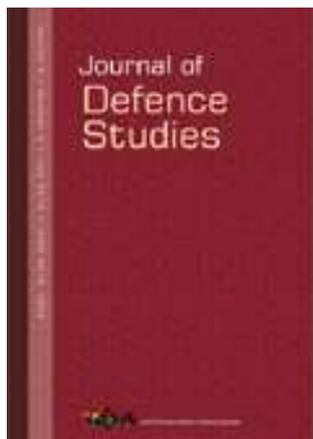


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## Enhancing Jointness in Indian Armed Forces Case for Unified Commands

*Vijai Singh Rana\**

*The nature of warfare has undergone a major change over the last few decades, brought about by rapid advancement in technologies combined with changes in doctrines and organisational concepts. This has resulted in enhanced focus on integrated and joint operations. Unified structures have been put in place by all major militaries in the world to optimise their defence capabilities. India appears to be reluctant to adapt wholeheartedly to the changing nature of war-fighting despite facing a wide variety of threats to its internal and external security. This article makes a case for establishing unified commands in India to enhance integration and jointness at the strategic and operational levels. In doing so, it examines various available models for implementation in the Indian context. Finally, it suggests a viable model for unified commands for India keeping in mind the geo-political realm and the external and internal threats to its security.*

### INTRODUCTION

War fighting has witnessed a profound transformation the world over in the past few decades. With a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)<sup>1</sup> well and truly underway, conflicts today involve operations that would have been classified as ‘near inconceivable’ by military planners in a bygone era. Contemporary war-plans involve coordinated offence and defence, pre-kinetic intelligence warfare campaigns, net-centric operations, cyber-attacks, and information warfare. Modern day warfare tools cater to a battle space that encompasses the land mass and island territories,

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high-seas, ocean depths, air-space, cyberspace, and the electromagnetic spectrum. In such a complex operational environment, militaries have little option but to adopt joint operations and integrated war-fighting. The dynamics of battle-field operations today place a high premium on inter-operable capabilities. Consequently, military planners are compelled to acknowledge the need to combine resources and individual service competencies to optimize battle-field efficiency.

Seamless integrated war-fighting is, however, no simplistic enterprise. To ensure jointness, a military needs to undertake serious reforms, both at the operational and organisational levels. Military forces have tended to get cosy with their standard modes of operations over time, that is, doing things just the way each service is comfortable with. Reforms thus require a degree of 'unlearning' old processes and procedures—a gradual egress from one's comfort zone into an uncertain space, where new procedures need to be worked out and new relationships established. Yet, keeping in mind the changing times, militaries around the world have embarked on the arduous path of serious reform, establishing new codes, protocols and standard operating procedures (SOP), and re-ordering the chain of command and control.

In the Indian context, despite vast and varied threats in the backdrop of RMA and two nuclear armed hostile neighbours, India has not been very open to military transformation. Why has this been the case? It could well be correlated to Rosen's articulation on bureaucracy:

The essence of a bureaucracy is routine, repetitive, orderly action. Bureaucracies are not supposed to innovate by their nature. Military bureaucracies moreover are especially resistant to change. Colonel John Mitchell of the British Army wrote in 1839: 'Officers enter the army at an age when they are more likely to take up existing opinions than to form their own. They grow up carrying into effect orders and regulations founded on those received opinions, they become, in some measure identified with existing views, in the course of years, the ideas thus gradually imbibed get too firmly rooted to be either shaken or eradicated by the force of argument or reflection. In no profession is the dread of innovation as great as the armed forces.'<sup>2</sup>

India's technological, doctrinal and organizational structures need to be structured in tune with its changing geopolitical environment and the threats faced by the nation. Presently, the responsibility to deal with Pakistan devolves on four Army commands, two Air force Commands, and one Naval Command. Similarly, three Army Commands and three

Air Force Commands deal with the Chinese threat.<sup>3</sup> Some commands have been earmarked for Out Of Area Contingency (OOAC) tasks;<sup>4</sup> however, no dedicated command exists for undertaking or coordinating the same. To top it all, India has still not appointed the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) despite having accepted its necessity more than a decade ago.<sup>5</sup> Contrast this with all developed and emerging major powers across the globe that have focussed on military transformation and undertaken doctrinal and organizational changes to ensure better integration and synergy amongst their armed forces.

In India, the debate on defence reforms has focussed primarily on the appointment of the CDS and higher defence management. A related issue—the establishment of unified commands—has not received adequate attention. Unified commands, however, are central to the notion of ‘Jointness’ and ‘Integration’ in the armed forces. Apart from appointing the CDS, a re-organization of the military to form unified commands would serve to integrate operations and bring greater synergy to the military effort. The appointment of CDS remains imperative but, in the longer term perspective, unified commands will have to be planned and raised. Similarly, integration of the armed forces with intelligence agencies and paramilitary forces is equally important. This article attempts to establish the necessity of unified commands to enhance jointness and integration at the strategic and operational level so as to conduct future wars within the framework of unified commands in the Indian context. While dwelling on the essential arguments for and against unified commands, the narrative will outline various options available to India for establishing unified commands.

At the outset, it is imperative to understand the meaning as well as the concept of ‘theatre of war’. The US concept of combatant commands includes unified commands and specified commands and defines it as given below.

