

PREPAREDNESS FOR JOINT WARFIGHTING – HIGHER DEFENCE ORGANISATIONS, DOCTRINES AND CIVIL MILITARY FUSION

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“The Armed Forces must be fully joint: doctrinally, institutionally organisationally, intellectually and technically because cyber war will be to the 21st century what the blitzkrieg was to the 20th century” –

General VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd)

Abstract

The creation of the appointment of CDS and of the Department of Military Affairs within the Ministry of Defence are significant steps. Foremost, is the CDS being appointed as ex-officio Secretary of the DMA, which for the very first time since 1952 places the edifice of management of the Armed Forces in the charge of a Military Officer in uniform. Second, it is a facilitating arrangement towards the eventual intent to set up Joint and Integrated Commands, which would need several calibrated changes being made towards orienting the existing organisational structure to meet the needs of these future structures.

These changes that would need a close, deliberate and a real-time understanding of threats the nation faces, our own operational capabilities and how these be recast and enhanced to best match the requirement of India’s security. The pitfalls in leaving such a critical aspect to be settled through traditional bureaucratic procedures are obvious.

The eventual aim being setting up of the Integrated / Joint Commands, there are significant issues that come to fore. On the one side, there are issues ‘internal’ to the military – such as the extent to which the CDS has been empowered to meet the objective, adequacy or otherwise of stipulated timelines, the command and control of these future commands.

There are also, on the other hand, larger issues such as the structure of the national security decision-making apparatus, the association and participation of the military therein, not just at the stage of decision-making but through the course of developing options.

Future warfighting has hitherto unknown ‘hybrid’ dimensions that can target the very heartland of the nation – its economy and infrastructure and would need to be fought between nations, with all their assets and capabilities, not just by the military alone but also involve other Departments of the Government and even the private sector.

The need for all stakeholders in such an extended battlefield to be aware of impending threats and their respective roles in combating these cannot be overstated. In this context, there are pertinent lessons to learn from the Chinese model of such a broader ‘Military Civil Fusion’ which we can consider to bring into our own systems to raise national security to be a truly national endeavour.

There is no gainsaying the creation of the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), created as a new vertical within the Ministry of Defence, have redefined Civil Military Relations.

Besides his functions as Military Advisor to the Raksha Mantri and as Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the CDS has is ex-officio Secretary of the DMA, thereby bringing an Armed Forces Officer into the apex structure of government for the very first time since 1952, when the “Organisation, Functions, Powers and Procedure of Defence Headquarters, 1952” under which Services HQ made ‘Attached Offices’ to the Department of Defence.

Equally momentous is that in follow-up, the Government have approved appointment of Military officials to positions in the Ministry of Defence, opening the prospect of their being included in the Central Staffing scheme and to hold even more positions, not only in other Departments of the Ministry of Defence and other Ministries of the Government of India.

Political Direction and Guidance

The rationale for these defining decisions and the strong political intention underlying them is best gauged from the following excerpts from the Hon'ble Prime Minister's address to the nation on Independence Day 2019:-

“.... 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.”

..... 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 that clearly stand out from these excerpts are:-

- (a) Acknowledgement that the (then) approach was 'fragmented'.
- (b) Need for the three Services to 'march in step' with good coordination, which should be in line with the changing war and security environment in the world.
- (c) An expectation that 'the three forces will get an effective leadership at the top level'.

Significantly, the creation of the DMA finds no mention in that address of the Hon'ble Prime Minister and it could be that step has been taken due to a realisation that emerged in the course of drawing up the role and responsibilities of the CDS that for him to execute the mandate placed on him, it would also be required for him to be adequately empowered.

Pith and Substance of the Approvals

The Notifications spelled out the CDS' functions as Permanent Chairman COSC to be to administer tri-services organisations, including tri services agencies/ organisations/ commands related to Cyber and Space; Member of Defence Acquisition Council chaired by Raksha Mantri and Defence Planning Committee chaired by NSA, Military Adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority with his role being to bring about jointness in operation, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance, etc of the three Services.

