

# CDS AND BEYOND

Integration of the Indian Armed Forces



**Vivek Chadha**



# **CDS AND BEYOND**

**Integration of the Indian Armed Forces**



# CDS AND BEYOND

Integration of the Indian Armed Forces

VIVEK CHADHA



KW Publishers Pvt Ltd  
New Delhi



Copyright © 2021 Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses,  
New Delhi

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without first obtaining written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this book are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, or the Government of India.



Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses  
No. 1, Development Enclave, Delhi Cantt.  
New Delhi 110 010  
Phone: +91-11-26717983  
Website: [www.idsa.in](http://www.idsa.in)

ISBN 978-81-952858-4-6 Hardback

Published in India by Kalpana Shukla



KW Publishers Pvt Ltd  
4676/21, First Floor, Ansari Road  
Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002  
Phone: +91 11 43528107  
Marketing: [kw@kwpub.in](mailto:kw@kwpub.in)  
Editorial: [production@kwpub.in](mailto:production@kwpub.in)  
Website: [www.kwpub.in](http://www.kwpub.in)

Printed and bound in India

The content of this book is the sole expression and opinion of its author(s), and not of the publisher. The publisher in no manner is liable for any opinion or views expressed by the author(s). While best efforts have been made in preparing the book, the publisher makes no representations or warranties of any kind and assumes no liabilities of any kind with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the content and specifically disclaims any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness of use of a particular purpose.

The publisher believes that the contents of this book do not violate any existing copyright/intellectual property of others in any manner whatsoever. However, in case any source has not been duly attributed, the publisher may be notified in writing for necessary action.

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
Setting the Stage for Jointness and CDS	11
CDS and DMA	26
Events Leading to Defence Reforms in the United States and its Comparison with India	43
Theatre Commands Concept, Structure and Implementation	55
Theatre Commands India: Structure and Implementation	61
Chain of Command	76
Functional Commands: Case of Air Defence Command	93
Functional Commands: Saving Costs & Enhancing Efficiency Integrated Logistics Command	106
Linkage Between Structural Changes and Doctrinal Thought	127
Conclusion	141
<i>Annexures</i>	151
<i>Endnotes</i>	154
<i>Index</i>	170





# Acknowledgements

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Director General of Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Ambassador Sujan R. Chinoy for facilitating this fellowship project. It was after the commencement of the fellowship period that transformational changes began in the sphere of structural reforms within the armed forces. At my request for a change in the subject of research, the Director General immediately agreed. And the fellowship project began soon thereafter.

My understanding of the subject would have remained incomplete and detached from reality without the generous time given by the CDS, General Bipin Rawat to discuss the ongoing reforms. His frank and forthright perspective was most helpful. While there remain differences on certain aspects of the forthcoming changes, however, his willingness to engage and accept those differences, despite having a more intimate understanding of reforms under implementation, was a rare and refreshing experience.

A series of web-based discussions that were held to deliberate upon a number of issues related to theatre commands, benefitted the study immensely. This initiative was anchored by a former colleague, late Dr S. Kalyanaraman. His sage advice and perspective on defence issues will be missed.

I would like to acknowledge the inputs of a large number of webinar participants, who, given their exposure and experience helped bring the project closer to functional realities.

I am thankful to the Deputy Director General, Major General Bipin Bakshi, along with all members of the Military Centre, past and present. Their perspectives, comments and deliberations enriched my understanding of the subject and helped guide the study.

I am grateful to Group Captain K.K. Khera for his detailed replies to my mails, especially on issues related to better understanding

employment of air power and more specifically the functioning of a future Air Defence Command.

My go-to tech genius Colonel Suresh Chandra was as always, the one who could decipher the futuristic world of logistics for me. Unfortunately, he will not be there to validate my understanding of the same. Like many other great minds, he was yet another victim of COVID-19.

A big thank you to Brigadier Ashish Chhibbar, whose book and personal guidance were very helpful during the project.

A large number of scholars provided their inputs during the discussion stage. While it may not be feasible to acknowledge everyone, I would particularly like to thank Rear Admiral S. Shrikhande, Shri R. Chandrashekhar, Major General Alok Deb, Lieutenant General Rakesh Sharma and a number of serving officers who were part of long discussions despite their busy schedule.

