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SAMARTH: LEGACY OF A THINKING GENERAL (STRATEGIC ADAPTIVE MULTI-DOMAIN ARCHITECT REFORMIST THEATERISATION HERALD)

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SAMARTH: Legacy of a Thinking General
(Strategic Adaptive Multi-Domain Architect
Reformist Theaterisation Herald)



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yad yad acharati shreshthas tat tad evetaro janah |
sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate ||

*(Whatever actions great people perform, common people follow. Whatever standards they set,
all the world pursues)*

- Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 3 Verse 21¹

The evolution of a nation's military strength is not the result of chance. Rather, it is the product of a disciplined foresight, strategic continuity, and the rise of leaders who are capable of navigating the dynamic intersection of tradition and transformation. In the highly intense contemporary arena of 21st-century geopolitics, the Indian Armed Forces have found themselves at a defining crossroads. They are moving away from the isolated doctrines of the past toward a future defined by synergy, technological mastery, and an integrated unified command. At the centre of this institutional metamorphosis stands a leader whose career is no less than a master class in the art of leadership. His journey is not just a record of rank and file but a testament to the "thinking general". He is an officer who balanced the complex realities of frontline combat with the intellectual rigor levels that are rare to find. From the rugged terrains of the frontiers to the

sophisticated deliberations of the National Security Council, his trajectory is a reflection of a methodical preparation for a historic mandate.

The establishment of the foundational phase of General Chauhan's career was shaped in the rigorous and disciplined environment of the National Defence Academy (NDA) Khadakwasla and subsequent specialised officer training at the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun.² He was commissioned into the 11 Gorkha Rifles in June 1981³ and his early years were marked by a commitment to elite combat proficiency. It is evidenced in his successful completion of the Young Officers Course and the Commando Course in Belagavi.⁴ As his career progressed into the 1990s, he efficiently transitioned from tactical execution to strategic leadership by attending the Command and Staff Course at the Army War College and the Higher Defence Management Course at the College of Defence Management.⁵ This academic and professional preparation was further globalised through his qualification as a United Nations Military Observer.⁶ This was a role that provided him with essential exposure to international peacekeeping protocols and multinational military cooperation.

General Chauhan's career trajectory is marked by a methodical ascent through the hierarchies of the infantry. During the formative decade of the 1980s, he witnessed promotions from the junior leadership roles of Lieutenant and Captain to the tactical responsibilities of a Company Commander. He took on the command of an 11 GR battalion, which was a critical juncture that tested his ability to manage large-scale infantry operations. These ultimately lead to his appointment as Brigadier and Commandant of the 11th Gorkha Rifles Regimental Centre in Lucknow.⁷ In this role, he was responsible for the institutional stewardship of one of the Army's most storied regiments, ensuring the professional development of the next generation of Gorkha soldiers.



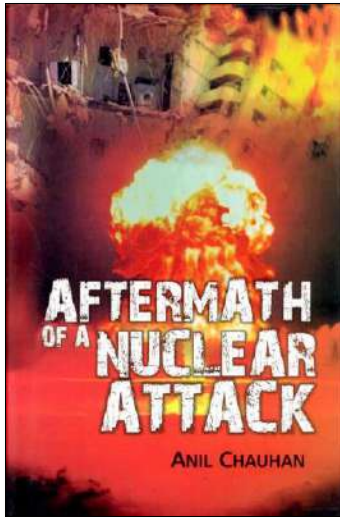
The transition to higher generalship saw General Chauhan assume significant administrative and operational portfolios that bridged the gap between field command and national policy. As a Major General, his tenure as Chief of Staff of the 15 Corps

(Chinar Corps)⁸ was instrumental in managing the complex security architecture of the Kashmir Valley. It was a responsibility that preceded his divisional command in the high-intensity Baramulla sector. His subsequent elevation to Lieutenant General and appointment as the General Officer Commanding of the 3rd Corps in Dimapur⁹ expanded his strategic remit to the multifaceted challenges of the Northeast. Following his distinguished active service and subsequent superannuation in 2021, he served as a Military Adviser within the National Security Council Secretariat.¹⁰ This unique advisory role placed him at the heart of the nation's highest strategic deliberations under the National Security Advisor. This served as the final professional bridge to his historic selection that was to come in subsequent years.

