India Prioritizes Homegrown WhAP After US Stryker Fails Water Trials

The Indian Army's potential acquisition of the American-made Stryker Armored Vehicle appears increasingly unlikely after the vehicle failed to meet critical amphibious requirements during recent trials in India. This development pivots the Army's focus toward the domestically developed Wheeled Armoured Platform (WhAP), aligning with India's broader commitment to indigenous defense manufacturing.

The Stryker, an eight-wheeled armored vehicle manufactured by General Dynamics Land Systems, underwent extensive evaluations across diverse Indian terrains, from arid deserts to high-altitude regions, earlier this year. These trials were part of a prospective co-production arrangement under the India-US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), aiming to assess the vehicle's suitability for the Indian Army's operational needs.

However, a significant shortfall emerged during the testing phase. India's Defence Secretary, Rajesh Kumar Singh, confirmed that the tested Stryker variant lacked essential amphibious capabilities. The Indian Army specifically requires its new armored vehicles to be capable of independently traversing rivers and water bodies. This amphibious feature is deemed vital for operations in India's riverine border areas and waterlogged territories, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and in the northeastern regions. Defence Secretary Singh stated, "The Indian Army is looking for an amphibious version of the system," indicating that the U.S. has offered to showcase an amphibious-capable variant in a future joint military exercise.

The Indian Army's ongoing search for a modern armored vehicle falls under its Wheeled Armoured Platform (WhAP) program. This initiative seeks to replace an aging fleet of Soviet-era platforms, such as the BRDM-2 reconnaissance vehicle, with a contemporary, modular 8x8 vehicle. The desired platform must be capable of safely transporting troops, integrating advanced weaponry like anti-tank missiles, and operating effectively across all geographical challenges. The ability to cross water bodies is a non-negotiable prerequisite, essential for navigating complex terrains like Pangong Tso in Ladakh and the Brahmaputra basin.

In contrast to the Stryker's performance in this specific trial, India has been actively developing its own solution. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with Tata Advanced Systems, has produced the indigenous 8x8 amphibious armored vehicle known as WhAP, or Kestrel. This domestic platform is specifically designed to fulfill the Army's requirement for water mobility and is currently undergoing its own series of advanced trials. With the potential Stryker deal, valued at over $1 billion, now in doubt, the focus is increasingly shifting towards indigenous solutions like the WhAP. This redirection underscores India's strategic push towards self-reliance in defense manufacturing, bolstering its 'Make in India' initiative.