The CDS is also to ensure optimal utilisation of infrastructure and rationalise it through jointness among the services, 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) and assign inter-Services prioritisation to capital acquisition proposals based on the anticipated budget. He is to bring about reforms in the functioning of three Services aimed at augmenting combat capabilities of the Armed Forces by reducing wasteful expenditure.

Correspondingly, the mandate of the Department of Military Affairs, in addition to subjects transferred from the Department of Defence to the DMA, include the following areas:-

- 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 Limiting Stipulations

The approvals however carried the following caveats/conditions:-

- The CDS will not exercise any military command, including over the three Service Chiefs.
- The three Services Chiefs is that they will continue to advise RM on matters exclusively concerning their respective Services.
- The critically significant stipulation is that these structures and systems were to be established within three years of the first CDS assuming office.

While there will always be divergent, even contrary views on how to implement a particular political decision, it is beyond the scope of anyone at the functionary level in service to intrinsically question the authority or efficacy of the decision itself. What is required of them at this stage is to put minds together to forge viable joint structures.

Range and Scope of the CDS' Authority

In the erstwhile dispensation prior to the appointment of the CDS, all issues relating to the administrative and operational control of the Armed Forces were dealt by the Ministry of Defence. The following major areas of work were transferred to the Department of Military Affairs which itself was placed under the ex-officio Secretaryship of the CDS":-

- Military Operations including CI Ops. Deployment of Forces, Border intelligence, Air Defence.
- Organisation and Manpower Planning, Pay and Allowances, Defence Services Regulations.

- Personnel Management - Postings, Promotions, Cadre Management, Complaints, Discipline etc.
- Service Conditions, Grant of PC, SSC etc., Recruitment Policy, entrance exams etc.
- Training Matters. CAT 'A' Estts, Field Firing Ranges,
- Budget Aspects, ATGs, War and Peace system of accounting,
- Procurements through Revenue route.
- Development of communication / roads.
- Provisioning / procurement of clothing (incl. spl clothing) and spl. Eqpt.
- Maintenance of Platforms – Aircraft, Ships
- War Wastage Reserves.

From the perspective of bringing about 'Integration' of the forces, important amongst these subjects are the Personnel Management - Postings, Promotions, Cadre Management, Complaints, Discipline etc. Service Conditions, Grant of PC, SSC etc., Recruitment Policy, entrance exams besides Training Matters. Substantive integration would come about only upon all these subjects coming on to a common template.

Present State of Flux

Determining the form and shape of Integrated Structures is work in progress. What is on the anvil is a tectonic transformation of structures and systems which require not just a new working ethos but also a large scale shake out from diecast mindsets that make it unrealistic to think that such transition would be pain-free.

Beyond the din of the high voltage slogan-driven narrative, at the leadership level, this is time for high professionalism and sagacity to understand contrary proposals and accept them. There would be an expected impact, even some tumult at the tactical, supported, supporting with a spill over on to the operational aspects but leadership, at all levels has to ensure that there is no compromise on strategic interests at any time.

Two guiding principles that need mention here are first, that 'geography is not joint; warfighting is' and second that 'Integration is not equivalent of sameness'. **While a deft functional understanding of the intended integration and jointness is not yet visible, it is clear that a lot of churning is indeed taking place, and happening so before rather than after the proposed structures are approved.**

The CDS in the National Security Decision-Making Architecture

While the CDS is well empowered to meet the requirements of fulfilling his mandate, and is taking the requisite strides towards accomplishing that mandate, certain areas and aspects of concern come to fore that are determinant on the how the decision-making apparatus is cast.

Higher Decision Making Apparatus

The issue that comes to fore is how the Armed Forces obtain the requisite political authority and guidance to execute their functions, whether the extent of empowerment is adequate to achieve the stated objectives. There is need to understand the structure of Higher National Security Decision making apparatus, the dynamics of its functioning and the extent to which the military, at its highest echelons is associated with and participates in the decision-making processes.

