

INDIA TO FINALLY APPOINT A CHIEF OF INTEGRATED DEFENCE STAFF

“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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Prime Minister Modi in his 2019 Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort announced that the country will soon have a first Chief Of Defence Staff (CDS), putting to rest a nearly two decade old need to reform Indian Military. The appointment of the CDS will contribute to enhancing the much needed jointness in the Indian Armed Forces as also streamline and strengthen the National Security architecture. This though can only be set in motion if the CDS is appointed with the requisite authority and mandate.

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. However, doing so is likely to 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 appointment of the CDS has remained unactioned despite a clear direction and push by PM himself. While addressing the Combined Commanders Conference in December 2015 onboard INS Vikramaditya, Prime Minister Modi had challenged senior military commanders to reform their “beliefs, doctrines, objectives and strategies,” spelling out six broad areas for military reforms, with the primary focus on defence planning and enhancing jointness (the ability of the army, navy and air force to operate and function as one entity) by restructuring higher defence organisation. The directions though clear and categorical were not implemented as the first and most important step of appointing a CDS remained in limbo.