

# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



SYNODOS PAPER

| VOL - XIV NO-01 / JAN 2020

## CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF - MANDATE, AUTHORITY AND THE WAY AHEAD



**Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd)** superannuated after 40 years of distinguished service in the Army as the Director General Military Operations (DGMO). Presently Director of CENJOWS.

***“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.”***

**Lt Gen Shekatkar Committee  
Report - Dec 2016**

Prime Minister Modi yet again demonstrated an unprecedented political will to give a much needed impetus to Defence Reforms. The fact that the sanction for appointment of CDS was made by the Prime Minister during his Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort is indicative of the government’s priorities to streamline and strengthen the National Security architecture.



The appointment of the CDS 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.

The cabinet finally sanctioned the CDS and appointed General Bipin Rawat the outgoing Army Chief as India's first ever CDS, putting to rest an unnecessary debate on who will be the nation's first CDS. Since the announcement of appointment of CDS, unfortunately the debate and discussions have centered on the 'WHO of CDS' rather than the more important 'WHAT of CDS'. As an initial reaction it appears that the NSA Ajit Doval led committee has accorded the much needed mandate and adequate

authority for the CDS to transform the Indian military from a force to a military power. It is not merely creation of a post but institutional reforms to achieve national security objectives. The CDS has been finally appointed, however, the jury is still out on certain issues of protocol and status equivalence. These are important issues as they directly impact efficient and effective functioning. General Bipin Rawat is an obvious choice given his experience as the longest serving Chief of the second largest Indian Army. Gen Rawat has also shown a will for carrying out reforms as he set in motion long due major reforms in the Army including rationalisation of manpower and structural changes for a more lean and mean army, formalising the IBGs. Gen Rawat is also the senior most among the three Chiefs which will facilitate a better transition as the CDS as he ranks ***primus inter pares*** (**First among equals**).

Before an analysis it is important to take a quick look at the role definition, charter, mandate and authority of the CDS as sanctioned.

### **Role and responsibilities of CDS**

- Act as the Principal Military Adviser to Raksha Mantri on

tri-Services matters. The three Chiefs will continue to advise RM on matters exclusively concerning their respective Services.

- **CDS will not exercise any military command, including over the three Service Chiefs.**
- CDS will administer tri-services organisations. Their military command, will be with the Chief of the duly notified Service, which has a predominant role in effective functioning of that specific tri-service organization. However, Tri-services agencies/ organizations/ commands related to Cyber and Space will be under the command of the CDS.
- Provide integrated inputs of the Services to relevant authorities. **CDS will be member of Defence Acquisition Council and Defence Planning Committee.**
- Bring about jointness in operations, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance, etc. of the three Services within three years of the first CDS assuming office.
- Ensure optimal utilisation of infrastructure and rationalise it through jointness among the services.
- Enhance the share of indigenous equipment;
- Evaluate plans for 'Out of Area Contingencies', as well as other contingencies such as Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief.
- Implement Five-Year Defence Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP), and Two-Year roll-on Annual Acquisition Plans (AAP), as a follow-up of Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP).
- Assign inter - Services prioritization to capital acquisition proposals based on the anticipated budget.
- Integrate and rationalise international cooperation plans.
- Prepare strategy papers on military matters for consideration of the competent authority.
- Bring about reforms in the functioning of three Services aimed at augmenting combat capabilities of the Armed Forces.



This may, inter-alia; entail rationalization of facilities. Use of indigenous equipment across the whole spectrum. He will identify and end obsolete practices, which may have crept in due to the colonial legacy:

- Build trust and confidence in the rank and file.
- Prepare for Raksha Mantri an empirical and objective Report on annual achievements in jointness during the year.
- Bring about reforms in the functioning of three Services aimed at augmenting combat capabilities of the Armed Forces by reducing wasteful expenditure.
- Function as the Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command.
- Authority to implement Five-Year Defence Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP).

The creation of a new department, **Department of Military Affairs (DMA)** within MoD is a new thought and will be the proverbial game changer in Defence Reforms, without this structure nothing much would have changed. The CDS as an Ex Officio

Secretary will head the fifth and the most critical vertical of the MoD, with requisite financial powers. The Chief of Defence Staff, apart from being the head of the Department of Military Affairs, will also be the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. He will act as the Principal Military Adviser to Raksha Mantri on all tri-Services matters. The three Chiefs will continue to advise RM on matters exclusively concerning their respective Services. CDS will not exercise any military command, including over the three Service Chiefs, so as to be able to provide impartial advice to the political leadership. The charter and delineation in the MoD will include:

- Chief of Defence Staff will head DMA. This will enable CDS to fulfil his role/functions.
- Work exclusively pertaining to Military matters will fall within the purview of the Department of Military Affairs, while the Department of Defence will deal with larger issues pertaining to defence of the country.
- The Armed Forces will fall under the ambit of Department of Military Affairs, which will have appropriate expertise to manage military affairs.

- The Department of Military Affairs will have the appropriate mix of civilian and military officers, at every level. The department will promote jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services. Facilitate restructuring of military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands. Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the Services.
- CDS will also be the permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. In this role, he will be supported by the Integrated Defence Staff.
- The Territorial Army.
- Works relating to the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.
- Procurement exclusive to the Services except capital acquisitions, as per prevalent rules and procedures.
- Promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services through joint planning and integration of their requirements.
- Facilitation of restructuring of Military Commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands.
- Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the Services.