The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by the Prime Minister of India with the Home, Defence, External Affairs and Finance Ministers of the Union Cabinet as its members is the highest decision-making body on all matters of India's national security including defence policy and expenditure. While the National Security Advisor (NSA) is a permanent invitee to the CCS and the Secretary of the concerned Department would invariably be in waiting, the Services Chiefs are invited to be in attendance only on a 'as required' basis. **As Secretary DMA, the CDS would be in attendance in the course of deliberations on subjects pertaining to his department but is not a 'permanent invitee', nor are the Services Chiefs. This is a long-standing proposal on the part of the Defence Services for the Service Chiefs (in present**

day context the CDS as Chairman COSC to be ‘permanent invitees’ at CCS Meetings merits immediate acceptance.

The National Security Council (NSC), also chaired by the Prime Minister and includes all members of the CCS, the National Security Adviser and the Deputy National Security Advisor. The NSC’s agenda includes issues of external and internal security, military affairs, conventional and non-conventional defence, space and high technology, counter insurgency, counter terrorism, economy and environment. The military has no representation in this tier. **If the Military is indeed to be given its due presence in the national security architecture, it is incumbent for the CDS to be a permanent invitee to the NSC.**

The Strategic Policy Group, is the first level of the NSC support structure. It is headed by the NSA and Members include the Vice Chairman NITI Aayog, Cabinet Secretary (the erstwhile Chairman), the CDS, the Services Chiefs, Governor RBI, Foreign Secretary, Secretaries for Home, Finance, Defence, Defence Production, SA to the RM, Secretary (R), Secretaries for Revenue, Atomic Energy, Space, Director IB, and the Secretary NSCS. Reps of other Mins/ Departments invited as required. The Cabinet Secretary coordinates implementation of SPG decisions by Union Mins/ Departments and State Govts. ***The CDS is member both as PC COSC and as Secretary DMA. Once Integrated Commands are set up and if the role of the CDS becomes an operational one, it needs to be ensured that the ‘military’ representation within the SPG at the tri-services level continues by inclusion of the VCDS as member of the SPG.***

The National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), constitutes members who are “persons of eminence” outside the Government with expertise in external security, strategic analysis, foreign affairs, defence, the armed forces, internal security, science and technology and economics. The NSAB is the Council’s think-tank. **The NSAB does not have formally ‘earmarked’ slots for the Defence Services which would be essential for the military perspectives to be factored into deliberations. Ironically, the NSC Secretariat does not even have a**

Military vertical. Clearly time to recast the NSAB and the NSCS to enhance formal Military participation at both forums.

The Defence Planning Committee

Notified in Apr 2018 as a 'Permanent Body' under the Chairmanship of NSA To '*analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs relating to defence planning*' including National defence and security priorities, Foreign policy imperatives, Operational directives and associated requirements, Relevant strategic and security-related doctrines, Defence acquisition and infrastructure development plans including the 15-year LTIPP, Defence technology and development of the Indian defence industry and global technological advancement. Its other members are Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, Service Chiefs, Foreign Secretary, Defence and Expenditure Secretaries and the CISC (Member Secretary). **Importantly, the HQ IDS is the Secretariat for the DPC.** The DPC functions on a 'think tank' mode and submits its recommendations to the Raksha Mantri whereafter the proposals follow the normal Government channels of progressing for consideration and approval. **The DPC is a crucial 'all of government' body with representatives from the MEA and the Finance Ministries and can be leveraged to fortify the planning process.** As the DPC caters to the requirements of the Ministry of Defence and in particular to the Armed Forces, the CDS, chairing the DPC in his capacity as Permanent Chairman Chiefs of staff Committee may in fact be a pragmatic move, especially as the Committee is already being administratively serviced by the HQ IDS.

Centrality of the NSA

On all matters relating to National Security (with Defence Strategy as a subset) - the NSA has come to be a the 'central pivot' at doctrinal and planning levels. The NSA chairs the Strategic Policy Group, the Defence Planning Committee and is advised by and oversees the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB). He is importantly, a Member of the NSC.

