

# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



SYNODOS PAPER

| VOL - XII NO-22 / OCT 2018

## THE TWO FORMS OF REFORM



**Group Captain Ashish Singh, VM, VSM** is a serving officer of the Indian Air Force from the fighter stream. A Category 'A' Qualified Flying Instructor with 4000 hours of flying, he holds an MSc in Defence Studies and an M Phil in Military Strategy.

### Introduction

Organizational reform is one of the toughest of tasks. Especially when reform is proposed for organizations “designed not to change.”<sup>1</sup> Recent media articles indicate an increased interest in defense reform, and specifically reorganization of the Indian Military into Theatre Commands. Reform is good, for any system which fails to adapt to a changing environment, faces the prospect of gradual obsolescence, or at worst sudden extinction. Equally bad is a wrong adaptation, which misreads the change in the environment. This

article shows how the concept of tri-service Theatre Commands needs to be the second step in a two phase reform process, the first being to address strategic level decision-making via Higher Defense Organization (HDO) reform. Theatre Command is a lower level operational level reform, and even considering it must be done some time after the first reform. This is because the problem defence reform needs to solve first is the civilian (political) separation from the military. Reversing the steps will increase the problem.

### The Two Forms of Reform

Since independence most proposals for HDO reform in India have talked about

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991, p.2.



reorganizing at the level of the Service HQs and Ministry of Defence (MoD).<sup>2</sup> These are two related but distinct problems at the level of Higher Defence. One is about integrating the military arms, and the other is about participating in national security as a stakeholder. In contrast to this level of reform, the topic of Theatre Commands is fairly recent. After the Kargil conflict, the Kargil Committee Report commented about organizational structure and processes for security decision-making at the apex level “what is required is a National Defence Headquarters.”<sup>3</sup> The follow on report by a Group of Ministers in 2001 also stressed on the formation of a CDS to amongst other things “provide single point military advice” to the government.<sup>4</sup> The Arun Singh task force envisaged the CDS as “the centerpiece of their reforms”. It briefly did toy with the idea of Theatre Commands, but decided that the time for such reform had not yet arrived, and so chose the “incremental option,” of CDS first. The next and related recommendation of the task force was the integration of MoD with the Service Headquarters.<sup>5</sup> Multiple

commentators have continued to stress on this level of reform. But this reform has always been scuttled. Once again, in recent months, along with talk of political favor towards defense reforms in general, there has been increasing talk of Theatre Commands, with the higher level reform relegated to the background. How does this shift of priority matter?

One way to look at the Higher Defence Organization (HDO) reform is that it is at strategic level, while Theatre reform is at operational level. The former affects peacetime policy, strategy formulation, and force structure; as well as wartime overarching national military strategy. Geographical Theatre Commands are however, organizations created largely for warfighting in defined zones. Since war is but an “an act of policy,” they only implement policy/strategy using military tools, while HDO participates in policy formation.<sup>6</sup> In case of countries like the US, Theatres also have a quasi-diplomatic function of handling coalitions of different countries.<sup>7</sup> Thus the former tackles both inter-service integration at National level, as well as integrates the military with the government. The latter only tries to integrate / synergize different forms of military power for pure military ends at the operational level of war. On its own, it is a tool without a brain. Creation of Theatre Commands is thus, a lower level of reform.

2 The first of these proposals about creating a CDS was from Lord Mountbatten at independence and again in 1960. Anit Mukherjee (2017) Fighting Separately: Jointness and Civil-Military Relations in India, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40:1-2, 6-34, p16.

3 Kargil Committee Report at <http://nuclearweaponarchive.org/India/KargilRCA.html> accessed 20 May 2017.

4 Gen VP Malik, “Higher Management of Defence and Defence Reforms: Towards Better Management Techniques”, in B D Jayal et al, *A Call for Change : Higher Defence Management in India*, IDSA Monograph, No 6 July 2012, p 44 .

5 Anit Mukherjee, *Failing to Deliver: Post Crisis Defence reforms in India* , 1998-2010, IDSA Occasional Paper No. 18 2011, p 19.

6 Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p 87.

