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THE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS-FAR MORE THAN A GAME CHANGER



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While making his rather unexpected announcement of the Government's intention to appoint a Chief of Defence Staff in his Independence Day address to the Nation, the Hon'ble Prime Minister had elaborately articulated the justification for a CDS. The transcript of the relevant portion of his address is as follows:

"....The world is changing today, the scope of war is changing, the nature of war is changing. It is becoming technology driven; in the circumstances India too should not have a fragmented approach... Our entire military power will have to work in unison and move forward... things cannot move smoothly if anyone from the Navy, Army and Air Force is a step ahead from the other two forces, while the other two are lagging behind. All the three should move simultaneously at the same pace. There should be good coordination and it should be relevant with the hope and aspirations of our people. It should be in line with the changing war and security environment in the world and today I want to announce an important decision from Red Fort. The subject experts on the issue have been demanding this for a long time....today we have decided that we will now have a Chief of Defence Staff- CDS and after formation of this post all the three forces will get effective leadership at the top level".

Three aspects stand out in this very deliberately drafted excerpt of the address. First, **acknowledgment that the (then) approach was 'fragmented'**. Second, **the need for the three Services to 'march in step' with good coordination with relevance to the 'hopes and aspirations' of the people'**. Third, and importantly, **the expectation that 'the three forces will get an effective leadership at the top level'**.



CDS: A Long Acknowledged Need

Nawab Ali Yavar Jung, erstwhile Governor of Maharashtra, who had been member of a Sub-committee of the Administrative Reforms Committee headed by Shri K Hanumanthiah had, way back as in 1966, emphasised that “the Defence Services ‘should retain their separate identities but all operational matters need to be coordinated and operations eventually integrated.....***We believe there is a need for a Chief of Defence Staff who would be the coordinator and the executive at the top echelon of all the three operational commands. The structure in peacetime should conform to the requirements of war***”.

A Missed Opportunity?

The following excerpt from former GOC-in-C Southern Command Lt Gen Depinder Singh’s book “**Field Marshal Manekshaw: Soldiering with Dignity**’ points to there being at least one missed opportunity to appoint a CDS.

“On a date prior to 26th January 1972 the Prime Minister had ordered that the Army Chief be promoted to the rank of Field Marshal and appointed Chief of Defence Staff, and that the appointment be made on the morning of Republic Day 1972. For some unfathomable reason, that was not done thereupon the Prime Minister directed that the announcement be made on the 28th January 1972 as the Chief (the Field Marshal) and the other two Chiefs were being awarded the Padma Vibhushan that afternoon. This too fell through and nothing more was heard by us. Over the years, the bureaucracy has evolved a perfect system to stall, what, to them, is an unwholesome direction. A very simple expedient is resorted to: a point concerning one service will be referred to the other two services and their views sought. If one or more services send a negative reply, the project is consigned to the dustbin as being ‘unacceptable to the other two services....”

CDS Appointed : Culmination of Approval of GOM Report’s 2001 Recommendations

The CDS’ appointment being sanctioned with effect from 29th December 2019 is, in effect, the culmination of decisions to implement recommendations of the Group of Ministers’ Report on ‘Reforming the National Security System’ headed by Shri LK Advani that had been presented to the then Prime Minister on 26th Feb 2001. Revisiting some pertinent recommendations of the Report would help understand the justification for and underlying spirit with which they have been made and assess whether if these are substantially met.

Integration of Service Headquarters Into Government. The GOM Report states that “In the organizational setup of the Government, as it exists now, besides Ministries and departments, there are either ‘Attached Offices’ or ‘Subordinate Offices’ which create an erroneous perception that the Armed Forces Headquarters do not participate in policy formulation and are outside the apex Governmental structure. In order to remove this impression, the Service Headquarters may be designated as Integrated Headquarters of the MoD for which the Transaction of Business Rule sand Standing Orders should be appropriately amended”and that “Though the Service Headquarters have always been associated in the decision-making process, the existing procedures involve multiplicity of levels/channels, which often lead to delays in decision-making”.

Decentralisation of Decision-Making. The GOM had recommended to progressively decentralize decision making and delegate powers to the Service Headquarters, wherever feasible so as to ensure greater speed, higher levels of efficiency and accountability.

