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WEB ARTICLE
WA/23/26

FORGING A JOINT FORCE: A NEW BEGINNING IN INDIA

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Since assuming office on 30 September 2022, General Anil Chauhan has steered India's armed forces through an era of unprecedented structural reform, doctrinal renewal, and multi-domain operational experience. His tenure as the country's second Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has been marked by a sustained drive toward jointness, indigenisation, and strategic modernisation.

Advancing Jointness and Theaterisation

The most consequential mandate entrusted to the CDS remains the restructuring of India's military commands through theaterisation, the creation of tri-service integrated theatre commands to replace the existing single-service command architecture. General Chauhan has described this initiative as "one of the most ambitious changes with far-reaching implications attempted post-independence," whose success depends on "the right steps taken together towards jointness and integration."¹

Recognising that structural change must be preceded by cultural change, General Chauhan articulated the concept of "Jointness 2.0." Whereas the initial phase of jointness was about creating a bond between the three services and building an atmosphere of trust, Jointness 2.0 focuses on developing a genuine joint culture. He

described this as distilling the best of each service and incorporating the "highest common factor rather than settling for the least common denominator."²

To operationalise this vision, General Chauhan chaired two editions of Parivartan Chintan, a landmark conference series for the heads of all tri-service institutes. The first edition, held on 8 April 2024, was followed by a two-day conclave on 9-10 May 2024 in New Delhi, which reviewed progress across multiple domains and refined a roadmap toward theaterisation.³ At the May 2024 conclave, the CDS emphasised the need to expedite the process of jointness to create "multi-domain response capable Indian armed forces" and expressed confidence that such brainstorming would enable the forces to evolve into a "theaterised force" capable of multi-domain operations.⁴

A landmark moment came in June 2025, when the government empowered the CDS to issue binding joint orders to all three services, a transformational shift enabling the CDS to direct joint operations across the Army, Navy, and Air Force without requiring separate approvals from each service chief.⁵ This authority mirrors the command model at the Andaman and Nicobar Command, India's only existing tri-service operational command.

At the Joint Commanders' Conference 2024 held in Lucknow, General Chauhan addressed senior tri-service leadership and outlined the critical imperatives of "Jointness 2.0", stressing that future wars would require integration across multiple domains like cyber, space, and advanced technological warfare and underscoring the urgency of modernisation during the ongoing third Revolution in Military Affairs.⁶

Doctrinal Contributions: Cyberspace and Amphibious Operations

A defining contribution of General Chauhan's tenure has been the formalisation of joint doctrinal frameworks for emerging warfare domains. On 18 June 2024, he released the Joint Doctrine for Cyberspace Operations at the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) meeting in New Delhi, described as a "keystone publication" to guide commanders in conducting cyberspace operations in complex military environments.⁷

"Cyberspace has emerged as a crucial and challenging domain in modern warfare. Unlike territorial limits in the domains of land, sea, and air, cyberspace is a global common and hence has shared sovereignty."

Ministry of Defence, PIB Press Release, 18 June 2024

The doctrine outlines a unified approach to defending national cyberspace interests, integrating offensive and defensive cyber capabilities and enabling synchronised operations across the three services. It emphasises threat-informed planning, resilience building, real-time intelligence integration, and the development of joint

cyber capabilities.⁸ Subsequently, in August 2025, CDS formally released declassified versions of both the Joint Doctrine for Cyberspace Operations and the Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations, underscoring India's commitment to wider dissemination of joint war-fighting concepts.⁹

General Chauhan also authored the book “Ready, Relevant, and Resurgent I: A Blueprint for Transformation of India's Military”, which traces its title to the theme selected for the Combined Commanders Conference 2023, chaired by the Prime Minister. The work outlines the structural, cultural, and cognitive reforms required to prepare the Indian military for future battlefields.¹⁰ He also authored a sequel to the book titled “Ready, Relevant, and Resurgent II: Shaping a Future Ready Force”, which expanded the canvas from reform to foresight, a strategic blueprint for a force reimagined for an era where the next war may be fought not on the ground, but in the orbit and in code.

Indigenisation and Defence Self-Reliance

General Chauhan has been an ardent advocate of India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision in the defence sector. Addressing the inaugural session of Defence Partnership Days in November 2024, he articulated a four-pronged framework for self-reliance built on four 'I's: being "Innovative, Inventive, Indigenous, and Imaginative." He emphasised that the entire enterprise of indigenisation would fail unless national interest served as the binding thread among all stakeholders.¹¹

The CDS has consistently called for defence policies in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, space, and autonomous systems to provide the industry with a clear sense of how the services envision the future unfolding. He has also called for alternative financing mechanisms such as a dedicated defence bank with longer loan terms, alongside innovation channels such as iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) and the Technology Development Fund.¹²

In February 2025, General Chauhan concluded an extensive visit to Aero India 2025, conducting strategic discussions with executives from major global aerospace and defence companies, including Saab AB, Airbus, Israel Aerospace Industries, BAE Systems, Dassault Aviation, and Rolls Royce, with conversations centred on indigenous manufacturing, technology transfer, and the development of niche capabilities under India's “Make in India” and “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiatives.¹³ He also engaged with forty industry and startup leaders from the Indian space ecosystem at a CII discussion on enhancing space capabilities in the defence sector.¹⁴