7 Major Richard McGlamory, “Defense or Diplomacy? Geographic Combatant Commands,” Thesis, (Maxwell AL: School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, 2011)

And yet, Theatres came into existence much before the complexities of HDO arose.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of Theatres dates back to antiquity. To rule their empire the Romans divided their conquered regions into *provincias*, “indicating that a certain region was a general’s responsibility.”<sup>9</sup> These extended to far flung areas of the empire, with two organizing principles. First, they kept the armies out of Rome, and so did not allow military power to concentrate in the capital.<sup>10</sup> Second, their size was governed by both anti Praetorian considerations,<sup>11</sup> and a more practical reason – radius of action.

Not just for the Romans, for all civilizations, the geographical extent of a governed region has depended on the reach and mobility of the dominant form of military power. As a thumb rule the traditional limits of frontiers were about 90 days march.<sup>12</sup> Thus the Romans divided their conquests into around 50 (small) provinces, while Genghis Khan, the emperor with the biggest empire in

history, only divided his conquests into four large Khanates. The essential difference was that the Romans used slower infantry while the Mongols’ power stemmed from their highly mobile cavalry. Thus, the form of reach and mobility has been crucial when deciding extent of theatres. The bigger the reach, flexibility and mobility of the dominant form of military power, the larger the theatre.

The problems of how large a Theatre needs to be, grew more complex as newer forms of military power arrived. Navies, the dominant form of military power in the eighteenth and upto the early twentieth century, pushed for larger theatres while armies argued for smaller ones. For example between 1945 and upto 1951 the US Army and US Navy argued about the organizing principles of a navy dominated geographically organized Pacific Command (PACOM) and an army dominated Far East Command (FECOM) functionally organized for occupation of Japan, both in the same area. Basically the Navy saw “all Pacific Islands as one Strategic entity.”<sup>13</sup> The Navy’s organizing principle prevailed, as FECOM was disbanded in 1951, and absorbed into PACOM. Two decades later, US Army Chief Abrams tried to cut up PACOM. He proposed dissolving PACOM, making the Pacific fleet a ‘specified command’ (single service functional command), and creating four smaller ‘unified commands’ (tri-service geographical commands). The army wanted smaller geographical entities. Again, the view of the service with the larger reach won, and

8 As Downey puts it “higher organization for defence as it exists in industrial nations today is quite a recent innovation.” He says there are almost two distinct roles, defence and war, with lower levels organized for war while higher organization becomes a “forum for philosophical debate and long term investment.” JCT Downey, *Management in the Armed Forces: An Anatomy of the Military Profession*, (Dehradun: EBD, 1987), p 67.

9 <http://www.livius.org/articles/concept/province-roman/>

10 And so when Caesar crossed the Rubicon river in 49 BC he broke the rule that no General was to cross into Italy with his army. <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/caesar.htm>

11 They would divide provinces into smaller entities to avoid any general controlling too large an army.

12 William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology Armed Force, and Society since AD 1000*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p 8.

13 Cole et al, *History of the Unified Command Plan 1946-1993*, (Washington DC: Joint History Office, 1995), p1.



Secretary of Defence accepted the Naval view that the entire Pacific was one entity.<sup>14</sup> Armies have argued for relatively smaller areas of division, while Navies and now Air Forces have argued for larger areas in tune with maximum reach.<sup>15</sup> The newer forms' arguments have prevailed.

### The Problem of Airpower

The arrival of airpower is at the root of operational level problems of inter-service integration in the last century. In the words of Downey "it was the development of air power, as a third element of military force that brought the problem of command structure to the forefront in modern times."<sup>16</sup> This is the newest form of war. It represents a paradigm shift,<sup>17</sup> moreover, a shift faster and more powerful than say the maritime dimension. The fact that Air forces were created as a separate service within 15 years of the wright brothers demonstrating manned flight is proof that the new paradigm had to be organized and used differently.

Each new way of war or technology of war has been initially used the old way. Tanks were initially used as per infantry doctrine for "forward movement of the frontline," and its advocates had to fight to create a

separate armor organization and doctrine.<sup>18</sup> The Royal Navy initially insisted that aircraft carriers were just ships, and it took time for people like Admiral Moffet to get people to think of them as mobile airfields.<sup>19</sup> Even then, aircraft on carriers were seen only as as "eyes of the fleet", to help in fleet to fleet battles, till they proved themselves capable of sinking ships, and even projecting power on land. Gradually, Navies have adopted airpower as the primary method of force projection. This is a huge shift from Corbett's postulate that Navies primary function is to control seas and support armies.<sup>20</sup> Armies, however, continue to organize airpower as per land power tenets. But the ones which succeeded in doing so have also suffered the maximum. The French military in WW I and the Russian military in the opening stages of WW II divided their airpower in tune with land power tenets, and under land force Commanders, and suffered badly for it.<sup>21</sup>

14 Cole et al, *History of the Unified Command Plan 1946-1993*, P2

15 So for example for India, the Air Force would see the entire Nation's territory and even beyond as one single theatre. The army would try to divide it into smaller entities, which match its reach, span of control, and style of functioning.