In contrast, the long-standing requirement projected by the Armed Forces for a ‘one on one’ interaction with the PM, a ‘permanent invitee’ status in the CCS for Chairman COSC / Services Chiefs has not been acceded even after the appointment of the CDS. In effect, the realm of the CDS is within the zone of the ‘military’ as a subset of the larger ‘security’ canvas with the NSA at its centre. **The functional relation between the CDS, the Services Chiefs and the NSA needs to be clearly stated and understood.**

Doctrines – Facilitators or an Enigma

Military doctrines reflect “*the will and philosophy of an organisation and specifies premises and convictions to sustain its endeavours*” and provide a set of principles that guide the Armed Forces to function in support of our National Security Objectives.

It is from these generally accepted but not formally propounded National Security Objectives that India’s National Military Objectives would flow. While these too have not been formally promulgated, they would broadly include prevention of war through strategic and conventional deterrence across the full spectrum of the conflict continuum; prosecute military operations to defend territorial integrity; ensure Internal Security and Stability, provide for contingencies at home and abroad to provide Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR), Aid to Civil Authority and International Peacekeeping, and defence cooperation when called upon to do so.

In the context of the rapidly changing nature of warfare, kinetic and non-kinetic character of conflict and the continually changing challenges faced by the nation, there is need for the Armed Forces to remain operationally current, agile, efficient and utilise scarce resources in an optimised manner.

It is hence imperative that Doctrines, collectively and individually, provide an ‘enabling’ environment for functioning rather than an ‘impeding’ one. ‘Joint’ military doctrines must provide foundations for ‘greater

integration and interdependence, to achieve higher inter-operability and compatibility within the Armed Forces' and must therefore be facilitators for seamless and effective bi-service or tri-service operations.

There are also Single service doctrines that are 'special to force' and seek to enhance operational efficiency within respective Forces. Doctrines, importantly, preclude or obviate finding ad hoc solutions and guidelines for carrying out operations which carry the potential to be disastrous.

All the three services have but one common aim – to either deter war or to fight and win it. A Joint Doctrine, duly accepted for adherence and compliance by the Armed Forces is inevitable, especially when there is no overarching National Security Doctrine to draw guidance from. The Kargil War is itself a suffice example for why there is need for a cogent, all-encompassing Joint Warfare doctrine.

National Security and Defence Doctrines

Democracy, ipso facto is premised on the 'will of the people' with the 'people' also being the eventual bearers of the consequences of the 'outcomes' of political decisions. Their stake in the decision-making processes and the portent of these decisions is therefore abiding. It goes without saying that people of the nation need to be kept abreast of the state of the nation's security, the nature of threats the nation faces and the 'strategic vision' of the political authority in understanding them and drawing up responses. It is therefore imperative that a 'National Security Doctrine' that covers in realistic detail issues relating to border disputes, conventional and non-conventional threats, duly approved by the NSC, be formalised.

On the 'functional' side, the CCS must rise to play an assertive role as the final arbiter on how the Armed Forces of the nation and the various security agencies function in seamless unison. The 'traditional' irking points of inter-cadre primacy and supremacy are present day context, vestiges of an era that precedes the CDS and DMA days

when there was a deliberate intent to keep the Armed Forces at a safe distance which was done in an ambience of anonymity. It is time now to revisit this aspect, understand the on-ground dynamics and protocols on which the Armed Forces and other Agencies mutually coordinate their functions. An ‘Integrated’ Military Doctrine as also other single-service Doctrines should derive from this Defence Doctrine.

Likewise, decision-making on matters of security also involves a plethora of functionaries across other Departments and Ministries of the Government of India as also of State Governments. In the context of modern-day warfighting, these decisions may also require to be made at great speed, even perhaps on a ‘real-time’ basis. It is time to frontally address the lingering ‘us vs them’ approach by defining the role and responsibility of various Departments / Ministries, place the onus of responsibility of specific functionaries.