Briefly, the purport of the relevant GOM's Recommendations are:

- (a) Correcting the perceived status of Services HQ being either 'Attached Offices' or 'Subordinate Offices' outside the apex Governmental structure and they not participating in policy formulation be dispelled / removed.
- (b) Amendment to the Transaction of Business Rules and Standing Orders for Services HQ being designated as Integrated Headquarters of the MoD.
- (c) Decentralisation of decision-making and delegation of powers to Services HQ, wherever feasible.

Creation of the Department of Military Affairs.

This creation of the DMA with the CDS as its ex-officio Secretary had neither been a recommended by the GOM in their Report nor announced by the Prime Minister in his I-Day address. Neither has it been suggested by any of the Committees that addressed the subject of Integration. From the perspective of the Armed Forces, this is a gracious 'bonus' that has come their way. Importantly, the creation of the Department has been encrusted through an amendment to the Allocation of Business Rules, 1961 and notified vide Cabinet Secretariat Notification of 30th December 2019, dispelling several apprehensions to the contrary expressed on the Social media in the run up to the appointment of the CDS. The ibid Notification, reproduced below states the subjects allocated to the DMA and the alterations made to the allocations of the DoD.

Text of Cabinet Secretariat Notification of 30th December 2019

S.O. 4710(E).—In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (3) of article 77 of the Constitution, the President hereby makes the following rules further to amend the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, namely:-

1. (1) These rules may be called the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Three Hundred and Fifty Third Amendment Rules, 2019.
(2) They shall come into force at once.
2. In the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961,-
(A) in THE FIRST SCHEDULE, under the heading "9. Ministry of Defence (Raksha Mantralaya)", for the existing sub-headings, the following sub-headings shall be substituted, namely, –



- (i) Department of Defence (Raksha Vibhag)
- (ii) Department of Military Affairs (Sainya Karya Vibhag)
- (iii) Department of Defence Production (Raksha Utpadan Vibhag)
- (iv) Department of Defence Research and Development (Raksha Anusandhanaur Vikas Vibhag)
- (v) Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (PoorvaSenani Kalyan Vibhag);

(B) in THE SECOND SCHEDULE, under the heading “MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (RAKSHAMANTRALAYA)”,-

(a) under the sub-heading “A. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE (RAKSHA VIBHAG)”,-

- (i) for entry 1, following entry shall be substituted, namely: -

“1. Defence of India and every part thereof including defence policy and preparation for defence and all such acts as may be conducive in times of war to its prosecution and after its termination to effective demobilisation.”;

- (ii) entries 2, 3, 5 and 7 shall be omitted;

- (iii) for entry 19, following entry shall be substituted, namely:-

“19. Capital Acquisitions exclusive to the Defence Services.”;

- (iv) after entry 20, following entry shall be inserted, namely:-

“21. Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, National Defence College and any other organisation within the Ministry of Defence whose remit is broader than military matters.”;

(b) after the sub-heading “A. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE (RAKSHA VIBHAG)” and entries thereunder, the following sub-heading and entries shall be inserted, namely:-

**“AA. DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS
(SAINYA KARYA VIBHAG)**

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

4. Works relating to Army, Navy and Air Force.
5. Procurement exclusive to the Services except capital acquisitions, as per prevalent rules and procedures.
6. Promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services through joint planning and integration of their requirements.
7. Facilitation of restructuring of Military Commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint / theatre commands.
8. Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the Services.”.

Organisation of the DMA

The DMA is now one of five verticals of the Ministry of Defence, headed by the Chief of Defence Staff, who acts as its ex-officio Secretary and reports directly to the Raksha Mantri on subjects allocated to his Department. In addition to the Chief of Defence Staff, the Department staff comprises two Joint Secretaries, thirteen Deputy Secretaries, and twenty-five Under-Secretaries and Twenty-two Section Officers whose sections had earlier formed part of the Department of Defence and now stand transferred to the DMA vide Department of Defence ORDER dated 9th January 2020.

Sections Transferred from DoD to DMA

Concerning HQ IDS and Army HQ:- D(AG-I and II), D(GS-II), D (medals), D (Works-1 and II), D(GS-1 and V) D (MS), D9O-I and II), D(Mov), D(QS), D(P&S).