16 Downey, *Management in the Armed Forces*, p123.

17 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 3rd Edition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). He coined the term Paradigm Shift to demonstrate how science advanced by regular revolutions. The same analogy is applicable in many other fields, with airpower representing a technological revolution in warfare.

18 Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, p 110.

19 Rosen, *Winning the Next War* p 98.

20 John B Hattendorf, Wayne P Hughes Jr. eds, Julian S Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, (1911;repr.,Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), pp. xxv-xxvi, xxix.

21 Richard Overy, "The Air War in Europe, 1939-1945," in John Andreas Olsen, eds, *A History of Air Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010), p 37. The Russians lost 7000 aircraft between June 41 to Oct 41, and 20, 392 by Dec 41 against German losses of 2505. The British, and later combined Allied forces in North Africa made similar mistakes but reformed after learning lessons. The Germans on the other hand, developed a separate Luftwaffe, which contrary to popular perception, was not under the Army, but instead a well rounded Service, synergized with the Army in an initially effective operational doctrine. See James S Corum, *Luftwaffe: Creating the Operational Air War, 1918-1940* (Lawrence KA: Kansas University Press, 1997).



Air and land forces are almost polar opposites in many things. These polarities do not allow common organizing principles at the operational level of war. Navies are in the middle for most issues, but that does not matter much, especially when they are a Blue Water navy which operates independent from other arms in far away areas. The table below tries to capture the major polarities between armies and air forces.

Armies	Air Forces
Fight on a 'front', with limited reach	Fight on fronts or deeper, with flexible reach
Fights other armies	Fights all three forms of military power, though tends to favour fighting Air Forces
Decentralized control	Centralized control
Fights in fixed locations	Switches areas of operation multiple times a day
Self contained units which own most assets they need for the tasks they are organized for	No unit self contained, fight as mixtures of units and disperses repeatedly. No fixed owner of assets
Manpower centric	Machine and Technology centric
Believes in Task achievement	Follows SOPs, at times to detriment of Task
Accepts more attrition. Counts attrition in manpower.	Very sensitive to attrition. Counts attrition in machine numbers
Needs team spirit	Individual skill centric,
Mostly, everyone fights	Very few fight
Is organized vertically with many levels	Organized with less vertical and more horizontal levels
Less separation of command and administration	Greater differences in specialization
Fights over small areas normally upto where terrestrial march or vehicles can reach	Fights over very large areas

**Table:** Differences between Armies and Air Forces<sup>22</sup>

It is therefore difficult to organize them in a common format at the operational level of combat.<sup>23</sup> Instead it pays to use them as complementary tools organized and used as per their nature.<sup>24</sup> And in case of ideological conflict, the new form of power should be given extra consideration, something which historically has been only evident in hindsight, and often after failures.

The operational level of integration faces maximum challenges because it involves trying to integrate elements of power which are separate entities because of their inherent nature. This is the reason why most problems of inter-service integration have occurred in trying to integrate organizations designed to fight wars, and not the higher

<sup>22</sup> See Downey, 77-81, Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, *My Years With the IAF*, ( New Delhi: Lancer International, 1986),pp323-329, and Ashish Singh “Arms and the Game: Accepting Competition and Encouraging Cooperation”, *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 January-March 2016, pp.18-20

<sup>23</sup> For example in WWII Australian forces were under an American General. Armies had no problem, but “ there is literally page upon page devoted to the problem the RAAF had to face.” Noel Sproles and Alex Yates, *A Historical Study of Operational Command and Control*, ( Edinburgh Australia:DSTO Information Sciences Library, 2005), p 37.