1. *Unified Command*: A command with a broad continuing mission under a single commander and composed of significant assigned components of two or more Military Departments that is established and so designated by the President, through the Secretary of Defense with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>6</sup>
2. *Specified Combatant Command*: A command normally composed of forces from a single Military Department that has a broad, continuing mission, normally functional, and is established and

so designated by the President through the Secretary of Defense with the advice and assistance of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>7</sup>

3. *Theatre of War*: This term denotes properly such a portion of the space over which war prevails as has its boundaries protected, and thus possesses a kind of independence. This protection may consist in fortresses, or important natural obstacles presented by the country, or even in its being separated by a considerable distance from the rest of the space embraced in the war. Such a portion is not a mere piece of the whole, but a small whole complete in itself; and consequently it is more or less in such a condition that changes which take place at other points in the seat of war have only an indirect and no direct influence upon it. To give an adequate idea of this, we may suppose that on this portion an advance is made, whilst in another quarter a retreat is taking place or that upon the one an army is acting defensively, whilst an offensive is being carried on upon the other. Such a clearly defined idea as this is not capable of universal application; it is here used merely to indicate the line of distinction.<sup>8</sup>

The theatres for the US armed forces are earmarked by geographically dividing the entire globe into different theatres. In the Indian context one military analyst states:

Conceptually, a theatre should include within its geographical boundary the entire geographically contiguous territory of a competing entity or an adversary including geographically contiguous territories of those entities or states which, in the event of hostilities, may collaborate either with the adversary or with own country. It must also include adjoining seas and space above that may be essential for manoeuvre of own forces to address the threatening entity/adversary and its geographically contiguous collaborator(s).<sup>9</sup>

#### JOINTNESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

To address the question of jointness, one must first understand its meaning and implications. Conceptually, jointness implies synergized use of the resources of the three services in a seamless manner to achieve the best results in the least possible time. The idea is to avoid needless redundancy and optimally utilise available resources. While jointness is a universally accepted concept in modern day warfare, the methodology of achieving

it varies from nation to nation. The American Doctrine for its Armed Forces illuminates the following:

Jointness implies cross-service combination wherein the capability of the joint force is understood to be synergistic, with the sum greater than its parts (the capability of individual components). It further states that joint forces require high levels of interoperability and systems that are conceptualised and designed with joint architectures and acquisition strategies. This level of interoperability reduces technical, doctrinal and cultural barriers that limit the ability of joint force commanders to achieve objectives. The goal is to employ joint forces effectively across the range of military operations.<sup>10</sup>

What does it seek to achieve? Firstly, based on unity of effort, jointness seeks to focus all the energy of armed forces across the range of military operations, throughout all levels of war, in every environment toward enhancing the effectiveness of military operations. Secondly, joint forces provide commanders with multidimensional capabilities (land, sea, air, space and, special operations) that are more effective than uni-service forces by providing a wider range of operational and tactical options. Finally, multiple service capabilities allow an innovative commander to combine joint capabilities in asymmetrical as well as symmetrical ways to produce a total military impact that is greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>11</sup>

One Indian military analyst enunciates:

True jointness entails integration of individual services to achieve a composite whole. It implies enmeshing the three services together at different levels and placing them under one commander for execution of operational plans. The creation of a dedicated resource is meant to be employed by the commander in the manner he deems appropriate to achieve the best results. It assumes that the theatre commander is well-versed with the operational imperatives of the various dimensions of battle (the land, sea and air) and understands the employment of all three services components functioning under him.<sup>12</sup>

To be truly integrated, the services must take their jointness to a higher level. The coordinating mechanisms must be so designed that an assorted force can be immediately assembled and dispatched to meet various contingencies/scenarios.<sup>13</sup> Integrated forces are premised on the presence of a theatre commander with over-riding authority. He is vested with authority and the resources to undertake operational missions, and

is alone responsible for the employment of all three services components functioning under him. His orders cut down the response time in developing situations during operations, and exploit fleeting windows of opportunity.

#### EXPERIMENTS IN JOINTNESS

In addressing the issue of ‘unified war-fighting’ in an Indian context, it is useful to look at the experiences of the other major powers. Below is a discussion of the American, British and Chinese experiences: the American case being that of a global power with capability and reach; the Chinese as an evolving military power; and the British from whom India inherited its modern military structure. Besides the above, other countries also have unified commands (either functional and/or theatre/regional commands). Other Commonwealth states, with a similar military lineage to India, such as Australia and Canada, have also embraced the concept.

#### **The American Experience**

The transformation of US Armed Forces—one of the most functionally integrated militaries in the world—is most relevant. The US experience of joint operations dates back to 1862–63 when the Federal campaign against Vicksburg, as executed by General Ulysses S. Grant and Admiral David D. Porter, showed how joint doctrine principles could be applied even before the development of modern communications and the internal combustion engine. The Union Army and naval forces jointly used unity of effort, mass, leverage, and seized the initiative.

Yet, it was only during World War II that the US came around to accepting the stark imperative of integrated operations. The US’ experience in the war provided countless lessons attesting to the importance of the military effort achieved through a unified command. Interestingly, while the US was able to achieve a degree of unified command in the European theatre during the war, attempts to establish unified command in the Pacific proved impossible due to inter-service rivalry. As it were, the War provided compelling evidence that the US needed an integrated military structure. Following World War II, US President Harry Truman noted:

We must never fight another war the way we fought the last two. I have a feeling that if the Army and Navy had fought our enemies as hard as they fought each other, the war would have ended much earlier.<sup>14</sup>

Truman's observation was an indictment of the US military's inability to collaborate effectively in the principal theatre of war. Over the next few years, the US armed forces were to undertake a firm conceptual turn towards integrated war-fighting. By 1958, President Eisenhower, a strong proponent of unified commands, felt that the days of separate land, sea and air warfare were over,<sup>15</sup> and that the complete unification of all military planning and combat forces and commands was a rank essential. He proposed that the Congress enact the Department of Defence Reorganization Act of 1958, amending the National Security Act of 1947 authorizing the President, acting through the Secretary of Defense and with the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), to establish unified and specified commands, to assign missions to them, and to determine their force structure.

