

**CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF (CDS) - TRANSFORMING INDIA'S MILITARY FORCE
TO MILITARY POWER**

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“The armed forces should review and carry out a strategic rebalance to optimise the combat power and synergise the assets to transform the armed forces from a ‘MILITARY FORCE to a MILITARY POWER’ capable of securing the nation, the people and assets across the full spectrum of conflict. “

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The national aim is to “TRANSFORM INDIA TO A MODERN, PROSPEROUS AND SECURE NATION”. As security is a precursor to long term peace, stability and development, securing India is a national imperative. India’s size, strategic location, trade interests and security concerns extend from Persian Gulf in the West, to the straits of Malacca in the East and from the CAR in the North to near the equator in the South and underpin India’s security response. In view of the strategic spread, it is essential to maintain a credible land, air and maritime force to safeguard own security interests. India’s security concerns are also impacted by a dynamic global and regional security environment. As India transforms from an emerging and rising power to a risen, responsible power and a net security provider in the region, India will need credible military capabilities to meet emerging security challenges, ensure peace, project military power to safeguard national interests and assets including the domination of IOR, assist friendly foreign countries in times of crisis from unconventional threats and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).

While addressing the Combined Commanders Conference in December 2015 onboard INS Vikramaditya, Prime Minister Modi challenged senior military commanders to reform their “beliefs, doctrines, objectives and strategies.”

Prime Minister Modi spelt out six broad areas for military reforms—in defence planning, enhancing jointness (the ability of the army, navy and air force to operate together), *urging manpower rationalization (tooth to tail ratio)*, emphasizing professional military education, restructuring higher defence management and streamlining defence procurement process. The analysis of problems in each of these sectors challenged the assumptions, and worldview, of India’s senior military commanders. This article attempts to address one of the six core concerns of envisaged military reforms—enhancing jointness.

The Indian military is among the least 'joint' major militaries in the world and its system of professional military education emphasizes training over education. Conventional wisdom would have the government announcing reform measures and leaving it to the military and the defence ministry to implement them. Doing so will likely subvert the reforms, as has happened in the past. In 1986, Arun Singh was instrumental in creating a tri-services and joint civil-military institution called the Defence Planning Staff (DPS) in an attempt to rationalise defence planning. It quickly lost its relevance as the services opposed this initiative. The military needs change, it is time for reform to ensure a more effective, efficient, present relevant and future ready force to meet multiple security challenges across the full spectrum of conflict. Any significant and meaningful change is a journey from an unsatisfactory present towards a desirable but uncertain future. The success of the journey will depend on a strategy to illuminate the way and to identify the destination.

In the West, the end of the Cold War brought hopes of a peace dividend. However, there has been little change in India's neighbourhood. The old national security threats have persisted in the 21st Century and new ones continue to proliferate. Terrorism, piracy at sea, proliferation, failing states, water stress, the environment and climate change are among the newer threats. Meanwhile, existing border disputes have continued unabated for seven decades. At the same time, rapid advances in military technology and the forces of globalization have created a dynamic situation. Crises develop quickly and solution are often complex. Such challenges can be met successfully only by combining all the elements of national power. Diplomacy, military, intelligence, law enforcement, and the economy are some elements of such a response.

Despite the best efforts of countless devoted people, resources allocated for national security are not used to their full potential. Departments and organisations, for the most part, accomplish their core missions. However, they are ill equipped to integrate their efforts and to deliver an efficient response on a sustained basis. Good people may sometimes rise above an inefficient system, but over time the limitations of the system make the task ever more difficult. As large resources are involved in national security, there is little scope for inefficiency in managing the nation's defence. Today, the nation faces a mounting backlog of defence purchases, with finite resources and competing priorities. Under the circumstances, a constant push towards higher levels of efficiency is essential for safeguarding national interests. This is best achieved by aligning authority and accountability by appointing a single authority to ensure Operational Preparedness in the form of the much deliberated and delayed Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). For the present the Service chiefs will continue to be responsible for operational readiness.

Wars in today's context cannot be fought with outdated organisations and structures, wherein the army, the navy and the air force conduct operations in stand alone mode, with coordination and cooperation only being achieved based on personalities. War is a joint endeavour, wherein all elements of national power and all resources of the union are synergised for fighting it. This truism is even more relevant in today's context, as war today is a complex phenomenon. This complexity is likely to increase in the future. The reasons include high technology, the nature of modern war, new threats and challenges and the reality of nuclear weapons in the arsenal of our potential adversaries. Consequently, a joint force, which acts in an integrated manner, is not just desirable but an imperative. The complexities of the future security environment demand that India be prepared to face a wide range of threats of varying levels of intensity. Success in countering these threats will require skillful integration of the core competencies of the three Services into an integrated force structure. However, re-organisation by itself will not succeed in achieving such integration. What is also required is a change in mindset, a change that makes every soldier, sailor and air warrior feel that he is a member of the Indian Armed Forces, and not just the Indian Army, the Indian Navy or the Indian Air Force.