Military Civil Fusion

The Chinese construct of Military Civil Fusion (MCF) warrants a very close understanding. Unlike in India where innovations and technological progress is regular and routine in every sector other than defence to an extent that the generally ‘holy cow’ has come to be tec impoverished. Several schemes and steps have undoubtedly been taken by both by the Services HQ and the DRDO but these are not at ‘platform’ level where in fact the real techno voids exist and can only be made up be imports. INS Vikrant, recently launched for sea trials has been flaunted as a shining example of Atmanirbharta’ with over 74% indigenous content. What is not stated is that the Engines installed in the carrier are GE Marine four GE LM2500 engines. Creditable, but not yet there. **China on the other hand has a robust and all-encompassing framework in which seven categories of factors shape the MCF system: catalytic, input, institutional, organizational, networks, contextual, and output factors.**

There are important lessons to draw from China’s strategy to reorganise its entire edifice of Science and Technology Enterprises of that new innovations are available simultaneously to the Civil and military

sectors. Its MCF model is premised on AI being the driver for the next technology revolution and future military dominance will accrue to the country that first applies AI to next generation warfare and transition to 'Intelligent warfare'. Key technologies being targeted under MCF include quantum computing, big data, semiconductors, 5G, advanced nuclear technology, aerospace technology, and AI. The acquisition of these new technologies is being done through investments. These include investment in private industries, talent recruitment programs, directing academic and research collaboration to military gain, forced technology transfer, intelligence gathering, and outright theft. The MCF strategy allows a growing number of civilian enterprises and entities to undertake classified military R&D and weapons production, exploiting blatantly the transparent nature of the global research enterprise. Bodies like the China Scholarship Council require academic scholarship recipients to report on their overseas research to PRC diplomats.

Technologies developed and procured on the civil side are seamlessly available for development in the military. The support and sustenance for this framework derives from a 'hands on' leadership involvement, direct involvement of key state and military agencies, financial mechanisms such as hybrid state-private sector investment funds. Without doubt there would be limits to setting up such a 'framework' in a democratic country where systems work in transparency based on strict adherence and compliance to the laws of the land which includes honouring IPRs. However, within there is much space even within these limitations to bring in enabling provisions that allow sharing of technologies for application towards national security.

Present Role of the CDS – Evolving or Temporal

To revert to the role of the CDS, has the appointment been accorded the requisite positions in these decision-making apparatus of the Government to an extent that ensures 'effective and real' integration?

The answer is substantially Yes. However, harnessing the full potential of the appointment towards the larger aspect of national

security, there is far more that needs to be done. Hopefully, this too is work in progress and several consequential changes, even perhaps redefining the present role of CDS could come up once Integrated Commands are set up, **even a possible reversion of the Secretary DMA to another Military Officer or even a bureaucrat, dependent on how the Government assesses the Military's success or otherwise in managing itself.**

Conclusion

Both the bureaucracy and the military sharing the characteristic of adhering to the status quo with little propensity to throw up substantive concepts and ideas of reform on their own volition, it is really the political dispensation that needs to understand the requirements and enforce requisite changes through 'diktat'.

To visualise the creation of the DMA having come through such 'diktat' is not hard. Neither is it to expect the setting up of Integrated Commands, their control and organisational structures and aspects of territorial ambits of each to also 'happen' in a similar way.

To reiterate, time line within which to set up Integrated structures has already been stipulated by the political authority. This timeline would without doubt have been set after extensive consultation from across the Armed Forces. Also, no political authority worth its salt has stomach to rescind a project initiated with such gusto.

In many ways, the Armed Forces are on test as to whether they can indeed 'manage themselves'. The collective endeavour must be to accomplish. Yet, if it is the unanimous opinion across the military spectrum that more deliberations are required before Integrated structures are cast or that the time to make the 'grand shift' is not opportune, reverting to the political leadership for fresh directions is only logical. The justification to do so must however be embedded in justifications that go beyond those for which the Armed Forces have been advocating creation of these commands in the first place.

In doing so, the Armed Forces need to keep in mind the old adage that ‘good enough is the enemy of perfection’ and each shot on or off the war zone invariably has to be the very best.

To recall Gen VP Malik’s terse message quoted at the beginning of this essay, that shot may well hit the heartland of India and its economy and infrastructure through cyber-attacks. The need of the hour is hence to brace up for eventualities that go beyond the battlefields as encrusted in classical thought.

Intended fruition from the bold and determined initiatives would accrue only when integration encompasses body and soul of the entire National Security apparatus. It is still a long way to get there.

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