Based on their experience, the defence reforms in the US have been continuously evolving with the passage of National Security Act 1947, followed by Department of Defence Reorganization Act of 1958, and the landmark Goldwater Nichols Act, 1986 (GNA) which was passed by the US Congress as a new vision for joint warfare planning and theatre command concept. It was the GNA that actually ushered in true integration.

The combatant commanders that came about as a result of the GNA were immensely successful. The US armed forces operated seamlessly in operations after the Cold War, like JUST CAUSE (Panama, 1989), DESERT STORM (Iraq, 1991) and DELIBERATE FORCE (Bosnia, 1995).<sup>16</sup> This stood in stark contrast to the difficulties and inter-service squabbling in operations in Grenada (URGENT FURY) and Lebanon (BEIRUT BARRACKS BOMBINGS) in 1983. US forces on land, sea and air, now, reinforce and complement each other more than ever. The GNA also elevated the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) to the principal military advisor to the President, the National Security Council (NSC) and the Secretary of Defense. It allows the Chairman the authority and discretion 'as he considers appropriate' to consult with the chiefs and the Combatant Commanders (CCDRs) before rendering his military advice.

One of the major effects of the said Act has been to give geographic CCDRs the responsibility for executing policy for the nation while taking away forces from the traditional control of the services and the functional commands. The functional commands do not engage in operations overseas themselves, but provide the forces that allow the geographic

CCDRs to execute their operations.<sup>17</sup> It will have to be acknowledged, even if grudgingly, that the US defence organization has evolved over the years based on their experience in World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm), the 2003 Iraq War, and in Afghanistan. More importantly, the US armed forces have been quick to learn from their mistakes to evolve into a fully integrated military.

### **Jointness in the British Armed Forces**

In the case of the United Kingdom (UK)—the first country to have a chiefs of staff committee dating back to 1923—its model was emulated by the US during World War II. Subsequently realising its pitfalls, the British commenced restructuring of its armed forces in 1964 to achieve jointness. Unified MoD was created in which the three service ministries were regrouped under a single Secretary of State for Defence.<sup>18</sup> In 1985, under the Heseltine Reforms, the CDS and Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) were instituted. In the new setup, the CDS and PUS were the principal advisors to the Secretary of Defence. The respective service chiefs have very little role in policy formulation. However, they have the privilege of direct access to the Prime Minister. In the British model of Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) established in 1996, there is a very high level of integration within the MoD, and people in uniform and their civilian counterparts. It commands joint and combined military operations and provides politically aware advice to MoD. Until establishment of PJHQ, the responsibility for the planning and conduct of any UK-led or joint overseas operation had been handed to one of the single services.

The Defence Reform Review led by Lord Levene, in a report published in June 2011, recommended further reforms. It recommended creation of Joint Forces Command (JFC) to manage and deliver specific capabilities and to take the lead on joint warfare development, drawing on lessons and experimentation to advise on how the armed forces should conduct joint operations in the future.<sup>19</sup>

Currently, the Chief of Joint Operations (CJO) and the Permanent Joint headquarters (PJHQ) command forces deployed on joint operations overseas. The single services remain responsible for specific maritime operations (including the deterrent), security of the UK's airspace and UK resilience. The PJHQ, commanded by the CJO, is the national operational level command. The CJO is responsible for the planning and execution of joint, or potentially joint, national and UK-led multinational operations conducted outside the UK. He reports direct to the CDS for

contingency planning and advice on the conduct and resourcing of current operations or standing commitments, other than for routine running of the Permanent Joint Operating Bases, which is the responsibility of Commander JFC.<sup>20</sup>

### **China**

With growing aspiration to be global power, the Chinese armed forces have undergone major restructuring of their command and control structures to meet modern joint warfare requirements. In the last decade, the major evolution in strategy and operations involved a shift from 'Joint Operations (JO)' to 'Integrated Joint Operations (IJO)'. Whereas JO still places emphasis on individual service divisions and command chains are vertical, IJO accepts that service divisions do not matter when command chains can be 'flat' due to the levelling power of digital command, control and sensor systems. The People's Liberation Army's (PLA) success in integrated jointness cannot yet be determined from open sources. But the move towards IJO was reflected in the 2004 decision by the PLA to make the commanders of the Navy, Air Force and the Second Artillery permanent members of the Central Military Commission's high command.<sup>21</sup>

The development of IJO capability is one of the most important issues for the PLA. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Party of China (CPC) proposed to reform the joint operational command structure including establishing theatre (military region) joint operation commands. In January 2013, the Chinese press reported that joint commands would be created in Jinan, Nanjing and Guangzhou Military Regions (MR) over a five-year period, followed by a consolidation of the remaining four MRs into two joint commands. Though this was denied by the Chinese Ministry of National Defence (MND), the MND spokesman also stated that establishing a joint command system was necessary to meet the requirements of modern warfare and that the PLA was conducting research into joint operations command with Chinese characteristics. Research on the issue is ongoing, and would lead eventually to the establishment of a theatre joint operations command system necessary for future integrated joint operations.<sup>22</sup>

### **JOINTNESS IN THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES**

The need for jointness in the Indian context was well appreciated even at the country's independence. India inherited a command structure for the

services which had unity of command, under a Commander-in-Chief. Soon, a Joint Services Wing was set up for training officer cadets, which later became the National Defence Academy, followed by the establishment of the Defence Services Staff College. To these were added, in due course, the College of Defence Management at Secundrabad at a more senior level, and finally, the National Defence College at New Delhi for training officers of the rank of brigadier and equivalent.<sup>23</sup> This framework for joint training of officers at different levels and to bring them together again at different stages of their careers was, therefore, well laid out and continues till date. It has yielded some good results in bringing about inter-service bonhomie; however, optimization in jointness continues to elude the Indian Armed Forces.