Necessity for Integration

Jointmanship and Integration. These two are very often used interchangeably, but they are two different concepts. While jointmanship would help achieve the desired end state, integration would invariably result in synergy and thus transcend the desired end state. Jointmanship can be enforced physically while integration commences in the mind. This lack of integrated thinking was obvious in the 1962 and 1965 conflicts; the former was left purely to the Army to conduct, and the later saw each service fighting very much their own individual wars. During the 1971 war the armed forces demonstrated an unparalleled jointness in planning and conduct of operations, more due to the personalities involved rather than formal structures. Another example of effective joint operations is Operation Cactus - Maldives again the success is owed to personalities rather than formal structures.

Integration of Service Headquarter (HQ) and MoD. Integration of service and service HQs cannot and should not be limited to the Department of Defence of the MoD. There is undoubtedly an imperative to integrate service HQs and MoD from the functional to the apex levels. The integration should be set in motion in the immediate term with identification of certain slots for military personnel at the Director, Principal Director and Joint Secretary level posted to the Department of Defence and similarly

certain slots in the General Staff and logistics branch of the services be tented by officers of the civil cadre including IAS. It is also an imperative to ensure effective and optimum functioning of other organised structures of the Ministry of Defence to be conjointly manned and managed by the services and civil cadre. The major weaknesses are in the functioning and understanding of the services requirement by OFB and DRDO. At present service officers posted to OFB and DRDO at the level of Lt Col/Col are mainly employed for non core activities of these organisations. The Indian Navy over the years has a major stake and say in the functioning of Dockyards and Shipyards as also the DRDO labs. The positive outcomes are evident as naval operational , maintenance and modernisation plans are better managed and met by these organisations vis-a-vis Army and Air Force. It is a functional necessity that high calibre service officers at the level of Brig and Major General Equivalent be posted on tenure basis at the managerial and executive level of ordnance factories and defence public sector undertakings(DPSUs) as also executive directors in the OFB/HAL. A similar model be followed for DRDO, where in service officers at the rank of Brigadier and Major General are mandated to be an integral part of DRDO to ensure that the user requirements are factored in at every stage, this will not only reduce the cost and time over-runs but also ensure that the ownership of the design and development of combat equipment, arms and other wherewithal is with the respective Services. It is pertinent to mention here that 80 to 85% of the military equipment is low to medium technology. The need is integration and not interfaces. India as a risen and responsible power needs to attain 'Strategic autonomy' and this can only be achieved by an effective R&D and indigenous production by both private and government owned organisations.

Strategic Planning. This is an imperative to optimise all resources to effectively counter security threats and challenges. Strategic planning with a single point of contact will also facilitate synergising all elements of national power , diplomatic, informational, military economic and political.

Operational Planning. Once a strategy has been agreed upon, it needs to be translated into a specific operational plan by identifying National Military Objectives and working out Military Strategy. The operational plan should cover the whole theatre of operations. For example, if Pakistan is considered a potential adversary, there must be a basic operational plan which should cover the entire Western front from the Siachen to the Rann of Kutch extending up to the Arabian Sea. It is only when such a comprehensive plan is made, a judicious distribution of existing resources and their shortfall can be worked out among the various sub-sectors of the theatre of operations.

Force Structuring. The three Services need to adopt a single military strategy and synergise operational plans. Once the strategy and structures are accepted the

services deduce desired military capabilities and work on a common platform with a fifteen year vision, a seven year strategy and a three year action plan. The vision , strategy and the plan has to be approved by the government and supported with a committed budget. The capital budget should be a roll on budget to cater for slippages given the tardy procurement procedures. 4

Integrated Advice. There is a pressing need to integrate the Service Headquarters with the Ministry of Defence. However, if the Service officers posted to the Ministry of Defence are to represent only their particular service interests, the discord will be transferred to the precincts of the Ministry with no real gain to anyone. Similarly, if the National Security Council is to obtain any worthwhile military advice, the purpose would hardly be solved, with the three Chiefs of Staff giving their respective service centric perspective. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) should bank on a well reasoned, single point military advice. This can only be obtained if the three Services agree on the strategy to be followed, the operational plans which flow from the strategy and the force structure required to meet national security challenges.

Integrated Resources. An integrated approach by the three services to equipment selection, procurement, stocking policy and training can lead to considerable financial savings.