I am grateful to the library staff at MP-IDSA, who continue to amaze me with their resourcefulness and support. The Conference Cell tends to remain in the background but must receive the credit for long hours of planning events that helped take this project forward. The administrative staff of the Institute led by the Assistant Directors, both past and present, remained most cooperative and helpful.

I would like to thank Vivek Kaushik, who worked tirelessly to get this book out in record time. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the copy editor. KW Publishers, my publisher and especially Sushanta Gayen, the go-to person there, remained helpful and eager to create a quality publication in a very short period of time.

My special thanks to the reviewers, both for their acknowledgement of what was good and more for their critique of the manuscript. While some differences in perception remain, I do acknowledge their forthright expression of views. It helped create a more balanced perspective.

While I benefitted immensely from the guidance received, any errors in my interpretation are mine and mine alone.

# Introduction

At the very outset, this project acknowledges and accepts its imperfection and the incompleteness of the endeavour. Despite the appointment of the CDS and establishment of DMA, the ongoing series of defence reforms are still underway, even as this book is being written. This creates a challenge for evaluating decisions and structural changes that remain in the process of implementation. There is far too much that can still be referred to as work in progress at this stage. In the conventional sense, the resultant book is bound to fall short of the desirable objective – which would be a complete understanding and evaluation of the ongoing defence reforms in India.

Defence reforms are a challenge for most countries, as the case study of the US indicates. These reforms are not a one-time undertaking. Instead, circumstances, evolution in technology, the need to meet newer challenges and limitations observed from past attempts, demand change as a continuum. This is despite the fact that opposition to change is a given, as is its special relevance to hierarchical organisations like the uniformed forces.<sup>1</sup>

The lessons from India's experience suggest that major change has almost always been driven from the very top. In other words, it has been the political elite, who have been the driver for such endeavours.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances of such change may vary over time; however, the co-relation of change with political support has remained an essential and inescapable requirement. Take the example of major force accretion after the 1962 India-China war. Even before the ceasefire had been inked, the process of weapons procurement had begun. This was followed by a substantial increase in the defence budget for the next few years to cater for this initiative.<sup>3</sup> The Indian Army also witnessed an increase in its numbers, which went up from 5.5 lakh to 8.25 lakh.<sup>4</sup> This could not have been possible without the complete backing of the then government.

The second major change took place after the 1971 war, with service-specific committees being formed in 1975.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Indian Army, this was led by General K.V. Krishna Rao and also included the future Chief of Army Staff, General Sundarji. The committee had the backing of the government and this saw revolutionary changes not only in the structuring of the Indian Army, but also its war fighting methodology over the next decade. Ironically, contrary to conventional wisdom, these changes took place in the aftermath of a resounding and the most decisive victory by India over Pakistan in 1971, instead of a defeat. This example suggests that change does not necessarily need to come after a military debacle. Instead, even as things seem perfect on the surface, the need to stay ahead of the curve or overcome a patchy makeshift reality of the past too can lead to change. In this case, as well, the political establishment of the day provided complete financial support for the modernisation of the armed forces, and for the procurement of mechanised forces, which took place in the eighties.<sup>6</sup>

The third attempt remained limited in its scope and implementation after the 1999 Kargil Conflict, despite the 2001 Group of Ministers (GoM) report suggesting far-reaching changes.<sup>7</sup> This endeavour was yet again undertaken after overcoming an initial setback to turn the tables on Pakistan. The observations of the Kargil Review Committee, headed by the renowned strategist K. Subrahmanyam, pointed out the weaknesses in military structures and decision-making procedures.<sup>8</sup> It was a rare public display of introspection, despite the achievements on the battlefield and deft diplomacy. This yet again had the complete support of the government, given the setting up of the Committee immediately after the conflict ended and a follow-up through the GoM of 2001.

In all three previous attempts, even as the government gave the requisite support and where needed additional capital expenditure, it was the senior hierarchy of the armed forces that provided the professional inputs to implement the changes. This was subsequently accompanied by follow-up mechanisms to ensure that changes were incorporated and taken forward to seek eventual fruition. This sequence when co-related with the last few decades will indicate the

reasons for some changes to be implemented, while others remained pending for want of “political consensus” as it was often described.<sup>9</sup> In reality, it was the absence of political will to push such big changes that would unravel the structure of Higher Defence Organisation (HDO) in India. A structure that had remained entrenched over decades on the basis of an obsolete model inherited from British India.