<sup>24</sup> Very few military leaders understood the nature of this new form of power in WW II. Some notable army exceptions at the time who understood and then adapted their operational doctrine to suit airpower are Generals (later Field Marshals) Bernard Montgomery in North Africa , and William ‘Bill’ Slim in Burma.



decision-making structures.<sup>25</sup> And even here expeditionary organizations have been easier to integrate, while integration of war fighting assets in the home-land has proved the most difficult.<sup>26</sup> The higher level of reform, however, is easier, because it only involves integrating the very few strategic decision-making people, and so, this form of reform has usually come first, India being an exception.

The history of the US military reforms has lessons for us regarding this particular problem about the two forms of reform. US airpower fought for its doctrinal voice and gained it on paper by being declared co-equal to the other forms of power in 1943, while still a part of US Army. After the War, in 1947 came the National Security Act which unified the three<sup>27</sup> services at the highest level, created a single Department of Defence, as also created an independent USAF. Two years later the position of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff was established. So unification

25 See Noel Sproules and Alex Yates, *A Historical Study of Operational Command and Control*, (Edinburgh Australia: DSTO Information Sciences Library, 2005), p 22. The study illustrates the multiple difficulties faced by many countries in organizing for war. For various Theatres of WW II, it was comparatively easier to set up strategic decision-making structures like the Combined Chiefs of Staff set up in Washington comprising of US and UK Chiefs of Staff to devise overarching strategy.

26 Even for the US, forces based on Continental US (CONUS), remained service oriented till 1993, and were the last to form a unified command in the homeland, in this case the US Atlantic Command (USACOM). *Unified Command Plan*, pp 6-7.

27 Actually only two, since the Navy and Army were the only two existing services. Co-equality was announced as a wartime lesson in the North African Campaign via publication of the War Department FM 100-20.

of the HDO happened at this time. But it wasn't perfect. The next few decades saw much experimentation with lower structures, specifically geographic Theatre Commands and functional Commands. The Department of Defence Reorganization Act of 1958, gave the President powers to form unified (usually geographical) and specified (single service and usually functional) Commands on advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It also separated service headquarters from combatant commands. Yet, operational failures like in Vietnam, and Op Eagle Claw in Iran continued. Additionally, inter-service rivalry intensified as the USAF and US Army disagreed on how to use and organize airpower.<sup>28</sup>

The final reform was in 1986 via the Goldwater Nichols Act, which did three things. First, it gave a clear chain of command from the President through the Secretary of Defense to the Combatant Commander. Next, it elevated the Chairman JCS to the principal military advisor to the President.<sup>29</sup> Last, it finally organized all airpower, irrespective of service, under one airman by ushering in the concept of the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC), solving

28 Dr. Ian Horwood. *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War*, (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009). This study captures issues, pettiness, and evolution of this rivalry, centered around airpower.

29 Vijay Singh Rana, "Enhancing Jointness in Indian Armed Forces: Case for Unified Commands", *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 January-March 2015p39, and James A Blackwell Jr, and Barry M Blechman, "The Essence of Reform," in eds, *Making Defense Reform Work*, (New York: Brassey's, 1990), pp1-3,11.

an operational level problem.<sup>30</sup> Operational successes displayed a radical jump after the final reform, as visible in Gulf War I to Op Enduring Freedom.

Thus, the reforms show a stepwise move from a higher level reform, before finally addressing operational level reform. The first step in 1947 was to centralize power in the Department of Defense, the next step in 1958 was to separate service headquarters from fighting forces, the last step in 1986 was to establish a clear chain of Command and Control between the fighting forces and the President. As part of the larger story, at operational level was the doctrinal acceptance of airpower's strengths and acceptance; that it cannot be used as per traditional forms of C2. No campaign shows this better than Desert Storm where an army Theatre Commander accepted the potency of this new paradigm and allowed it the mandate of decimating 50 percent of Iraqi combat power before the land forces moved. This translated to a 38 day air war followed by a four day land war. <sup>31</sup>On paper it took from 1947 to 1986 to carry out organizational reform in stepwise fashion. Actually it took almost half a century, from 1943 to 1991 for an army man to understand the principle of co-equality of a new form of power. This time also

30 However, practically services have relinquished different amounts of airpower to the JFACC. For example in the First Gulf War the marines only released 15 per cent of their air assets to the integrated campaign, utilising 85 per cent organically. See Stephen J. McNamara, *Air Power's Gordian Knot: Centralized versus Organic Control*, (Maxwell: Air University Press, 1994), p. 133.