Concerning Air HQ: D(Air-1, II and III).

Concerning Naval HQ: D(Navy II and III).

The subjects dealt with by each of these sections have received wide circulation. Suffice to say that these are wide in range and scope. **It needs mention that the subjects now forming part of the Charter of the DMA formed a part of the entire canvas of responsibilities of the DoD headed by the Defence Secretary. Apprehensions in the social media on the ‘doability’ and the possibility of a ‘deluge of work’ are therefore entirely misplaced.**

Some Subjects could entail a ‘First Time Experience’

There are however certain areas of work, such as finalising replies to Parliament Questions, according approval to affidavits / counter affidavits to be filed in High Courts and Supreme Courts, dealing with Defence PSUs and other Government Departments such as the Income tax Department – uncommon for Services personnel - could also be ‘first time’ experiences. An opportunity lies here for the Services to widen their exposure and harden themselves to fight ‘administrative’ battles with the same spirit and zeal as those on the battlefield.



Has the DMA been Adequately Empowered to Execute its Charter?

A persistent apprehension being expressed is as to whether the DMA has been adequately to effectively fulfil its charter. A close analysis of the charter vis-à-vis the powers accorded to the Department would dispel the same.

- (a) Control of the Armed Forces of the Union - Army, Navy and Air Force and HQ IDS, Army, Navy and Air HQ and Territorial Army. All major aspects of Armed Forces functioning have been brought under the ambit of the DMA. These include the organisation, recruitment, training, terms and conditions of service, personnel management including career management of all ranks.
- (b) Works Relating to Army, Navy and Air Force. Works planning, sanctions and oversight over execution, control over cadres responsible for execution have been brought under the DMA.
- (c) Procurement Exclusive to the Services except Capital Acquisitions. All revenue procurement for the Armed Forces would now be carried out with the oversight of the DMA. The participation of the CDS and the Service Chiefs in the Capital procurement process remains unaltered.
- (d) Promoting Jointness in Procurement, Training and Staffing of the Services through Joint Planning and Integration of their Requirements. The powers bestowed on the DMA are adequate for it to assume the role of an integrator of planning, coordination, procurement, resource management and training. While the CDS may not have operational control over the three Forces, his role as 'Single Point Advisor' would necessarily have bearing on the political approval and guidance to the conduct of operations.
- (e) Promoting use of Indigenous Equipment by the Services. With control over revenue procurements, the DMA could, through gentle guidance move the procurement regimen towards one where non-critical procurements are increasingly sourced indigenously. This would require to be done at a 'measured pace' for each item so as not to cause shortfalls. The CDS not just lend his voice but also collaborate and coordinate with the three Services Chiefs at forums like the DAC to make a push for indigenisation of platforms, large equipment and critical spares.
- (f) Facilitation of Restructuring of Military Commands for Optimal Utilisation of Resources by bringing about Jointness in Operations, Including through Establishment of Joint / Theatre Commands. These are at the very core of the reasons for which the appointment of the CDS has been instituted that find mention even in the Prime Minister's I-Day address. Resource-wise, the CDS has been empowered with requisite control over entities, organisations and structures that would need to be amalgamated / reorganised. It would require his alacrity, astuteness and professional wisdom to visualise what the restructured formations would be and to draw up the road map to seamlessly transition without compromising operational efficacy.

Suggested 'Next Steps'

The DMA being a Department of the Government of India would necessarily have to comply with standard procedures as followed in Government Departments, be manned by Civilian Officers and Staff who stand posted to it and yet accomplish its role and responsibility. A few 'next steps' are outlined below for consideration of leadership.

(a) Adopting the Manual of Office Procedure. Compliance to the procedures stipulated in the Manual of Office Procedure (MoOP) is an imperative for all Departments of the Government, including the DMA. **Services HQ, which presently follow the Whitehall system (reported discarded at Whitehall itself) should migrate to following the MoOP for their functioning.** As is known, a file endorsement made at all levels level remains on file placing responsibility on its author be circumspect and comprehensive in recording his endorsements. The advantage to Leadership / Approving authority is of the entire discussion on the concerned issue being available to them. **Adopting the MoOP would help transform the work culture in the Services HQ from one of 'proposal drafting' to that of 'decision making'.** Training courses for Services HQ on Manual of Office Procedure(MoOP) should be arranged by the Defence Headquarters Training Institute that functions under the CAO's Office. Courses at DSSC, AWC, CAW and NWC should also include capsules on MoOP and the ethos of decision-making in the Government of India.