As far as operational experience is concerned, immediately after Partition, Pakistan's military forces, masquerading as freedom fighters, invaded Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The ensuing conflict in 1947–48 saw an integrated approach in utilization of the Army and the Indian Air Force (IAF) despite it being in nascent stage with limited resources and played a substantial role in stalling the Pakistani endeavours in annexing J&K. The lack of integrated thinking was obvious in the 1962 and 1965 wars; the former was left purely to the Army to conduct and the latter saw each service fighting very much their individual wars. In 1962, the Army did not carry out joint planning with the other service involved, that is, the IAF. Even the chiefs of the three services, it is reported, never met to discuss the developing situation on the border during the operations; hence, there was no coordination between the Army and the IAF and the tasks were projected and taken on an ad hoc basis.<sup>24</sup> The use of air power in 1962 would certainly have significantly boosted troop morale and stiffened resistance. It would have conveyed a message to the Chinese about the extent of India's resolve.<sup>25</sup> In the 1965 war, inter-services cooperation was again far from satisfactory. The institutional framework for it was rudimentary, and the situation on ground left much to be desired. The Indian Navy was given a limited role during the war. Army–IAF cooperation was primitive and ineffective. Many senior officers of the Army had no experience of modern war and a very inadequate appreciation of the potentialities and limitations of air power, respectively.<sup>26</sup>

The 1971 operations, a resounding success, showed considerable improvement in joint planning, more so due to the personalities involved than to any institutionalized system. Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw, brought up the case for jointness immediately after war. Speaking at the

Staff College in Wellington, he made a telling comment that the area commands in India were dysfunctional, and that they needed to be reduced to joint commands which would operate under a CDS.<sup>27</sup>

In the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operations in Sri Lanka in 1987–89, though the Overall Force Commander (OFC) was provided with component commanders subordinated to him from Eastern Naval Command and Southern Air Command respectively, the Navy and IAF Commanders-in-Chief (Cs-in-C), responsible for providing forces, declined to delegate command and instead got the component commanders designated as liaison officers with no role other than to act as a *via-media* in the headquarters of the OFC and the Cs-in-C. By the end, the OFC lost credibility and was, in effect, just the commander of land forces with the two other wings cooperating, but independently.<sup>28</sup>

The Kargil conflict in 1999 again highlighted the pitfalls in the national security system and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence noted that it was lack of synergy among the three services which caused difficulties to the armed forces during the Kargil War.<sup>29</sup> Modern warfare demands not only unified command but an organization fully responsible for operational control, which should determine the range of equipping of the forces, the type of weaponry—be these of the Army, Navy or Air Force—and the same being in consonance with the nature of threats, type and scale of operations envisaged, the tactics to be employed, and future developments in weapons and equipment, etc. The full potential of a unified command and collective application of forces cannot otherwise achieve the desired results.

#### EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF UNIFIED COMMANDS IN INDIA

The commonly held view that ‘unified command in the Indian Armed Forces’ is a recent phenomenon, though accurate, does not adequately acknowledge the impulse to unify, which goes back nearly four decades. In 1976, when India established the unified ‘Fortress Andaman and Nicobar (FORTAN)’, under the Navy, it was a ‘qualified’ acceptance of the basic principles of defence-integration. The Army placed an infantry battalion and, subsequently, a brigade under the Fortress commander. The IAF, on the other hand, stationed its units under one of the IAF commands on the mainland with a liaison unit in the Fortress HQ.<sup>30</sup>

In the wake of Kargil many former diplomats, military leaders and defence experts called for drastic changes to the existing system.<sup>31</sup> The Kargil Review Committee (KRC)<sup>32</sup> and the Group of Ministers (GoM)

reports<sup>33</sup>, by themselves, brought to light several grave deficiencies in India's security management system and recommended certain measures to be undertaken. Of all the recommendations made by the GoM report, three are of most interest to this subject: (1) integration of the services both with each other and with the Ministry of Defence (MoD); (2) the creation of a chief of defence staff (CDS); and (3) joint operational commands.<sup>34</sup>

While there was a lack of consensus on the subject, a pro-forma restructuring of the MoD was undertaken as recommended by the GoM, the adoption of a unified command system was the next logical step. 'The creation of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) was to evolve, from first principles, and meant to provide a framework for a unified formation. In the crucible of the new command would be tested the working rules, standard operating procedures and doctrines, which would then be codified for use by future unified commands. The idea was to develop a framework, which could become a template for replication elsewhere.'<sup>35</sup> The Standing Committee on Defence, in its report, categorically noted that the ANC and Strategic Forces Command (SFC) were set up as India's first integrated commands. Both were meant to exemplify the application of jointness and how the concept could be applied to other tri-service commands.<sup>36</sup> Alas, the enabling provision of creating a CDS was not agreed upon thereby rendering 'unification' a still-born idea.<sup>37</sup>

More recently, the recommendation of the Naresh Chandra Committee for appointing a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC) faced tremendous bureaucratic opposition from within the MoD.<sup>38</sup> Under pressure, the then Defence Minister clarified that the issue was yet to be discussed by the Cabinet Committee of Security (CCS), but not without revealing the Ministry's deeply held biases. Incidentally, Pranab Mukherjee as Defence Minister had remarked during a presentation at Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) in 2005 that the government had even decided who the CDS would be but that there was 'no political consensus', adding in the same breath, 'but then there is no political consensus on so many things but they do come through.'<sup>39</sup>