31 John Andreas Olsen, *A History of Air Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010), p. 177.

saw institutionalizing of the joint career paths of officers from all services, building a culture and understanding of 'other' services.<sup>32</sup> This maturation takes time, and the first form of reform nurtures this maturation.

### **Essence of the Problem and the Need for Sequencing**

Before any reform, we need to ask, what problem are we solving, and is it the correct problem? Historical reform committees show which symptom needs to be cured. Anit Mukherjee has correctly analyzed the malaise.

Basing his award winning analysis on earlier studies on military innovation by Posen, Mukherjee focuses on the root of the problem. About reform in the Indian military, he says "civil military relations are the most important.... driver for jointness."<sup>33</sup> He bases his thesis point on Posen's argument that militaries will not reform by themselves, and "civilian intervention is crucial for military innovation," with organizational reform just another facet of innovation. However, he also amalgamates the later theory of Rosen who tried to show that successful innovation also

32 Blackwell, and Blechman, "The Essence of Reform," in eds, *Making Defense Reform Work*, p24. For example the Joint Officer Personnel Specialty of the US military, which mandates service on joint staffs as a pre-requisite for promotion, has contributed to better understanding of issues with sister services. In addition, scholarly debate, and encouragement of research based education has ensured that rising officers have an informed opinion on most subjects, rather than 'company policy' which percolates through training, or even informally. All this needs both concerted effort, and time.

33 Anit Mukherjee, "Fighting Separately: Jointness and Civil-Military Relations in India", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40, 2017:1-2, 6-34., p 7



“occurs from within the military and requires the support of senior military officers. More specifically, senior officers have to propose a ‘new theory of victory’ and win the support of mid-level officers and create ‘promotion-pathways’ to ensure its success.”<sup>34</sup> And so normally it takes a generation’s churn ( say 10 -30 years), for grooming based change to take place.<sup>35</sup> Synthesizing the two views he says, “Therefore, in order to enforce jointness, we need to adapt the insights from both the approaches – civilian intervention is required and senior officers need to support this vision.”<sup>36</sup> This article claims, that addressing the more complicated form of reform, Theatre Commands, needs a generation’s grooming of officers to understand the complexity of the problems they face. This grooming should be after the first step of reforming the HDO has occurred – where the civil-military divide is the paramount cause of disjointness. The case study of the US evolution shows just this.

There are two major reasons why the Strategic level reform has not happened. First is the opposition from the Air Force leadership.<sup>37</sup> This issue is about fundamental doctrine. Even as the other two services gradually acknowledge the potency of the new form of power, they try to own and organize it as per their paradigms. AF leadership has not trusted the maturity level

34 Mukherjee (2017) *Fighting Separately* , p. 12.

35 Rosen, *Winning the Next War* , p 105

36 Mukherjee (2017) *Fighting Separately* ,p. 12

37 For example see Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, *My Years With the IAF*, pp323-329. He expresses his views on inter-service differences, his apprehensions about a CDS, and with characteristic restraint shows how he feels sister services are grabbing Air Force assets, and through them roles and missions.

of other service leaders, especially as they both try to raise own air arms, in the process poaching on Air Force ‘roles and missions’. It does not help that single service functional separation does not eliminate dominant service culture, something which promises to grow stronger if co-equality of the three forms of combat power is not built into the re-organized structures.<sup>38</sup> In the case of the US, this equality was put into writing in 1943, even before the first organizational reform occurred in 1947.

The second and more important factor has been concerns regarding power redistribution. One of the biggest resistances to organizational change anywhere is considerations of power redistribution.<sup>39</sup> Power is currently distributed between four organizations, the three Service headquarters, and MoD. HDO reform in any manner, threatens to upset the existing

38 This implies not just leadership co-equality, but also staffing co-equality, for ‘pro-rata’ staffing by itself skews decision making through what Allison and Zelikow call Model II (bureaucratic output), and Model III ( political bargaining) processes. Army staff will give out only Army solutions (outputs), while larger say via numbers will also allow for greater bargaining power in mixed service bargaining. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, (New York:Longman, 1999).