General Anil Chauhan's ascent to the highest levels of military leadership is deeply anchored in his extensive experience of commanding pivotal formations along India's most sensitive and diverse frontiers. His tenure as the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 19th Infantry Division in the Baramulla sector is an example of his profound and practical understanding of high-altitude warfare, cross-border infiltration dynamics, and counter-insurgency operations within the Northern Command. Another such example would be him commanding the Spear Corps (3 Corps), headquartered in Dimapur. During this, he handled with excellence the responsibility of maintaining the territorial integrity of the borders in Northeast India while simultaneously managing complex internal security operations across multiple states with distinct ethnic and political landscapes. His operational journey reached its zenith in his appointment as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of the Eastern Command in Kolkata.¹¹ He also oversaw one of the largest and most strategically vital territorial jurisdictions in the Indian Army, managing the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China during periods of significant friction, as well as the international borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh. He was a commander capable of managing large-scale theatre responsibilities and balancing conventional defence with internal stability.

His contribution to India's national security framework reached a critical juncture during his service as the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) at Army Headquarters.¹² He functioned as a primary architect and coordinator of the military

response following the Pulwama terror attack in 2019. He provided the essential strategic oversight, inter-service liaison, and operational planning for the Balakot airstrikes. It was an operation that signalled a fundamental paradigm shift in India's military doctrine toward proactive deterrence against state-sponsored, cross-border terrorism of Pakistan. His leadership was also extremely instrumental in the conceptualisation and execution of Operation Sunrise.¹³ It was a highly coordinated bilateral military effort between the Indian and Myanmar armies. This operation targeted



insurgent camps and safe havens along the border and effectively disrupted the activities of several anti-India militant groups like the NSCN(K) and ULFA.¹⁴ These operations demonstrate the unique ability of Gen Anil Chauhan to translate high-level political objectives into precise, synchronised military actions while maintaining delicate diplomatic balances through effective military-to-military engagement and regional security cooperation.

Beyond the rigors of field command, General Chauhan has made extensive contributions to the administrative, social, and intellectual evolution of the Indian Armed Forces. During his tenure as a Brigadier at the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans, he moved beyond traditional bureaucratic management to draft and implement sophisticated policy frameworks. These frameworks modernised the support structures for retired personnel. His approach was not merely administrative but deeply holistic. It focused on the long-term socio-economic welfare and dignity of the soldier beyond their active years of service. Intellectually, he distinguished himself as a strategic thinker through his 2010 publication *Aftermath of a Nuclear Attack: A Case Study on Post-strike Operations*.¹⁵ It meticulously analysed the strategic, medical, and operational implications of nuclear fallout. By examining post-strike scenarios and the requirements for operational continuity in extreme contingencies, he contributed a rare and necessary perspective to India's nuclear discourse. It also emphasised the military's indispensable role in civil-defence and national resilience. This rare combination of administrative reform,

empathetic leadership, and strategic authorship established him as a ‘thinking general’, who could address the multifaceted challenges of modern-day defence management.

General Chauhan’s appointment as the Chief of Defence Staff in September 2022 marked a historic milestone in the institutional history of the Indian military and the Ministry of Defence. Succeeding the inaugural CDS, the late General Bipin Rawat, he became the second CDS of the country. His primary mandate in this role has been the profound structural overhaul of the military into Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs). It was a reform that was aimed at optimising India's defence posture for modern, multi-domain warfare. This transition represents a decisive shift away from service-specific silos toward a unified, resource-efficient model designed to integrate land, air, and sea capabilities seamlessly. Under his guidance as the Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs, he has prioritised ‘jointness’ in training, procurement, and logistics. His leadership ensures that the Army, Navy, and Air Force function as a unified, cohesive force, capable of rapid synchronisation, interoperability, and superior decision-making. This reform is not merely organisational but cultural. It required a visionary approach to overcome decades of legacy perspectives and service-specific doctrines, which exactly was provided by General Chauhan.

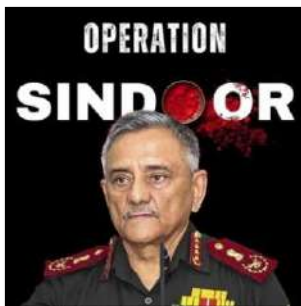
In the contemporary global security environment, General Chauhan has emerged as a leading voice on the necessity of ‘Aatmanirbharta,’ (self-reliance) in defence technology and the strategic management of a complex two-front threat. He has frequently and candidly addressed the challenges posed by the increasing military, economic, and technological convergence between adversaries. He has actively advocated for a strategy of integrated deterrence that spans the entire spectrum of conflict. This involves the systematic modernisation of legacy weapon systems and the aggressive integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cyber-warfare tools, and space-based assets into the national security matrix. His tenure has seen a marked acceleration in the procurement of indigenous platforms and the fostering of a domestic defence-industrial ecosystem, ensuring that India’s defence posture remains robust without over-reliance on volatile foreign





supply chains. By maintaining high operational readiness along the sensitive borders, he effectively steered the Indian Armed Forces toward a future, characterised by technological superiority, strategic autonomy, and regional stability.