In many ways, therefore, it can be argued that the Indian Armed Forces have been primed to function as independent entities. The absence of a CDS means the forces lack the command and control structure needed to operationalize unified commands. It must also be said that the

services themselves have not shown much enthusiasm in embracing the notion of 'unified operations'. The creation of IDS, ANC and SFC was merely a grudging admission of the fact that 'jointness' as a concept, and 'jointmanship' as its product, was an inescapable reality that the defence forces had to adapt to—however unwillingly. It is equally true that among the major armed forces in the world, the Indian Armed Forces are the least integrated. Be it strategic or tactical doctrines, training, equipment, procurement or logistics, each service tends to go its way. The stark reality is that the Indian Armed Forces lack an integrated approach, and each service has its own individual doctrine in isolation from the joint doctrine.<sup>40</sup> Joint doctrines by themselves amount to little unless they are executable by joint organisations. The latter is absent in the form of unified commands. Without such structures ensuring horizontal and vertical interoperability, true jointness will remain a misnomer.<sup>41</sup>

#### UNIFIED COMMANDS FOR THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES

Expert opinion on unified commands in India has been mixed, with many critics rejecting its relevance for the national armed forces. The late Air Commodore (Retd.) Jasjit Singh, in a compelling piece published a few years ago, argued that the concept of theatre commands was neither relevant nor suitable for India as such unified commands are normally established for operations away from the home country.<sup>42</sup> He added, for good measure, that the age of specialization enjoined upon the services the responsibility to retain their independent status while working very closely with each other. In his view, if the services could not work jointly in the present set-up, bringing them into a theatre command concept could only reduce the potential for corrective action where decisions are taken with less than adequate knowledge of the specificity of the other services. However, there are others like late General K.V. Krishna Rao, former Chief of the Army Staff, who recommended theatre commands more than three decades ago.<sup>43</sup>

The argument and counter arguments against unified commands are discussed below.

1. *The paucity of air resources demand that they be kept centralized.* The air resources possess strategic mobility and can be moved from one theatre to other as per requirement. The existing organization has five operational air commands. In the proposed re-organization, five theatre commands are recommended with concentration of

air power against major adversaries. Thus, effectively, there is no change in the centralization of air resources.

2. *Unified commands are required only for countries with global aspirations.* This argument is flawed since unified commands are required for better planning, coordination and conduct of operations at the same time ensuring economy of effort.
3. *Specialization is paramount.* There is no denying that specialization is of utmost importance. But at the higher levels, it is the ability to think and plan strategically and operationally that has more relevance. Military history is replete with examples where, despite tactical successes, the national aim could not be achieved resulting in stalemate or strategic failures. The component commanders are the specialists to advise the theatre commanders. The case in point is Kargil in 1999 where differing perceptions and bickering amongst services could have been avoided if it was a unified command where all stakeholders would have been involved in joint planning and execution since inception.

India has a unique position in the global scenario and faces vast and varied threats to its internal and external security. The geopolitical realm and the external and internal threats to India make a compelling case for unified commands. The restructuring of its armed forces by creation of unified commands will entail joint organization, joint planning, joint training, joint logistics, and joint operations, thus ensuring a cohesive and synchronized approach and optimizing its capabilities to cater to existential threats. Presented below is a snapshot of the threats facing India's security and territorial integrity.

1. India has two distinct adversaries each on her northern/eastern and western fronts with whom it has fought five wars; and territorial disputes with them continue with no foreseeable solution in the near future.
2. Proxy war in J&K by Pakistan has continued unabated and is only likely to intensify in light of the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan.
3. The threat to India's widespread island territories and the growing significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), especially in view of the Chinese forays into the region, apart from security of sea lanes of communications and non-traditional security threats.

4. Aerospace and cyber threats, especially from enhanced Chinese space and information warfare (IW) capabilities.
5. India faces the threat of Naxalism and spurt in growth of internal terrorist organizations, which can be exploited by its adversaries.
6. Vast frontiers and varied terrain enhance the risk of natural and manmade disasters in the region and involvement in humanitarian and disaster relief operations will continue to engage the armed forces. Apart from that, the Indian role in various United National Peacekeeping operations is likely to continue.
7. Nuclearization of the region.

Economic considerations are equally relevant and joint organization and thinking will ensure maximization out of finite resources. This is best encapsulated by the statement made by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his address at the Combined Commanders' Conference in 2013:

We will have to exercise prudence in our defence acquisition plans and cut our coat according to our cloth. While we must take into account the capabilities of our adversaries, we have to plan our long term acquisition on the assumption of limited resource availability. This is an exercise that has to be done with a high degree of priority and urgency.<sup>44</sup>

The financial and resource constraints of the annual defence budget invariably lead to each service vying for a greater pie of the budget share, and planning its procurements in isolation. Though HQ IDS is involved in the procurement planning process, prioritization gets affected without the CDS. A joint organization with the appointment of a CDS catering to procurement and prioritization for all the three services will ensure economy and optimization of the resources.

### **An Unsuccessful Transition**

So why have the Indian Armed Forces not succeeded in making a successful switch from service-oriented operations to unified war-fighting? India's real problem has been the clash of cultural practices and operational ethos of each of its defence services. Beyond the issues of organizational turf and jostling over resources, each service has a distinctive method of operations and is deeply uncomfortable with another service guiding its operations. The IAF, for instance, strongly believes in the primacy of 'indivisible air power' and centralizing its assets in order to effectively

use them in wartime.<sup>45</sup> This makes it hostile to the idea of parcelling out assets to dedicated theatre commands. The Navy, on the other hand, is an ardent proponent of the idea of more jointness and the creation of unified commands. Some of this may have to do with the fact that it needs to operate in a maritime-littoral environment and project power from the sea to land—operations that involve cooperation with the other services. This also has to do with the Navy's interest in non-traditional security issues in the IOR, which call for greater inter-service cooperation.<sup>46</sup> The Army lies between the two extremes and is divided into two camps. One group of reformist officers takes a line similar to the Navy's and calls for increased jointness and the creation of both a CDS and unified commands; on the other side are officers who are concerned about border conflicts and internal insurgencies and feel unified commands are unsuited for India.<sup>47</sup>

But this is not a characteristic peculiar to India. Similar situations existed in other countries, such as the US and the UK, where reforms were *enforced* on the services. The traditional explanation for this is that military innovation mostly emerges from an external threat or problem that causes the civilian leadership to force change on a reluctant military, ever resistant to change.<sup>48</sup> In like-fashion to the US and the UK, India's main option also is try a top-down model of integration.