39 This ‘Power’ aspect is not frivolous; Power is a very real facet of organizations. Its distribution within organizations is done for optimal achievement of organizational goals( for example authority with rank in militaries). Its distribution amongst the sub-organizations which comprise the components of the Ministry of Defence is an important facet any reform will have to factor. Any reform attempt which ignores this aspect, and the resistance that change will manifest, is likely to fail – as has happened with all Defense Reform Committees. David A Buchanan and Richard J Badham , *Power, Politics and Organizational Change :Winning the Turf Game*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), pp xx-xxi





power distribution. Currently, the power is most concentrated in the MoD.

The establishment of Geographical Theatre Commands alters power differently from HDO reform. Establishment of Theatres also implies a move of military power centers away from Delhi. The Service Headquarters lose whatever power they have in defence matters as new geographic power centers arise at the Headquarters of the new theatres. The move also separates the centers geographically away from each other, as they spread outward from Delhi, diffusing power. Without a central CDS equivalent, this emasculates the military participation in national security further.

Apart from the Roman example, this stratagem has often been used to reduce the power of the military. In eleventh century China it was a deliberate ploy used by the 2000 year old mandarin bureaucracy to keep the power of the military under check by a 'divide and rule' policy. Garrisons were kept at the frontiers and their supply was controlled from the capital. This control of food and weapons "could in any dispute expect to balance one military leader off against another."<sup>40</sup> Even today, whoever controls the power to equip can play 'balance of power' politics. For Theaters, this allocation of resources will happen from whatever decision-making structure exists in the Capital – all the more important why HDO reform is needed first.

The last tranche of Chinese military reforms is oft quoted as a reason to mirror their move . But, it is incorrect to compare Theatre reform in India to the recent Theatre reform in China. The problem in China has been too autonomous and strong an Army, which is an alternate power centre to the Communist Party, whose organ it is supposed to be. Even in Mao's heydays, the PLA was strong enough to protect Deng Xiaoping from arrest by providing sanctuary on military bases, even as Mao repeatedly purged him.<sup>41</sup> Xi Jinping is centralizing power, and one method of doing so is to reduce the power of the PLA by increasing alternate power centres of the PLAAF and PLAN. Thus, for the first time the PLA HQ has been created(downgraded) as a co-equal to the Air Force , Navy, and Strategic Force which till now were subsumed within the larger Army structure.<sup>42</sup>While no doubt, potential adversary orientation is also one factor in how the theatres have been geographically organized, it is important to remember, the change from multiple Military Regions to *larger* and *fewer* Theatres is an evolutionary step of military reforms that date back to at least 1991. Chinese reforms are aimed at reducing the power of the military in internal politics, while the problem in India is the opposite, too little say in national security strategy and policy.

41 Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), p 327

42 Michael S. Chase and Jeffrey Engstrom, *China's Military Reforms*, at [ndupress.ndu.edu](http://ndupress.ndu.edu) and Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr. , *China's New Organizational Structure, What is known unknown and Speculation* , *China Brief* , Vol 16, Issue 4 , 4 Feb 2016, at <https://jamestown.org>

40 McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power*, p 34



If we form Theatres first, an already emasculated military will further lose its strategic level participation in national security, even as reform appears to have happened. The likelihood of Strategic level reform, though easier in administrative ease, will reduce further, unless, as Posen predicts, a catastrophic failure occurs, a likely possibility as multiple independent Theatre leadership applies independent strategy in wars. From the historically 'service level' independent strategy, we would have changed the mistake to geographically oriented independent strategy.<sup>43</sup> We will still not have solved the problem of unified strategy at the highest level. So, we will have to wait for catastrophic failure to reform HDO, the essence of the problem.

However, in the current political climate, the concept of Theatre Command may find some favour. A seminal work by Jervis explains why. First, "domestic politics may dictate that a given event be made the occasion for a change in policy."<sup>44</sup> The current climate seems conducive to reform, and the assertive political leadership has in recent years expressed an interest in reforming defense.<sup>45</sup>

43 In no war excepting 1971 have we applied true unified strategy at the highest level. When we did so, as in 1971, the result was a spectacular success – Pakistan was rent asunder. Every other war has ranged from a catastrophic failure like in 1962, grudging stalemate as in 1965, to inefficient victory as in Kargil.

