

Too Little Too Late

Indian armed forces urgently need to include joint-ness as part of military reforms

LT GEN. VINOD BHATIA (RETD)



THE INDIAN ARMED forces are one of the most battle-hardened and combat rich force in the world with a proven record of ensuring national security. However, the key question is, are they optimal and future ready?

Lack of joint-ness has been recognised as a major weakness and hence, the imperative need for a pragmatic, acceptable and implementable Joint warfare structures, systems, organisations and doctrine for the Indian armed forces. While addressing the Combined Commanders Conference in December 2015 onboard INS Vikramaditya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi challenged senior military commanders to reform their 'beliefs, doctrines, objectives and strategies.'

He identified six areas for military reforms to include joint warfare, restructuring higher defence organisation, defence planning, manpower rationalisation, defence procurement and professional military education. PM's direction challenged the established structures, systems and organisations of India's military and the mindset of senior military leaders. However, two years down the line, little of substance has actually been set into motion, except that a beginning has been made.

On 23 April 2017, the Chairman COSC Admiral Sunil Lanba along with the Chiefs of the Army and Air Force, Gen. Bipin Rawat and Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa and the head of Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) Gen. Satish Dua, released the Joint Doctrine of and for the Indian armed forces. It was a rare show of solidarity among the service chiefs indicative of congruence and convergence of interests leading to enhancing the efficacy of joint operations in the long run.

For far too long the services have been blamed for protecting their turf and thwarting optimisation of scarce resource. The perceived divide among the services has also been exploited by the bureaucracy in the ministry of defence (MoD) to thwart projects, modernisa-

tion and growth of the services, often playing one against the other. The Joint Doctrine driven by HQ IDS for once has finally found approval among the three services. It remains to be seen whether or not this first step is carried forward for enhancing joint operational efficacy or remains as a mere document showcasing a non-existent joint-ness.

Jointmanship and Integration 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 joint-ness and integrated thinking was obvious in the

1962 and 1965 conflicts; the former was left purely to the army to conduct, and the latter saw each service fighting very much their own individual wars.

Again the 1999 Kargil war was marked by lack of any kind of joint planning and response. Though essentially a land war, there was an obvious functional discord between the army and air force. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka established how far distant the three services were to any operational integration or joint-ness. The then GOC-in-C Southern Command, Lt Gen. Depinder Singh was appointed Overall Force Commander (OFC) and a formal directive was issued for the OFC to undertake the mission with Commanders from all three Forces placed under command OFC.

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Wars in today’s context cannot be fought with outdated single service



assets, organisations and structures, wherein the army, navy and the air force conduct operations in a linear stand-alone mode, with coordination and co-operation only being achieved, based on personalities. War is a joint endeavour, with all elements of national power and all resources of the union being synergised. This truism is even more relevant in the present day Indian context.

Future wars will be complex affairs waged in the multi-dimensional and multi-domain space, and this complexity is likely to increase exponentially in the future. India needs to be prepared to meet new threats and security challenges in all domains of land, sea, air, space, cyber, informational, electronic warfare, sub conventional and nuclear. 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 skilful integration of the core competencies of the three services into an integrated force structure.

Consequently, a joint force, which acts in an integrated manner, is not just desirable but an imperative. Reorganisation by itself will not succeed in achieving such integration. What is required is also 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. The military needs change, it is time for reform to ensure a more effective, efficient, present relevant and future-ready military to meet multiple security challenges across the full spectrum of conflict.

Another major factor which makes this change to joint-ness inevitable and gives a sense of urgency is the ever-decreasing defence budget. The competing national priorities will limit the defence budget which implies that every rupee needs to be maximised and this can only happen when the services think and act as one. Defence budget cannot be stretched beyond a point, the MoD and armed forces have a tough choice for resource deployment. Reducing revenue expenses and spending more for capital pose the biggest challenge for MoD.

Despite the best efforts of HQ IDS, resources allocated for national security are not used to their full potential. Various departments and organisations, for most part, accomplish their core missions, however, they are ill-equipped to integrate their efforts and 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).

All mega nations have formal joint warfare structures and organisations for their respective armed forces, which facilitates joint-ness in all military domains. Joint-ness in the Indian context should initially aim to facilitate the five domains of Joint Intelligence, Planning, Communications, Logistics and Training. Joint-ness in these domains is an imperative to enhance the efficacy and effectiveness of joint operations. The single services approach to warfare has shied away from optimising the resources and war fighting strengths of the other services.

The American Doctrine for its armed forces describes the essence of joint-ness as a ‘cross-service combination wherein the capability of the joint force is understood to be synergistic, with the sum greater than its parts’, adding further that ‘joint forces require high levels of interoperability and systems that are conceptualised and designed with joint architectures and acquisition strategies. This level of interoperability reduces technical, doctrinal and cultural barriers that limit the ability of joint force commanders to achieve objectives. The goal is to employ joint forces effectively across the range of military operations’.