### **Current Structure in India**

India has a total of 19 commands: seven army commands (of which six are operational); seven air force commands (of which five are operational); three naval commands (of which two are operational), and two joint commands. None of these are co-located and their geographical zones of responsibilities have little commonality. In most cases, the command of one service overlaps or is linked with two or more commands of sister services. In contrast, the US which has a global role has a total of nine combatant commands that include three functional combatant commands: Special Operations Command, Strategic Command and Transportation Command; and six geographic combatant commands—Africa Command, Central Command, European Command, Northern Command, Pacific Command, and Southern Command.<sup>49</sup>

The Indian Navy has its own complement of air power, including fighters. However, in the case of the Army, integral air resources are limited to utility helicopters; and though medium lift helicopters, attack helicopters, and transport aircraft have a predominant role with the Army,

they are actually held by the IAF. As far as the air component is concerned, the IAF has its advance headquarters with each Army command and maritime air operations with the Navy. At the level of corps headquarters, the IAF has a tactical air centre allocated to each corps. However, these were meant to be incremental steps before achieving full integration. This organization precludes complete integration and cohesion between the services and can be overcome by adopting the concept of unified commands. Unified commands would remove additional layers and improve interface between the commanders, resulting in flatter structures and thereby better planning and speedier decision-making and execution.

### **Adoption of Integrated System**

It is imperative to shift from service specific approach to an integrated system which avoids duplication, ensures unity of command and effort, enables optimization of resources, and ensures greater integration and jointness. To achieve this, unified commands fit well into the scheme of things. An integrated system aims to put all resources of the three services at the disposal of a theatre commander who will carry out the task in consonance with the overall national plan approved by the political leadership and given to the CDS for implementation.

Critics of unified commands often point out that global powers like the US have global interests that demand a unified structure of military operations. For a benign power like India, which is focussed primarily on its territorial integrity, there is no need for the integrated theatre command system. Integration, however, is aimed at a speedy, effective and synergetic response to an evolving crisis. More importantly, it takes into consideration force multipliers in determining the outcome of conflicts. The tools of modern warfare—satellite and surveillance assets, cyber systems, drones, space-based weapons, etc.—can be better exploited to advantage in an integrated command structure than in any other organisation. It gives a commander a clear idea of his capabilities and limitations, thus ensuring instantaneous employment to exploit fleeting opportunities in the din of battle, resulting in greater possibility of success.

Central to an effective structure of integrated commands is the issue of the acquisition of domain knowledge of other services and their integrated application. Not only the commanders, but the staff must get used to integrated functioning. The services will need to give much greater emphasis on joint training, as against specific service training that has been the norm so far. Officers from all three services would need to

attend courses at service-specific training institutions to gain knowledge and insight into services other than their own.

#### UNIFIED COMMANDS: MODELS FOR INDIA

The need for unified commands is well established. Most models propagated by various Indian military strategists advocate creation of theatre and functional commands.<sup>50</sup> In keeping with the above considerations, the options available to India could be based on four different models.

- Model I Creation of additional functional commands.
- Model II Geographical theatre commands catering to the envisaged threats to the country supported by functional commands.
- Model III Creation of a Joint Forces Command (JFC) to undertake OOAC tasks.
- Model IV Theatre commands specific to offensive and defensive role akin to the existing pivot and strike corps.

Each model has its merits and demerits. However, in ideal circumstances any model adopted should involve minimum turbulence yet achieve the desired integration of the armed forces to fight a future war.

#### *Model I: Creation of Additional Functional Commands*

In 2013, the media reported that the Indian Armed Forces have submitted a proposal for the creation of three new tri-service commands: Cyber command, Aerospace command, and Special Operations command. As per the plans, the Special Operations command will be headed by an Army officer and the Space command by an IAF officer, while the Cyber command will get its head on a rotational basis from the three services. The ANC, now headed by officers from the three services on a rotational basis, will be under a Navy Vice Admiral.<sup>51</sup> This indeed is a step in the right direction. However, there is also a need for Joint Logistics and Training Command. The argument for raising these commands is given in the succeeding paragraphs.

#### *Joint Logistics Command*

In the existing system each service plans its own logistics following its own planning, provisioning, transportation and delivery model. This has resulted in tremendous amount of duplication, long inventories, and a

colossal waste of precious resources that goes against the very ethos of efficient economy. It is imperative that the logistics organizations of the three services are integrated into one, thereby enabling optimization of resources. The UK Chief of Defence Material, US Defence Logistics Agency, and the Chinese Integrated Logistics System have functioned very efficiently and India too needs to create a Joint Logistics Command.

#### *Joint Training Command*

There are few organizational structures in place that could meaningfully formulate or impart the desired level of joint training. The essential ingredients of a joint training system (philosophy, infrastructure, and processes) need to be implemented. Therefore, to give impetus to jointness and promote synergy amongst the three services, there is a need to start training officers together from junior command and equivalent courses onwards. Integration of the three higher command courses into one curriculum would be the next logical step akin to higher defence management course and National Defence College. The role of IDS should be extended from merely promulgating joint doctrine and joint military strategy, from which flow the individual service doctrines, to being fully integrated in planning and conduct of joint exercises and the validation of the joint doctrine and military strategy. This necessitates creation of an integrated joint training command under which all training establishments function.

#### *Joint Cyber and Information Warfare Command*

Future operations will be conducted in the backdrop of cyber warfare, information dominance and high-tech conditions, and necessitates synchronization of all resources for better synergy and utilization. The necessity of a Cyber command has already been accepted by the services. A common communication grid for the services will enhance joint operability and facilitate joint operations.