Beyond his structural reforms, General Chauhan's leadership has also been characterised by a profound shift in the military's cognitive and cultural framework. He recognised that structural change is ephemeral without a corresponding shift in mindset. This is seen in the shift from the traditional 'Jointness 1.0', the basic camaraderie, towards a more sophisticated 'Jointness 2.0'.¹⁶ This advanced phase seeks to cultivate a genuine tri-service professional culture that exists alongside individual service identities rather than competing with them. By introducing rank-agnostic initiatives like the Future Warfare Course¹⁷ and high-level intellectual forums such as Ran Samwad¹⁸,



he has institutionalised critical thinking across the officer cadre. These platforms have effectively transitioned the military narrative from single-service primacy to a unified focus on Multi-Domain Operations (MDO), where land, sea, and air are seamlessly synchronised with space, cyber, and electromagnetic (EM) domains.

The functional reality of this integration has been realised through the General's relentless focus on measurable verticals that ranged from intelligence and logistics to human resources and communications. Under his stewardship, the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) was transformed into a high-functioning nerve centre of India's theaterisation machinery. One of the most tangible outcomes of this integration can be seen in examples such as that of the successful convergence of the Akashteer - Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) and Indian Maritime Situational Awareness (IMSA) Systems.¹⁹ This provided a unified digital battlefield picture that proved decisive in real-time operations.

By streamlining these functional aspects, he ensured that the 'Ways and Means' of modern warfare were sufficiently robust to support the strategic 'Ends' of national defence.

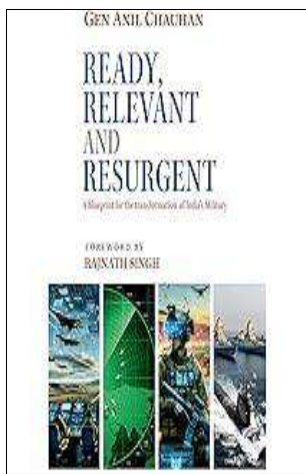
General Chauhan's tenure reached a definitive operational peak during Operation Sindoor, where he served as the strategic fulcrum for the 88-hour high-intensity engagement. Acting as the principal architect of the operation, he demonstrated the efficacy of the military thinker, an officer who transcends the colour of their uniform to plan with a truly integrated mindset. His role as the Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) allowed him to bridge the gap between military strategy and government policy. This helped ensure that the Armed Forces were no longer on the periphery of national decision-making but were central to it. Through 23 'Op Tiranga'²⁰ meetings and consistent consensus-building among the various Chiefs of Staff, he brought the Indian military to the threshold of an impressive transformation.

The appointment of General Anil Chauhan as India's second Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) marked a pivotal moment in the nation's military history, effectively ending a high-stakes nine-month leadership vacuum that followed the tragic demise of General Bipin Rawat in December 2021.²¹ General Chauhan, a seasoned professional with extensive experience in the Eastern Command, officially assumed the mantle of CDS on September 30, 2022, signalling a renewed focus on theaterisation and defence integration. By ensuring strategic continuity during a period of global geopolitical shifts, General Chauhan's term solidifies the office of the CDS as the central pillar of India's unified military command and long-term security strategy.



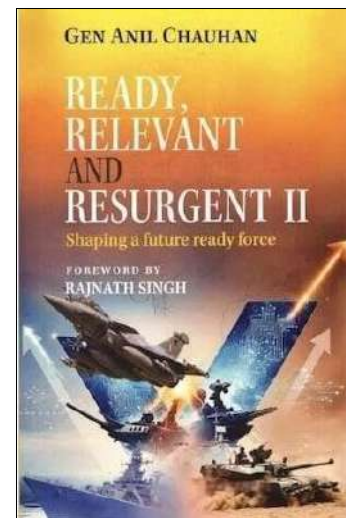
His four-decade career is punctuated by a prestigious array of military decorations that reflect his consistent excellence in both peace and operational environments. His recognitions began to mount in the latter half of his career, starting with the Vishisht Seva Medal (VSM) in 2011²² and the Sena Medal (SM) in 2014,²³ acknowledging his early distinguished service and valour. As he ascended to higher command, the magnitude of these

honours increased, earning him the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) in 2015²⁴ for outstanding service excellence. His exceptional leadership during high-intensity periods was specifically recognized with the Uttam Yudh Seva Medal (UYSM) in 2018,²⁵ one of India's highest wartime distinguished service awards. This sequence of honours reached the pinnacle in 2020 with the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM),²⁶ the nation's premier award for distinguished service of the most exceptional order, cementing his legacy as one of the most decorated strategic leaders in the modern era of the Indian Armed Forces.