Though there had been a continuum of efforts to bring joint-ness in the US Armed Forces, it is the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 that brought about sweeping changes and the present organisational structure. The restructuring brought about unity of command and tried to obviate inter-service rivalry. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was nominated as the ‘Principal Military Adviser’ to the President of the United States, National Security Council and Secretary of Defence. Equally important is that the ‘Command’ authority rests with ‘unified’ and ‘specified’ field commanders, thus enforcing and ensuring ‘Joint-ness’.

In November 2013, the Third Plenum of

the 18th Central Committee of the CCP announced the decision to 'optimise the size and structure of the PLA, adjust and improve the balance between the services and branches, and reduce non-combat institutions and personnel'. On 3 September 2015, during the PLA parade President Xi surprised all by announcing a 300,000 manpower cut and implementing a defence reform programme to ensure a more effective and transformed military with integrated structures capable of meeting future security challenges and projecting China as a global power.

The PLA introduced major restructuring of their command and control structures to meet modern joint warfare requirements. The philosophy for operations has shifted from 'Joint Operations' to 'Integrated Joint Operations'. Major restructuring includes setting up of a Joint operation command authority under the Central Military Commission (CMC) and Theatre joint operation command system which aims to 'accelerate the building of new combat power, and deepen the reform of military'. Five theatre commands have been set up based on geographical locations enabling transition from military regions to battle zones towards development of joint operations capability. The US and China militaries are only two of the 64 nations with integrated and joint

structures and a CDS.

It is a given fact that the services protect and project their own interests and compete for supremacy. There are yet deep concerns within the Services themselves, particularly the navy and air force, as to how joint-ness would impact them and their role in the envisaged future structures.

Addressing the 14th Subroto Mukerjee seminar recently, the Vice Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal S.B. Deo, said jointmanship was also about optimal utilisation of resources stating that, "Ours is a growing country, our budget is limited. We cannot afford duplicating capabilities," and that "We cannot have an air force with the army, an air force with the navy and another air force."

On the other hand, the army chief, General Bipin Rawat in another recent seminar said that "supremacy and primacy of the army in a joint services environment" should be maintained and that "the other services, the navy and air force, will play a very major role in support of the army which will be operating on the ground because no matter what happens, we may be dominating the seas or the air, but finally war will be to ensure territorial integrity of the nation," and therefore "the supremacy and primacy of the army in a joint services environment becomes that

much more relevant and important."

What is required is a top down and driven approach to achieve joint-ness. The political will too seems lacking. Traditionally the national security advisor (NSA) has subsumed the role of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), often being the single point advice and the interface between the PM and the services, in addition to also resolving inter-service issues. The appointment of the CDS is the first step to joint-ness and despite many committees recognising and recommending the institution of a CDS there has been no forward movement. The recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee are relevant: "India is perhaps the only major democracy where the Armed Forces Headquarters are outside the apex governmental structure".

Task Force for Review of the Management of Defence, one of the four task forces set up to consider the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee headed by Arun Singh, recommended the creation of a CDS, setting up of Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and the creation of the Tri-Services command at Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command (SFC). Despite many committees including the Naresh Chander Task force and the recently concluded Shekatkar committee, there is

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a definite reluctance and lack of political will to create a CDS.

Till the time the CDS is appointed with requisite mandate and authority jointness in military cannot be achieved. The Shekatkar committee recommended five domains of joint-ness as a first step, the services should consider implementing these seriously and shed the baggage of 'my service first'. A study of global military systems the world over reveals that 64 countries across the globe have switched to the CDS-Theatre Command format.

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.

There is also a need to move towards



TOP AND ABOVE Exercise INDRA 2017; Exercise TROPEX 2009

Integrated Commands. Why then the impasse? The answer probably lies in misplaced fears, apprehensions and private positions as distinct from public postures. Most of the models that have been analysed point to a win-win situation for the organisation, operational efficiency and personal growth. Solution lies in bringing the issue to central focus, assuaging sensitivities, educating the political class and pushing the issue relentlessly to its logical conclusion. While there are roadblocks, the same are not of substantive nature but are merely rooted in misperceptions, inertia and the fear of change.

The existing Operational Commands of the three services would need to be regrouped into integrated theatre commands based on geostrategy location and the threat envisaged along a theatre or a border. The role and responsibilities of the Integrated Commands could be worked out by a Committee of Experts.

However, it is logically evident that we need to have an Integrated Theatre Command for the Western frontier (Pakistan),

two Integrated Commands along the Northern borders (China) on account of terrain fractured sectors, and one Command each for the Eastern and Western seaboard. There would be other joint and/or integrated commands such as Space, Cyber, Special Operations, Strategic, Logistic and Training. The three joint commands of Space, Cyber and special operations have again been recommended by various committees, but as always there is no move to establish these. The agencies set up to perform these all important and critical functions lack the authority and wherewithal and cannot substitute as full-fledged effective organisations.

It must be recognised that military capabilities are an important adjunct to comprehensive national power. As a risen and responsible India transcends from a regional leader to a global player, the military will need to transform from a military force to military power. ||

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