#### *Special Forces Command*

Special Forces (SF) are a very potent asset and their employment needs to be synergized and thus merits creating an integrated Special Forces Command. The US' engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq have also boosted the significance and use of SF, which are by design organized into small, highly-trained units. SF are usually assigned close combat missions in short bursts of intense activity. Now with the availability

of PGMs, SF can deliver overwhelming force to targets deep within enemy territory, usually by using laser target identification and secure communications.<sup>52</sup> Its necessity has also been accepted by the services in India. The time has come for enhancing the number of SF units and creation of a dedicated command.

#### *Aerospace Command*

In 2008, an Integrated Space Cell under HQ IDS was established for integration between the military, the Department of Space, and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The logic behind the creation of a joint aerospace command is abundantly clear: firstly, as India's requirements for Space increase, the necessity of a single agency coordinating different activities becomes paramount. Secondly, the presence of a single entity will allow India to better promote its national interests in Outer Space as it becomes increasingly crowded and contested. Though its necessity has been accepted by the services, one needs to look at US model where it has merged its Space Command into the Strategic Command, which now looks after both the nuclear and space realms.

#### ***Model II: Geographical Theatre Commands***

In this option, the unified command structure would be based on geographical theatres catering to the envisaged threats, duly supported by the functional commands (less Special Forces Command, which is proposed to be part of the Reserve Command) as recommended in Model I. It will specifically cater for threats from Pakistan, China, IOR, internal security, and OOAC tasks. The necessity of establishing a tri-service command for OOAC tasks have been deliberated upon.<sup>53</sup> The structure of geographical theatre commands would include the Northern theatre, Western theatre, Eastern theatre, IOR theatre, and Strategic Reserves.

#### *Northern Theatre*

This would comprise the existing Northern Command and requisite elements of the Western Air Command, primarily to look after the state of J&K and the on-going counter terrorism operations there. This region mandates a separate theatre in view of the likelihood of further spurt in terrorism as a consequence of withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and Pakistan's policy of use of non-state actors and sponsoring proxy war.

*Western Theatre*

It will comprise the existing Western Command, South Western Command, Southern Command, Western Air Command, and South Western Air Command primarily oriented towards Pakistan. A requisite naval complement also needs to be allocated to this theatre.

*Eastern Theatre*

This would comprise the Eastern Command and the Eastern Air Command predominantly aligned to Chinese threat. It would need to cater for borders with China in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and the entire North-East. Accordingly, the forces would need to be regrouped.

*Indian Ocean Region Theatre*

IOR needs to be a separate theatre in view of its growing importance strategically as well as commercially, and in light of maritime as well as non-traditional security threats. It could be a single theatre or encompass two separate theatres—IOR (West) and IOR (East). It would include elements of the Southern Command, Southern Air Command, Western Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command and ANC, aligned to undertake operations in the IOR and cater for maritime threats.

*Reserve Command*

The primary role of this command would be to cater for OOAC tasks and would comprise elements of the Central Command, Central Air Command, and the Southern Naval Command. It would also encompass a strike corps, air mobile or airborne division, and amphibious elements suitably restructured from the existing resources. The Special Forces Command would be part of the Reserve Command in this model. They would also function as strategic reserves.

The major merits and demerits of this restructured organization are discussed below.

1. Each theatre would look after a specific threat under a single theatre commander, with one command available as strategic reserves that also caters for OOAC tasks.
2. In the existing system, taking the case of conventional operations against a western adversary, for example, seven different commands would effectively be involved in operations with no single

commander controlling the operations. This is not a synergized application of force and is against the very basic principle of unity of command and the ethos of war-fighting. Instead, one theatre command encompassing service components under one theatre commander would result in seamless orchestration of the forces facilitating concentrated application of force, resulting in a decisive victory and not merely limited tactical gains.

3. This model would also cater for the on-going low intensity conflict.
4. This model would also cater for a two-front threat.
5. It would ensure the availability of dedicated reserves.
6. The major drawback of this model is the dedication of one theatre to handling threats from Pakistan or China in J&K.

***Model III: Creation of Joint Forces Command for OOAC Tasks***

Here, it is proposed to have the above recommended functional commands (as discussed in Model I) with a Joint Forces Command, which could be based on Central Command, Central Air Command, elements from Eastern Naval Command and ANC primarily to cater for OOAC tasks. It would also act as a reserve for application in case of any eventuality. Additional resources could be provided from functional commands or other commands not involved in operations. This model is based on the argument that India does not need theatre commands; instead, there is a need to have one joint command for OOAC tasks. The merits and demerits of this organizational structure are:

1. It caters for a specific force for OOAC tasks, thus enabling better planning and preparation for the same.
2. It ensures the availability of a dedicated reserve for any eventuality.
3. At the same time, this model does not adequately cater for the envisaged external and internal threats to India and would prevent true integration of the services.

***Model IV: Theatre Commands Specific to Offensive and Defensive Role Akin to the Existing Pivot and Strike Corps***

This model is based on organising separate theatres for conduct of offensive and defensive operations. It would encompass the various theatres discussed below.

*Western Theatre*

This would encompass the entire border with Pakistan and include J&K, Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat. It would constitute the formations of Northern, Western and South Western Commands (less their strike corps) and the Western Air Command. It would be responsible for ensuring the territorial integrity of the country against any threat from Pakistan.

*Eastern Theatre*

This would comprise the Eastern Command and the Eastern Air Command and cater for threat from China.

*Strike Force I*

This would be responsible for conduct of offensive operations in the West and would comprise two strike corps, one each from the Western and South Western Command. It would also include South Western Air Command.