The subject of armed forces integration or for that matter reform of the HDO in India has been discussed and debated for decades.<sup>10</sup> However, as the readers would be aware, negligible movement in this regard since independence had left little to be assessed afresh in terms of options and ideas that had not been analysed threadbare in the past. Contrary to this perspective, the initiative taken by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance Government, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, surprised the naysayers, who had all but given up hope on reforms. The government also went well beyond the wish-list of those who were expecting incremental defence reforms to take place. Instead of a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) was created. And unlike every conceivable option voiced, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) came into being. While the time lost in undertaking military reforms in the HDO may not come back, however, the initiatives were the best option for the government to reverse the clock and push for major changes in the defence sphere in India. This opened up the possibility and opportunity to not only take up fresh evaluation of the ongoing changes, but also participate in the debate to constructively feed into the process.

This project was undertaken with a distinct aim. It was not only to evaluate the wider context and concept of defence reforms even as these are underway, but to also provide options to further the ongoing process. This was intended through a detached evaluation of the objective that had been set out by the government in the statement that accompanied the announcement of the appointment of CDS and thereafter the role and responsibilities the appointment would fulfil in its multiple avatars. This spelled

out certain responsibilities clearly, including the duties of CDS, Permanent Chairman COSC and Secretary DMA.<sup>11</sup> The press release announcing the appointment on 24 December 2019, also included the responsibility to create theatre commands as part of the charter of the CDS.

There was a brief reference to the fact that the CDS would not exercise military command.<sup>12</sup> However, this was understandably not accompanied by the nuances of his role in future organisational structures once the theatre commands did come into play. Similarly, the hierarchy beyond the CDS was also not explicitly clear in similar circumstances. This raised as many questions, as it provided answers, regarding the future of defence reforms, its manifestation and how India would create its own home-grown system, even as best practices from elsewhere were available for reference.

This book attempts to evaluate a few critical areas of defence reforms, which are either underway or will be rolled out in the next few years. Despite its imperfection that stems from inadequate information about the stages of reforms that are unfolding, an attempt is made to contribute to the process through discussions around “why” a certain trajectory in defence reforms is needed keeping in mind the operational and structural imperatives that are relevant in the case of India. This has been followed by a brief “how” regarding some of these reforms. However, the “what” has deliberately been avoided as it is considered a logical progression of the first two steps. It was also felt that having got these steps right, the third in the form of the “what” is far easier to implement and is best done by practitioners closer to the realities of emerging structures.

The nature of this study makes its findings time-critical, especially if these rather presumptuously could be considered useful enough inputs for the reform process that is underway. This implies that even if the study was not the most detailed, it was important to make it timely while focussing on the most relevant aspects of the reforms in requisite detail.

Consequently, it was considered important to provide a brief backdrop to the evolution of defence reforms in India, which has been undertaken in the first chapter of the book. It highlights some

of the initiatives undertaken in the past, as also the reasons for successive governments not being able to push big-ticket reforms, despite the logic being echoed by multiple committees. And in some cases, the government, despite being in agreement with the principle itself, failed to take the final step.

This is followed by a recall of events that immediately preceded and succeeded the announcement by the Prime Minister to appoint a CDS on 15 August 2019. And more importantly, an evaluation of the charter that has been designated for the appointment, as also its affiliated designations held by the same individual. This includes the Permanent Chairman of the COSC and Secretary DMA. As a follow-up, the changes that this led to in the responsibilities within the MoD are also discussed briefly to provide a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities that have emerged as a result of the new designations and appointments.

There is an attempt to go beyond what came out in the press release to better understand the relationship between various institutions that have been created and their interplays. This includes the office of the Chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force. It also delves into the role and responsibility of the COSC. Beyond that, an evaluation of the linkages between the CDS, subordinate and higher officers is also taken up through a critical examination. This is done especially in light of the fact that the responsibilities of the CDS are likely to evolve and expand over time. This will possibly take place with newer structures coming into place and existing ones being redefined. A very important change that could define the civil-military relationship that exists will include the Department of Defence (DoD) led by the Defence Secretary and the office of the Defence Minister itself. While the former will examine fewer areas as compared to the past, the latter will possibly get more involved with the functioning of the armed forces. The ongoing changes should ideally be accompanied by an enlarged office of the Defence Minister to allow an independent assessment of issues.