As profound as his military leadership is, equally profound are his writings through which he connects uniquely with the readers. He has authored the 'Ready, Relevant, and Resurgent (RRR)' series (with RRR-I AND RRR-II published) that serves as a comprehensive doctrinal manifesto designed to navigate the Indian Armed Forces through the complexities of twenty-first-century multi-domain warfare. In the first volume, RRR I, the General has established a strategic framework for military transformation. He has emphasized that the forces must be

'ready' not just in terms of hardware but through a profound intellectual shift. This book argues that for India to achieve true strategic autonomy, it must integrate its three services into a cohesive, theatreised entity. He has drawn inspiration from India's own rich civilisational heritage, such as the strategic principles found in the Arthashastra, to foster an indigenised military culture. The narrative moves beyond traditional defensive posturing to advocate for a proactive, "relevant" force that is self-reliant under the Atmanirbharta initiative, ensuring that defence procurement and innovation are aligned with India's specific geopolitical challenges. In RRR II, the focus shifts towards the technical and cognitive frontiers of modern conflict. Here the 'resurgent' nature of the military is defined by its ability to dominate in non-kinetic realms like cyberspace, space, and the information environment. General Chauhan has meticulously analysed



contemporary global conflicts to illustrate how the character of war has changed, necessitating a transition from a manpower-intensive military to a technology-driven, "future-ready" force. This second volume has heavily emphasised the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), swarm technologies, and quantum computing into the national security architecture. It further argues that institutional agility is the only way to counter hybrid threats. By synthesising historical wisdom with cutting-edge military theory, the RRR series provides a definitive roadmap for 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. It presents a vision where the military acts as a sophisticated enabler of national power. The two books function as a cohesive guide for officers and policymakers alike, demanding a departure from legacy mindsets in favour of a unified, technologically advanced, and strategically confident Indian military. This is going to be prepared extremely well to protect its interests in an increasingly multipolar and volatile world order. One can only wait for the last piece of this trident.

Conclusion

The appointment and subsequent tenure of General Anil Chauhan as India's second Chief of Defence Staff represents more than a personal milestone. It signifies a structural pivot in the nation's military history. By bridging the critical leadership gap during a period of heightened regional volatility, General Chauhan provided the strategic continuity necessary to maintain momentum in India's most ambitious defence reforms. His career, spanning from the tactical nuances of the Gorkha Rifles to the supreme command of the tri-services, reflects a rare synthesis of field-hardened experience and intellectual depth. The hallmark of General Chauhan's leadership is the move toward 'Jointness 2.0,' a cultural shift that transcends administrative cooperation to achieve true operational integration. Under his stewardship, the concept of Integrated Theatre Commands has moved from a theoretical objective to a functional roadmap. This transition is essential for modern, multi-domain warfare, where the lines between land, sea, air, and space are increasingly blurred. By focusing on measurable verticals ranging from logistical convergence to digital interoperability, he has ensured that the 'purple military mindset' is institutionalised within the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff.

Furthermore, his advocacy for Aatmanirbharta has anchored India's defence posture in strategic autonomy. By fostering a domestic defence-industrial ecosystem and integrating emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and space-based assets, he has addressed the dual challenges of legacy modernisation and future warfare preparedness. His tenure as DGMO during the Balakot strikes and his strategic oversight along the Line of Actual Control have demonstrated a pragmatic approach to deterrence, signalling a fundamental shift in India's response to cross-border threats and territorial friction. General Chauhan's role has remained central to navigating the complex convergence of regional threats and global geopolitical shifts. Ultimately, his legacy will be defined by his ability to dismantle service-specific silos and forge a cohesive, resource-efficient force. General Anil Chauhan has not only commanded at the frontiers of the nation but is also actively constructing the frontiers of its future security, ensuring that the Indian Armed Forces remain a robust, unified, and technologically superior pillar of national sovereignty.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is the author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS, the Defence forces, or the Government of India. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished, and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

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