*Strike Force II*

It would be responsible for offensive operations in the East, predominantly against China, and would constitute strike corps from Southern Command and the newly-raised mountain strike corps for the Eastern Command. It would also have Central Air Command as part of it.

*Indian Ocean Region Theatre*

This would encompass the Southern Command (less strike corps), Southern Air Command, Western Naval Command, Eastern Naval Command, Southern Naval Command and ANC. The option of dividing it into two theatres catering for the West and East can also be considered.

The merits and demerits of this model are as follows:

1. It would provide dedicated forces for each adversary.
2. There would be a requirement for greater coordination between the defensive and offensive forces, and, therefore, an additional headquarters will have to be superimposed on top of them.

**PROPOSED MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

The reorganization of existing commands into unified commands would entail a massive restructuring exercise. The moot question, however, is—is India ready for it? Probably not; and it will have to follow an

incremental approach instead of a revolutionary approach, else it might shake the very foundations of the Indian defence structure. India already has a model for theatre command in terms of ANC and SFC as functional command, and the same could be used for raising new functional and theatre commands. Keeping in view the likely threat scenarios for India, Model II is recommended for implementation. The restructuring would have to be carried in a phased manner within specified timelines. An appropriate timeframe can be worked out after the proposal is approved. What merits consideration is that even US and UK took four-five decades to evolve into their respective present systems and are still undergoing transformation; the Chinese began the process in the 1990s while Australia and Canada have also taken around three to four decades. With the benefit of knowledge and hindsight of other countries, India could achieve the same in a comparatively lesser timeframe.

The recommended model—Model II—may be implemented as given below.

- Phase I* The first phase would include the appointment of CDS and raising functional commands under the CDS.
- Phase II* In the next phase, Western Theatre Command could be established. The argument for selection of this particular theatre is that the Army is involved in fighting terrorism/insurgency in other theatres, whereas the Western Theatre would have a more conventional role. Hence, the transition would be the least turbulent.
- Phase III* In the third phase, IOR Theatre Command(s) and the Eastern Theatre Command could be established by recommended re-organization.
- Phase IV* In the last phase, the Northern Theatre Command could be established. The second command could be Reserve Command, which would function as the strategic reserves.

Given the scarcity of air resources, the CDS with the advice of the Chief of Air Staff would have the option of allocating resources from the dormant theatre/functional command in keeping with the strategic mobility available to the air resources. In the envisaged restructuring, the chiefs would be responsible for training, equipping and administration of their service and would predominantly play the role of chiefs of staff, while the theatre commanders would be operational commanders. The

theatre commanders would be directly responsible to the Prime Minister/Defence Minister/Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) through the CDS, who would be the principal military advisor and coordinator.

The issue of rank structuring and individual aspirations could get negated by having four-star theatre commanders with three-star component commanders (equivalent to the present Cs-in-C). The functional commands would be commanded by three-star ranking officers (equivalent to present Cs-in-C). The issue of who should head these commands can be resolved by basing the appointment on merit and professional competence or on a rotational basis. However, service specific Cs-in-C, based on predominant service, could also be considered with the IOR Theatre headed by a naval officer, the Northern theatre by an army officer, the Eastern and Western Theatres by Army/Air Force C-in-C, and the Reserve Command by Army/Navy/Air Force C-in-C. The comparative analysis of rank structuring based on existing and proposed model is listed in Table 1.

Overall, there would be a major reduction in the staff since 19 commands would be restructured into five theatre commands and five functional commands. The staff authorized to the component commanders will be much lesser due to availability of staff at the theatre

**Table I** Rank Structuring in the Proposed Reorganization for the Indian Armed Forces

S. No.	Rank Structure	Existing Organization	Proposed Organization		Remarks
			Functional Commands	Theatre Commands	
1.	4 Star	3	–	9(5 Theatre Commanders, 3 Chiefs of Staff of the three services, CDS)	Increase by 6
2.	3 Star (C-in-C equivalent)	23 (17 C-in-C Army, Navy and IAF Commands; 3 Vice Chiefs, CIDS, SFC and ANC C-in-C)	5	16 (5 COS Theatre Commands, 3 Vice Chiefs of Services, VCDS, 7 Component Commanders based on service component)	Decrease by 2 (Other component commanders could be 3 Star ranks)

level. This would result in significant equipment and manpower savings, apart from better planning, coordination and conduct of operations.

#### CONCLUSION

Jointness and integration of the military is an inevitable requirement for the modern day battlefield. The principles underlying these features are inter-service cooperation and economy of effort, both of which are crucial to war-fighting. Unified commands that come about as a consequence of the said principles provide synergy to military endeavours. But integration and jointness are contingent upon the presence of an effective higher defence organization. The lack of strategic thinking within the politico-bureaucratic establishment in India has, however, resulted in a higher defence structure that excludes the services from the process of defence decision-making. The services too have not been united in demanding the appointment of a CDS or creation of unified commands.

In the backdrop of RMA and varied threats existing to India, it needs to expeditiously undertake restructuring of its defence organization to establish unified commands. Unified Commands would enable better joint planning and coordination, quicker decision-making based on appropriate advice from specialists, and the optimal utilization of technology and other resources. Any further delay will only be at the peril of its national security.

The need to retain 'operational' control over their respective services has led the services to withhold their full support to unified operations. Despite the acknowledgement of the tremendous operational and administrative benefits that would accrue by having unified commands, such commands have not come through. The biggest challenge to jointness is to bring about an attitudinal shift by turning the sense of insecurity and mutual suspicion into a sense of belongingness amongst the services as well as the politico-bureaucratic establishment. The change has to be implemented top down for it to take root and be effective. This necessitates a strong political will and India's political leadership has to enforce the necessary reforms by enacting the required legislation. National interest should remain supreme and not be compromised due to service parochialism and politico-bureaucratic hurdles.

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