A case study that has most often been quoted and discussed is that of the US reforms. This is understandable since these reforms

were undertaken by a major military power, which is also a democracy. The country had also witnessed repeated attempts prior to the reforms of 1986 eventually implemented through legislation, which became a victim of the interests of specific service groups and organisations within the government. The nature of debate and the struggle for seeking advantage and retaining existing turfs find resonance in India, much like what had happened in the US. In addition, the trajectory of some of the reforms was also similar. This has been captured in a chapter to suggest that the kind of reforms and change that is being envisaged in India is neither new nor is it likely to be any less hotly debated. And this discussion is likely to help achieve a more considered end result. It is also equally important that those responsible for defence reforms in India do not make the same mistakes that have been made and corrected by countries like the US which has a long history of attempts at integration of their armed forces. In some cases, these were not only attempted but also questioned as way back as the Second World War, under conditions that were ideal to test their efficacy. Similar attempts by the US have been tested repeatedly under combat conditions in Iraq, Afghanistan and previously during military engagements with Iran.

There is a school of thought that suggests that given the vast differences between the US and Indian capability, resources and circumstances, such comparisons are futile. This book disagrees with such contention and reinforces the fact that even as operational circumstances are different, principles of integration, joint operations and joint structures remain the same. And there is enough experience that US reforms bring for other countries to seek value, without the need to repeat past mistakes, or duplicate the US processes blindly.

Further, taking on board this critique, where needed, comparisons have been made with the ongoing defence reforms in China. Yet again, it can be argued that China represents a very different environment for such reforms to be conceived and implemented. This is indeed true. However, there are far too many similarities that China has with India in terms of the military structures that are being put in place to discard the ongoing changes out of hand. These similarities include the location of these theatres within the boundaries of the



country. China is also making an attempt to not only integrate the major services, but also functional commands. Further, reforms are being undertaken in China with a simultaneous attempt at net centricity and operationalisation of an informationalised environment. And finally, there is also a focus on cutting down on hierarchy and bringing theatres in closer control of the Communist Party leadership. All these aspects are likely to find resonance in the case of India as well.

One of the most important reform initiatives in the making at present includes the creation of theatre and functional commands. Both these initiatives have witnessed a healthy debate in the public domain. This debate has thrown up multiple variations for these changes to be implemented. The final couple of chapters go into these options, commencing with geographical theatre commands. The discussion includes the number of commands needed, stature of theatre commanders and the imperatives that should ideally drive the change. This debate is critical to the ongoing structural changes taking place. Not only do theatre commands represent the next important level of military change, but these are also likely to become the foundational basis for subsequent constituents to be created and interlinked with these commands. These commands will also form the cutting edge of India's military response to threats and challenges over the next few decades. This makes their constitution and structure one of the most important steps in the ongoing reform process.

The book discusses two commands in a degree of detail. This includes the Air Defence Command and the Logistics Command as part of two separate chapters. These have been envisaged as functional commands, in addition to the theatre commands being created.<sup>13</sup> This analysis does not suggest that the other likely to be created commands are less important. Conversely, since the debate around their raising and structure is likely to be less animated and contested, which includes geographical theatre commands and the Maritime Command, it was felt appropriate to undertake a more deliberate analysis of two of the commands. While the debate continues to take place on the utility and feasibility of an Air Defence Command,

the Logistics Command while having a broad agreement, is likely to present one of the most complex challenges in its execution. It is also likely to remain below the radar as logistics operations often tend to, yet, its implementation will be critical for the overall success of the integration exercise being undertaken by the armed forces.

The Air Defence Command could well become a reality by the time this book is published. Despite this possible reality, the book delves into the need or otherwise of such a command and the options that could be considered while implementing it. The conclusion drawn suggests that it is more important to retain unity of command through the Air Defence Command and theatre commanders for both defensive and offensive air operations, rather than divesting these to different entities. This assessment benefits from a study of the existing air defence system in place, expert views of practitioners on the subject, and case studies from similar restructuring that has been done elsewhere in the recent past.

The second detailed analysis undertaken deals with the Logistics Command. The first building blocks of this structure are in the process of being established and the long-term direction seems to indicate the need for a unified system as the end result. Keeping this in mind, the chapter not only examines the challenges posed by such a move, but also suggests options to reach the ultimate objective of full integration. This is despite the fact that all three services presently function with a reasonable degree of comfort and efficiency on three completely different platforms. However, despite this divergent and independent approach towards logistics management in the past, there is no escaping closer integration in the future.