Personnel Policies. As the Services move to greater sophistication of equipment, they will increasingly be competing with the civil sector for trained and trainable manpower. The retention of such manpower will also become increasingly difficult given the better financial prospects in the civil sector. Unless the services can work out clear-cut common personnel policies, they will increasingly lose out to the civil sector and find themselves competing with each other for shrinking quality manpower. This can be avoided when the three Services begin to address such problems, including the Tri Services Act, in an integrated manner.

The felt need and an imperative to appoint a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has been long debated and acknowledged. All mega nations have joint structures fully integrated with national security apparatus and policy with a single point adviser from the armed forces. The Group of ministers (GOM) set up by the Prime Minister in year 2000 in their report categorically stated at Para 6.5 “The functioning of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) has to date revealed serious weaknesses in its ability to provide single point military advice to the government, and resolve substantive inter service doctrine, planning, policy and operational issues adequately. This institution needs to be appropriately revamped to discharge its responsibilities efficiently and

effectively, including the facilitation of “Jointness” and synergy among the defence services”.

The GOM vide Para 6.18 amplified the reasons and justified the need for the CDS. To reiterate and quote from the GOM the reasons enumerated which are even more relevant today are:-

- To Provide Single-Point Military Advice to the Government. Under the existing system, each of the Service Chiefs renders military advice to the civil political executive independent of one another. This is unsatisfactory. Creation of a CDS would ensure provision of single point military advice to the civil political executive. Before presenting his advice, the CDS will consult the Service Chiefs and will inform Government of the range of military advice and opinion with respect to the subject in hand. Individual Service Chiefs will have their right to present their own view where that is at variance with the CDS’s views.
- To administer the Strategic Forces. As India is now a state with nuclear weapons, the highest importance must be attached to the creation of appropriate structures for the management and control of our nuclear weapons and strategic forces. The CDS should exercise administrative control, as distinct from operational military control over these strategic forces.
- To Enhance the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Planning Process Through Intra and Inter-Service Prioritisation. Under the existing system, each Service tends to advance its own capability without regard for Inter-Service and even intra-Service prioritization. Accordingly, one of the most vital tasks that the CDS would be expected to perform is to facilitate efficiently and effectiveness in the planning/budgeting process to ensure the optimal and efficient use of available resources. This could be carried out through intra-Service and inter-Service prioritization of acquisitions and projects.
- To Ensure the Required “Jointness” in the Armed Forces. The capabilities of the Armed Forces can be enhanced significantly, if rather than operating as three individual units, they operate with a high degree of “Jointness” and in close tandem with one another in the conduct of various tasks, including training. Modern warfare demands a much higher degree of coordination in operations by all the three Services than ever before.

Creation of a CDS would promote greater “Jointness” in the Armed Forces.

- Further amplifying the GOM recommend that the “CDS” may be a four star officer drawn from the three services. Accordingly, he should rank primus inter pares in the COSC and function as the “Principal Military Advisor” to the Defence Minister.

It is a national security imperative to appoint a CDS with the requisite authority and mandate. Envisaged role of the CDS should be:-

- CDS should have the primary role of being the Principal Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Government, through the Defence Minister, on all matters pertaining to India’s national security.
- CDS should provide ‘strategic vision’ and be responsible for all strategic perspective planning, operational planning and contingency planning.
- In peacetime, the primary role of CDS should focus exclusively on war preparedness having a bearing on strategic operations.
- In terms of war preparedness, the CDS should have a major role in refinement and integration of operational plans, creation of logistic means to sustain operational plans and ensuring build-up of strategic reserves of arms, ammunition, military hardware, supplies and fuel requirements. In effect, he will be responsible for Financial Planning, Budgetary allocations and force structures of the three services.
- The CDS should prepare the annual Defence Intelligence Estimate and the requirements of Defence intelligence to meet the existent threats, overall.
- The CDS should exercise operational command over Strategic Forces Command and the Andaman and Nicobar Command and other bi-service or tri-service commands that may evolve in the future, like Cyber, Space and Special Operations Command, till the formation of integrated theatre commands.
- The CDS has to be viewed as the ‘Head’ of the Indian Armed Forces in terms of providing strategic control, strategic direction and strategic vision.

- CDS should have the primary role in formulation of defence policies.

India boasts of the second largest Army, the fourth largest Air Force and a blue water capability for the Navy to ensure our territorial integrity against external threats and internal security. What the nation lacks is a credible and single authority to synergise all elements of military power to include DRDO , Indian Ordnance Factories and other structures in addition to the three services, to meet emerging security challenges in the regional and global context. It is an imperative for the government to appoint a CDS with the requisite mandate to effectively meet future security challenges. The Indian armed forces are one of the most professional, battle hardened and combat rich military in the world, however we continue to be a military force due to lack of certain suboptimal support structure and integration both intra and inter. As a risen responsible regional power India needs to transform from the Indian Armed Forces from a MILITARY FORCE to a MILITARY POWER.

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