44 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p 17

45 "Decision on defence reforms in 'few months': Manohar Parrikar," *The Times of India*, 11 Nov 2016 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Decision-on-defence-reforms-in-few-months-Manohar-Parrikar/>

But, "bargaining within the bureaucracy may dictate what options are presented to the national leaders."<sup>46</sup> There are four bureaucratic organizations<sup>47</sup> under the political leadership, (MoD and Services) which reform affects. Relative bargaining power between the four would influence what options are finally presented to the leadership. A known way of influencing change is through controlling *decision premises*, where "attention is devoted to the control of decision agendas and to strategies for guiding or deflecting people's attention to the grounds or issues defining a favoured point of view."<sup>48</sup> All the current discussion on Theatre Command deflects attention from HDO reform.

Third, "the decision makers' predisposition could account for the choice that was made."<sup>49</sup> The current political climate is conducive to progressive change but the leadership may not understand the ramifications this article tries to explain. And so it may accept the reform which appears to visibly bring change.

Last, "the interests and routines of the bureaucracies could explain the way the decision was implemented."<sup>50</sup>

articleshow/55374339.cms accessed 31 May 17. The current government has shown resolve on reform in general and so it is likely to press hard for reforming.

46 Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p17.

47 While the term bureaucracy is normally used to refer to civilians, the military organizations are also bureaucratic in their functioning. In this paper the term refers to both classes of officials.

48 Morgan, *Images of Organization*, p173

49 Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p17

50 Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, p17

## Conclusion

This article has narrowly focused on explaining the two levels of reform. It is important to highlight this narrowness of scope. It is unfortunate that there is much debate on *one* solution – Theatres. But, there is hardly any exploration of the problem(s) which need solving. Problem solving, especially for such “wicked problems” like defence reform should start with exploring the nature of the problem.<sup>51</sup> This article has used history and facets of organizational theory to throw some light on the ‘blind men’s elephant’. The pitfall of starting debate from a solution instead of a problem is that the brilliant solution may solve the wrong problem. In doing so it may exacerbate or even change the nature of the real problem.

There are two forms of reform, strategic level, and operational level. The first is a HDO reform which involves unified decision-making about national security at the apex level. It matters both in war and even more in peace, for it will end up shaping force structure and doctrine. The lower form of reform translates to unified geographic commands, and only looks at synergizing the combat arms through organizational/ structural change. While its forms have been both geographical and functional, current thought in the Indian context is about geographical commands.

---

51 Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” *Policy Science* 4 (1973) , pp 155-169. Wicked Problems are difficult to understand, often don’t have perfect solutions, only relatively better ones, and solutions don’t solve the problem – they change the nature of the problem.

Theatres however, despite an older history have greater complications in this era. They involve trying to unify dichotomies through structure. Airpower as the new technology or way of war has given rise to these increased complications. Its natural attributes, strengths, and nature are diametrically opposite to land power’s tenets. It is better to use these forms of power to complement each other than just like each other. Lessons of history also show that the two forms of reform need to be sequential, for the higher form leads to organizational learning essential before the second form is contemplated. Reversing the sequence can harm national security by exacerbating the root of the problem of the Indian defence services – lack of civilian (political) engagement with the military. Creating Theatres first will emasculate an already weak national decision-making structure, fracturing and moving military’s participative power out of Delhi, Not only will we have lost an ability to formulate unified strategy for war , but also in peace, lost Downey’s “forum for philosophical debate and long term investment.”<sup>52</sup> .

---

52 See footnote 8.



Reforming the HDO, on the other hand will only rebalance power equations within Delhi. This HDO reform is about both integrating Service HQs with each other and with MoD. That this rebalancing is needed is unquestionable – every reformist has advocated it, starting from Mountbatten. What is debatable is the form it may take, a single individual co-equal to Service Chiefs, or above them, or an empowered committee. What is more important is integration of MoD with Service HQs and a direct access of uniformed leadership to political leadership. Akin to the

unification act of the US system in 1947, the separate forms of power need to unite at the very top, before we can even contemplate Operational level reform, the task with more complications. Administratively, reorganizing HDO is comparatively easy. But what blocks it is both insufficient understanding of the problems which face us, and considerations of power redistribution. However, with the political climate currently being amenable to reform, it is important that the national leadership understands all ramifications of the form and sequence of the change.



## CENJOWS

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

### CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES (CENJOWS)

Kashmir House, Rajaji Marg, New Delhi-110 011

**Tele. No.** : 011-23792446, 23006535, 23006538/9 | **Fax** : 011-23792444

**Website** : <https://cenjows.gov.in> | **E-mail** : [cenjows@yahoo.com](mailto:cenjows@yahoo.com)