(b) Single file System between DMA and Services HQ. The Department of Defence follows a system of progressing proposals from Services HQ on their internal files and returning the Services HQ file with the approved decision. This must change. The Services HQ file should be the medium to obtain and record approvals and decisions and should move seamlessly between the concerned Service HQ and the DMA to return to the initiating section. **This would facilitate the Services HQ becoming the effective 'record keepers' on matters concerning them and 'repositories of accumulated wisdom' on matters of their concern and would largely negate the 'Attached office' status that has prevailed since the promulgation of "The "Organisation, Functions, Powers and Procedure of Defence Headquarters" in 1952.**

(c) Devolution of Authority and Powers to Services HQ. **As earlier brought out, the GOM Report had emphasised on "decentralisation of decision-making" and "delegation of powers to Services HQ wherever feasible". The opportunity and time has clearly come to do just that.** The CDS, as erstwhile COAS and Chairman COSC already have knowledge of the 'pain points' where Services HQ functioning is impeded on account of infructuous correspondence and effort on mundane or routine issues. Delegating decision-making powers to Services HQ would not only ease pressure on the DMA and the CDS himself. Equally significant, this would promote a de facto 'integration' of the Services HQ with the DMA and making them effectively, 'extensions' of the DMA – a significant forward movement from the erstwhile status of 'Attached Offices'.

(d) Induction of Armed Forces Officers into the DMA. Regular posting would require DOPT approval for AF Officers to come under Central Staffing Scheme, a case that needs to be initiated without delay. Till such time, officers from HQ IDS and/or the Services HQ be appointed as 'OSD' / 'Advisor' which would help commence their 'learning the ropes'



as also 'rub shoulders' with the largely Civilian Staff of the DMA – an experience likely to be far different from working alongside Civilians in the Services HQ

(e) Restructuring Service HQ in Tandem with DMA. The 'mismatch' between various 'levels' of functionaries at the Services HQ and the Ministry of Defence lies at the root of issues relating to equivalence etc. that have caused so much angst in the recent past. There is occasion now to review the structures of the Services HQ to bring them 'at par' with those in the DMA – level for level. This would ease the eventual process of the Services HQ themselves becoming Departments of the Ministry of Defence.

(f) Time to Develop a Robust Bench Strength of Competent 'Defence Administrators'. Nether Civil or Military Officers can expect or hope to serve in the DMA or the Services HQ beyond stipulated tenures. It is only the AFHQ Civil Service, entirely dedicated to the Ministry of Defence, that can effectively provide continuity and a robust backbone of experience and knowledge to serve this purpose. Amongst the early initiatives should be to review this cadre, train and utilise it at various levels across the DMA and the Services HQ. Along-standing suggestion to open the cadre to retiring Services Officers to facilitate ploughing back the wealth of their experience for the benefit of the organisation, can be reconsidered.

Above all, it is imperative for a culture of 'decision making' and 'taking responsibility' and 'facing consequences', as already being done on the battlefield, be inculcated even for administrative decisions. This is an absolute 'must' for effective and speedy decision-making.

A 'Not to be Missed' Opportunity

The DMA has achieved much more than the highest realistic expectations. Several erstwhile threads of control of Armed Forces now loosened or even snapped, as have several 'pain points' of functioning between MoD and Services HQ now stand resolved with 'bureaucratic interference' minimised.

It is for the first time since the promulgation of Rules titled the "Organisation, Functions, Powers and Procedure of Defence Headquarters, 1952" that the Armed Forces have opportunity to participate at the apex structure of Government with responsibility directly to the political authority.

The opportunity given to do so by the Government reflects its intrinsic faith and trust that the Armed Forces are well capable of administering themselves. On their part, Armed Forces must 'seize the opportunity' and make it a huge success- not just for themselves but also as much for the Nation.

Disclaimer : Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.

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