

# **Need and Desirability for Establishment of a CDS System in India**

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There is no doubt that India requires a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) system for its higher defence management. Those who argue otherwise should revisit the Indian experience and realize that the world over militaries are getting to understand the inevitable necessity in today's environment of having a CDS-like system.

Success in a modern war depends on the formulation of a joint military strategy based on the politico-military aim and its joint and integrated execution. At present, under the system that India inherited from the British, the three Services draw up their individual operational plans based on the Defence Minister's Operational Directive. Only limited coordination is carried out at the operational level and the tactical level.

Given the ever-changing nature of the battlefield, it is necessary to adapt the Indian military system accordingly. Additionally, in a nuclearized environment it will not be possible to fight single service wars in future. It will be necessary to have joint structures for fighting future wars. For this purpose, it is felt that India must take up the challenge thrown up by the experience of other countries, like the US and UK and find the best way to move forward to the creation of an institution that will ensure jointness and rapid reaction capabilities.

This does not mean that a CDS is the panacea for all of India's problems in the military sphere. But the point is that such a system will solve many a problem faced by the military today. Be it planning, budgeting or force structuring, the present set-up does not cater for cohesive advice to the Government from the military based on a coherent strategic vision.

Those in favour of persisting with the current status quo claim that the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) system, has worked quite well and therefore there is no need for either a CDS, or integration with Ministry of Defence (MoD), or any further inter-service integration. However, the inadequacies of the present system was clearly demonstrated during the kargil conflict in 1999.

In the wake of this conflict, the Government of India set up a committee under Arun Singh, former Minister of State for Defence, to recommend changes to the existing defence organisation. The committee proposed far-reaching changes to the existing higher defence organization.

The main recommendations of the Arun Singh committee are:

- That the existing COSC should be enlarged by the addition of a CDS who would be the permanent chairman, and a Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) who would be the Member Secretary.
- The CDS was to be the Principal Military Adviser to the Government of India. He would not exercise command over any of the Chiefs or Forces other than those placed specifically under his command.

The Kargil war also led the Government to institute a comprehensive review of the National Security system in its entirety for the first time in the history of independent India. A Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted on April 17, 2000 carried out a review of the recommendations of the four task forces set up to examine, management of defence, the intelligence apparatus, border management and internal security.

The GoM made several recommendation regarding reforms in Defence Management. The processes of implementation of the recommendations were initiated in 2001. While the GoM accepted the recommendations of the Arun Singh Committee, the process of implementation of the top order, namely creation of the CDS became embroiled in controversy. This was both in the political sphere as well as within and amongst the Services.

To ensure a higher degree of jointness amongst the Services and to attempt inter-service and intra-service prioritization, the Government set up the Headquarters, Integrated Defence Staff (HQIDS), headed by the Chief of Integrated Staff to Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CISC), to support the COSC and its Chairman.

The CISC supervises the IDS, chairs all multi service bodies and the Defence Crisis Management Group (DCMG) and is also responsible for the coordination of long-range perspectives plans, five year plans and annual budgetary proposals of the three services in consultation and coordination with the Integrated Services Headquarters, through the COSC.

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Its envisaged functions include:

- Giving advice to the Government on prioritization for developing force levels and capabilities through restructuring proposals;
- Undertaking net assessment comprising the totality of the national capability;
- Formulating joint doctrines in consultation with Service Headquarters (SHQ);
- Conceptualizing policies and programmes on joint planning and military education for personnel of defence services;
- Rendering advice for evolving responses to non-traditional and unconventional threats to national security;
- Proposing measures to be taken for ensuring the required jointness amongst the armed forces;
- And enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning process through intra and inter-service prioritization.

In practice, this has not worked because the CISC has to go through the COSC for all matters and this arrangement is ineffective. The most important point to bear in mind is that there is little use of having a system in place without having the leader, namely, the CDS.

It is contended that while the GoM accepted the need for the CDS, they did not take into account that such a post would only solve problems in peacetime. The purpose of having armed forces is to prepare for a war. And future wars are going to be such as to force coordinated and very quick action from the armed forces of the country. Waging such wars will require theatre commands. The practical way to ensure proper command and control would be for the theatre commanders to report to the National Command Authority through the CDS. The point that needs to be emphasized is that it is necessary to have the CDS and theatre commands, if the system is to be successful in war.

The CDS would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning process through intra and inter-Service prioritization. And he should ensure the required "Jointness" in the Armed Forces. The CDS has to be viewed as the 'Head' of the Indian Armed Forces in terms of providing strategic control, strategic direction and strategic vision.

Such a situation will allow the Indian armed forces to react quickly and with reduced teeth-to-tail ratios. With jointness it will become possible to bring together and analyse overlapping service aims, both in terms of acquisitions and operational deployment. And finally, there is a need to find means of coordination between nuclear and conventional forces.

The most urgent requirement for the Indian Armed forces is to create the capabilities to be able to apply maximum force in the shortest possible time, in a conflict. This means that the following aspects have to be kept in mind when preparing for the future.

- There is no alternative to transformational strategies. Because of strong institutional biases, experience elsewhere indicates that many of the areas needing reform will need political will and legislative mandate.
- The armed forces have to restructure at the earliest, through the establishment of the CDS and theatre commands. This must be done and we must ensure jointness.
- Force acquisitions need to be made on the requirements of the theatre commands and not on the needs of individual services.
- More effective approaches to jointness, combined arms and combined operations leading to concepts and tactics towards truly integrated operations or even inter dependent operations is the need of the hour. The sensitivity of each Service should be kept in mind while planning integration and jointness. It is suggested that areas of agreement be worked out first.
- Resource constraints tend to make the armed forces focus on force modernization in terms of traditional weapons. Greater attention needs to be paid to doctrines, equipment and forces to respond to unproven and asymmetric threats. Innovation and 'out of the box' thinking is needed.
- The answer is to consolidate and rationalize tri-service roles, missions and assets based on scientific and operational analysis criteria. With this approach it should be possible to afford and operationalize the kind of capabilities and forces needed within national resource limitations.

In the present era of strategic uncertainty and rapidly changing threats, military professionals are aware of the necessity of a joint planning staff for the planning and conduct of joint operations so that these can be planned "top down". The establishment of HQIDS in India is no doubt, a first step. But if the organization remains headless, its functioning will remain disjointed. Also it will never carry the clout necessary to ensure that difficult and sometimes unpalatable decisions are accepted by the three Services without questioning. And finally, it needs to be emphasised that theatre commanders, vital for wartime operations, will only follow a CDS. If global trends are any indication, this is the direction in which India should be headed. □

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