Operation Sindoor: A New Paradigm in Warfare

The most consequential test of India's military integration under the CDS's watch came with Operation Sindoor, launched on 7 May 2025 in retaliation for a Pakistan-

sponsored terrorist attack at Pahalgam that killed 26 civilians on 22 April 2025. General Chauhan has described Operation Sindoor as heralding "a new kind of warfare", fought not only on land, air, and sea but also in electromagnetic space and cyber domains, where adversaries are identified through satellite imagery, electronic signals, and technical intelligence rather than physical observation.¹⁵

"We beat Pakistan decisively in every escalation during Operation Sindoor. Precision strikes for long-distance targets during the night required special efforts."
CDS Gen Anil Chauhan, Raj Bhavan Interaction, Ranchi, September 2025

General Chauhan has characterised Operation Sindoor as evidence of a broader shift in how victory is defined in modern warfare, away from territorial capture or body counts and toward strategic deterrence, operational sophistication, and information dominance.¹⁶

Reflecting on structural reform in the aftermath of the operation, the CDS stated: "Now, after initiatives and operational experiences, we are moving toward integrated commands and leaner, more flexible structures."¹⁷ The Joint Commanders' Conference held in Jaipur in May 2026, themed 'Military Capability in New Domains', was convened to institutionalise the lessons of Operation Sindoor in the domains of AI, cyber, space, and cognitive warfare.¹⁸

Defence Diplomacy and International Engagement

Under General Chauhan's leadership, defence diplomacy has been elevated as an instrument of strategic communication and partnership-building. During the visit to the 22nd Shangri-La Dialogue, he held bilateral meetings with chiefs of defence forces from Australia, the European Union, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States.¹⁹

At the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue, the CDS engaged with Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, Commander of US INDOPACOM, in discussions centred on Operation Sindoor and Indo-Pacific security. He also held bilateral discussions with General Onno Eichelsheim, Chief of Defence of the Netherlands, exploring exchange programs and joint training exercises.²⁰ He participated in a special breakout session on 'Defence Innovation Solutions for Future Challenges', discussing scalable technological solutions, defence start-ups, and public-private partnerships.²¹

Earlier, the CDS visited France to bolster the India-France strategic partnership and paid tribute at the war memorials of Neuve-Chapelle and Villers-Guislain to Indian soldiers who served on the Western Front during the First World War, an act that reinforced both historical bonds and the salience of India's defence partnerships with European allies.²²

Joint Training and Tri-Service Integration

Strengthening joint training has been a consistent priority for General Chauhan. On 13 November 2024, he presided over the 35th Tri-Services Commanders' Conference (TSTCC) at Southern Naval Command, Kochi, attended by senior commanders from all three services. The CDS emphasised the need for enhanced "jointmanship" in the training sphere as a critical component for dominance in the emerging multi-domain battlespace.²³

Following Operation Sindoor, the CDS conducted strategic review visits to Northern Command at Udampur and Western Command at Chandimandir in May 2025, engaging with Army commanders and staff officers involved in the planning and execution of the operation.²⁴

Future Warfare: The Third Revolution in Military Affairs

General Chauhan has consistently articulated a strategic vision attuned to the rapid evolution of conflict. He has described the current epoch as the dawn of a "third revolution in military affairs", characterised by what he terms "convergence warfare", where artificial intelligence, quantum computing, edge computing, hypersonics, advanced materials, and robotics reshape the character of conflict, making future battlegrounds faster, more interconnected, and more technologically driven.²⁵

He has stressed that multi-domain operations will transition from being an option to becoming a necessity for effective military response. He has cautioned that having advanced technology is insufficient if it is not networked: "If you have great tech but it's not connected, you can't fully leverage it."²⁶

General Chauhan has argued that India must simultaneously maintain the capacity for swift, high-intensity operations (as demonstrated by Operation Sindoor) and for protracted, land-centric conflicts arising from unresolved territorial disputes, a dual challenge that underscores the imperative of comprehensive and sustained military reform.²⁷

Conclusion

General Anil Chauhan's tenure as Chief of Defence Staff has been distinguished by a methodical, sequential approach to the most ambitious military transformation India has undertaken since independence. Rather than pursuing theaterisation as an immediate structural end-state, he has invested in creating the cultural, doctrinal, and institutional foundations, a joint culture, integrated training, shared doctrine, joint cyber operations capability, and expanded command authority upon which a theaterised force can eventually stand.

The operational trial by fire of Operation Sindoor, combined with the broader arc of reform from the Parivartan Chintan conferences to the Joint Doctrine for Cyberspace Operations, has accelerated India's trajectory toward a genuinely joint force. He is leaving behind a legacy so meticulously built and deeply etched into the institution that needs nothing short of exceptional resolve, vision, and relentless dedication to carry forward the transformation.

DISCLAIMER

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