In order to better understand the desirability and advantages of such a move, case studies from the corporate world have been studied to seek better understanding of how similar initiatives were undertaken despite enormous management challenges. While the armed forces present unique difficulties that relate to unpredictability and disruption as a result of operational conditions, the evolution of supply chain management in the present era has the inherent flexibility of taking such conditions on board. It is also suggested that systems that continue to work on the pull model can shift to

a push model, at least partially to reduce to load on operationally deployed units and thereby improve efficiency.

One of the most critical aspects for the effectiveness of military structures will emerge from the chain of command that eventually evolves as part of the ongoing reform process. A chapter has been devoted to this important aspect. As part of the discussion, different options have been evaluated. The book concludes that the need for faster and more efficient decision making will remain a critical consideration for the eventual decision. However, this ideal condition must simultaneously be weighed against the reality of India's circumstances. The chapter also delves into the role of service chiefs, with new structures coming into place.

Often structures tend to be seen in isolation. However, military and government structures can only achieve optimum effectiveness when their creation is accompanied by strategic guidance from the highest level. In addition, this guidance must become the fountainhead for defence and service-specific doctrines. This has unfortunately not always been the case. And the adverse effects of such systemic limitations have been evident in the past. These aspects are dealt with as part of a chapter, which co-relates doctrinal thought with structural changes.

The key question that the ongoing integration raises is the need to cut costs even as an attempt is made to enhance efficiency. This is difficult to assess from past examples within the military. However, since bringing cost efficiencies is a critical and inherent part of restructuring within the corporate world, case studies from the banking sector, especially since these initiatives have been taken in the recent past in India, provide useful points in this regard. It is clearly evident from these examples that integration can and should cut costs, something that the logistics command can achieve since it has closer co-relation with its corporate entities. It is also in this regard that examples of complex automation challenges and delivery efficiency of companies like Amazon.com are used to co-relate potential changes in the logistics operations for the armed forces.

Three technologies have made a dramatic impact on a number of fields. These are Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain and Bigdata

Analytics. While enhancing efficiency remains a consistent need in organisations, however, these technologies have displayed the potential to create a revolutionary impact on operational efficiency. Therefore, any attempt at restructuring cannot and should not be undertaken without incorporating the best practices that these technological advancements offer. The book highlights some of the advantages specifically in the case of logistics management that can be pursued through the incorporation of these technological advancements while conceptualising and implementing the ongoing changes.

## CDS AND BEYOND

### Integration of the Indian Armed Forces

Defence reforms are a challenge for most countries. The lessons from India's experience suggest that major change has almost always been mandated from the very top. The ongoing structural changes are also being driven by the highest political office in a bid to seek integration, indigenisation and greater effectiveness of the armed forces.

The ongoing military reforms began with the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and creation of the Department of Military Affairs. Future changes are likely to include the creation of theatre commands, functional commands, restructuring of Army Headquarters and a number of other associated shifts in conjunction with these big bang reforms.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that these changes are perhaps the most far-reaching military reforms in India's post-independence history.

The book undertakes a focussed assessment of the changes that commenced with the appointment of CDS. This includes the role and inter-se co-relation between major stake holders and defence departments. Keeping in view the need to enhance operational effectiveness, recommendations regarding the chain of command, rank structures and role of service chiefs have been made. The book will also analyse the structure and role of the future Air Defence and Logistics Command.



Colonel **Vivek Chadha** (Retd), is a Research Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. He served in the Indian Army for 22 years prior to joining MP-IDS in 2011. His areas of research include defence reforms and military change. He has also written extensively on counter terrorism and countering the financing of terrorism.

His single author books include: *Kargil: Past Perfect Future Uncertain*; *Even if Ain't Broke Yet Do Fit It: Enhancing Effectiveness Through Military Change*; *Lifeblood of Terrorism: Countering Terrorism Finance*; *Low Intensity Conflicts in India: An Analysis*; *Company Commander in Low Intensity Conflicts* and *Indo-US Relations: From Divergence to Convergence*. He is on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Defence Studies*.

₹ 1080.00

  
KNOWLEDGE WORLD  
KW PUBLISHERS PVT LTD  
www.kwpub.in

ISBN 978-81-952858-4-6