**The following areas will be dealt by the Department of Military Affairs headed by CDS:**

- The Armed Forces of the Union, namely, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.
- Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence comprising Army Headquarters, Naval Headquarters, Air Headquarters and Defence Staff Headquarters.

**The proposal specifies that the work exclusively pertaining to Military matters will fall within the purview of the Department of Military Affairs, while the Department of Defence will deal with larger issues pertaining to defence of the country.**

The appointment also comes with certain caveats. The appointment also states that it is effective from



31 Dec 2019 till further orders. The appointment till “Further orders” leaves an uncanny doubt on the rationale.

- CDS will be a four star General,
- He will not be eligible to hold any Government office after demitting the office of CDS.
- CDS can not take up a private employment without prior approval for a period of five years after demitting the office of CDS.

These caveats are applicable only to the CDS and are not applicable to any other office holder of the government of India. This exceptional caveats are indicative of a general mistrust in the top military hierarchy as the CDS is the only one to have such stringent restrictions imposed post demitting office. Having said that a detailed analysis also indicates that the government has accorded the CDS more than what the armed forces and the strategic community was expecting, especially in the structural change of forming a DMA headed by the CDS.

The CDS will be expected to lay down the Strategic vision for the armed forces and give the required strategic guidance. This reform in the Higher

Defence Management would also enable the Armed Forces to implement coordinated defence doctrines and procedures and go a long way in fostering jointmanship among the three Services. The country will benefit by coordinated action on greater jointmanship in training, logistics, planning, communication, works, intelligence and operations as well as for prioritisation of procurements.

CDS also has a second and an equally important role of permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. In this role, he will be supported by the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) .Headquarters IDS has the requisite structures and expertise to provide full fledged staff support to the CDS. It will now be up to the CDS to build on the existing structure giving it the strategic direction and leadership. The CISC should now be appointed as the Vice Chief of Defence Staff and assume the role of coordination among the principal staff officers of not only HQ IDS but also among the three services including the Vice Chiefs Committee (VCC), the various principal staff officer committees (PSOCs). HQ IDS will also need to gear up to provide the much needed staff support to the CDS in running an operational directorate to initially control the



Andaman and Nicobar Command and the three joint divisions under raising, Defence Cyber agency, Defence Space Research Agency and Special Operation Division. This role can be performed by the existing Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations) and his staff at HQ IDS. The CDS however should not be expected to have a magic wand to resolve numerous pending issues specially defence modernisation, jointness and integration. CDS will take time to evolve and get accepted.

The Challenge for the CDS will be to ensure a smooth transition, overcoming the many hurdles of single service priorities and mind sets. Militaries world over are known to be rigid and resist change, the Indian armed forces are no exception. The first CDS will have to be both firm and fair with a long term vision, judicious and accommodating in his approach, ensuring the armed forces remain present effective and future ready. The MoD on its part should ensure that the authority of CDS is primary and single service interests do not degrade or undermine the functioning of CDS. The MoD, national polity and the armed forces however should not expect immediate reforms and results, the CDS is not a magic wand. Effective reforms and visible results will take

time given the resistance to change and as a system our procedures and processes continue to be lethargic and long. The CDS will need time for acceptability, to evolve and then put it into motion the much needed reforms to enhance the defence preparedness, build capabilities and enhance capacities. The MoD and in particular the RM will have to ensure full support in division of roles between the DMA and the DOD in particular.

The devil will lie in the detail, the government will need to amend the The Government of India **Allocation of Business Rules (AOB)**, 1961 as promulgated by the President of India under Article 77 of the Constitution as also the **Transaction of Business rules (TOB) 1961**. The amendments must be initiated earliest, as past experience is indicative of dilution of political decision in implementation. A case in point is the GOM recommendations on integration of service HQs and MoD. The Integration is only in name and the service HQs continue to remain attached offices to MoD as the AOB and TOB rules were not amended. In addition certain matters especially those pertaining to Military Secretary that is promotion and postings of Flag rank officers, Personal Matters like service conditions and



those being dealt by the Adjutant General of the Army and the Chiefs of Personal branches of the Navy and Airforce should also come under the purview of DMA. This will ensure better commanility and synergy in HRD which is important to jointness and combat effectiveness.

To ensure a smooth transition, for the present and in the near term Service Chiefs rightly continue to be responsible for operational readiness, as the mandate of the CDS is to ensure **“Defence Preparedness”** for the present. The first CDS has its task cut out, which is to ensure that the foundation is strong and the new structure is an integral and important component of the National Security Architecture, contributing effectively to a secure India.

Now that the CDS has been done, the last of the macro recommendations of the Group of Ministers Report, post the Kargil Review Committee pending is the establishment of the Indian Defence University. The foundation stone of the Defence University was laid by the then PM Manmohan Singh in July 2013. The Indian National Defence University (INDU) has also since been re-christened as the Indian Defence University in keeping with present day political sensitivities. It is time this important reform too is sanctioned in keeping with PM Modi’s directions and his Government’s known record of taking decisions and implementing long pending reforms.

*The Article was first published in January 2020 issue of FORCE Magazine Views expressed are that of the author*

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