

Jointness in Defence Services: Chief of Defence Staff is a must for the Defence Services

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"In order to bring jointness and synergy among the three services of the armed forces, need has been felt to appoint Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) who can have better command and control over the three services for a successful operation and also be a single military adviser to the Prime Minister and Defence Minister. The CDS case has been strongly reiterated by the Parliamentary Committee on Defence and its recommendations should be taken seriously by the government."

Laying bare the claims on the efficacy of joint military commands of the army, navy and air force, the Parliamentary Committee on Defence on 14 October 2007 has commented that there is "no jointness" in these commands. In its report tabled in Parliament, the committee has found that that there still exists a serious lack of synergy between the three services, as was evident during the Kargil conflict.

The Committee visited the Andaman and Nicobar Command and found that the required synergy between the three services was missing. "The Committee understands that the senior officers of the command can issue orders to personnel belonging to their respective forces only. There is no jointness of command and control. The Committee feels that there is a serious lacuna and earnest efforts should be taken to correct it immediately", the report states.

The Parliamentary Committee has also commented on the Kargil conflict, stating the Chiefs of Staff assumed the role of operational commanders to the respective forces, rather than Chief of the Staff to the Prime Minister and Defence Minister. "This led to a number of negative results and protocol problems," it says.

The Committee has also reiterated the need for creation of the post of CDS in order to boost synergy among the three services and provide a single point military advice to the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister.

The Committee has reiterated that the government should take the recommendations seriously and take final decision on the CDS at the earliest and, till that was done, the functioning of the Chief of Staff Committee (COSC) should be seriously streamlined and positively made effective.

It has been reported that Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sureesh Mehta, took over as Chairman COSC from the outgoing Chairman General JJ Singh on 1 October 2007 after his superannuation from the army. It is customary that the senior most out of the three services chief becomes the Chairman COSC.

CoSC is meant to support the Chairman in the optimum performance of his role and functions, and bring together and coordinate several functions common to three Services. However, it has been proved beyond doubt even during the Kargil war that the Chairman of COSC is a defunct body having no clear cut roles assigned officially.

On 15 August 1947 when India got its independence, the British must surely have been delighted when the independent Indian government decided to retain the British Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the Army, and the British Chiefs of Air and Naval Staff. On 15 January 1949, General K M Cariappa took over from General Sir Roy Bucher as "chief of the army staff and C-in-C, Indian army. He remained C-in-C till 26 January 1950, when the Indian Constitution came into force. As C-in-C he enjoyed number two status next to the Governor General of India.

All the three services chiefs were given independent command of their respective services - army, navy and air force, under the defence minister. They were given the status equivalent to the Cabinet Secretary, which is resented by the defence secretary who happens to be junior to them in the warrant of precedence. The supremacy of the civil rule was maintained and a possibility of a Defence forces commander taking over the country was completely ruled out by the cabinet headed by Jawaharlal Nehru.

However, it has been felt strongly at the higher defence quarters that there is a need to appoint a CDS to control the three services in operations for better command and control under a 'military adviser' to the Defence Minister for efficient functioning of the three services. The advance democracies - USA, UK, and EU - have a Joint Chief of the Staff looking after the operations and peace time requirements of all the three services.

On the recommendations of the Subrahmanyam Committee Report on Kargil for the appointment of CDS the Government appointed a Task Force under the former Rajya Raksha Mantri Mr Arun Singh to give its recommendations on defence and security matters. Mr Arun Singh also strongly recommended the formation of CDS on the lines of other world democracies. Finally Group of Ministers under the chairmanship of Mr L K Advani appointed on April 17, 2000 also recommended the appointment of CDS in rotation, but the Defence Secretary was also recommended to be the Principal Secretary.

The CDS structure was created after studying the military establishments of advanced countries with the aim of achieving synergy between the defence forces.

The Government finalised the basic structure of the CDS set-up, which will revamp top defence management. The setting up of a Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the tri-service Andaman and Nicobar Command under a Indian Naval Vice Admiral was also approved. The conceptual framework was more or less complete. The new apex set up will promote joint planning and execution of military affairs.

The CDS will be a four star officer assisted by a Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) and four Deputy Chiefs of Defence Staff (DCDS), who will all be three star officers from all the three services. The four Deputy Chiefs will look after the functional areas of Operations, Intelligence (DIA set up), Medical and Planning respectively. The Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services is likely to be redesignated as DCDS Medical. The Naval Chief of Personnel, Vice Admiral Arun Prakash took over as Commander-in-Chief of the first tri-service command known as Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC). Its major task is surveillance in the Bay of Bengal and the adjoining waters. The ANC will report to the CDS.

Details of the tri-service Strategic Force Command (SFC) comprising the country's nuclear forces have also been finalised. The C-in-C of the strategic forces will also report to the CDS, who will be the principal military adviser to the Government. Tri-service training establishments like the National Defence Academy (NDA) and the National Defence College (NDC) will also function under the supervision of CDS.

The tri-service DIA will be headed by a DCDS and will Pool together the intelligence resources of the three services through coordination and sharing of information. The DCDS (Intelligence) will also be an adviser to the Defence Secretary, Defence Minister, and Union Cabinet, to ensure that the Defence Intelligence inputs reach well in time to the decision-makers.

While the decision of the CDS was awaiting clearance from the Ministry of Finance, the then Air Chief Marshal A Y Tipnis played a spoilsport in its formation. He was not happy with the CDS structure in its present form. Informed sources have indicated that he had written to the Defence Minister Mr Jaswant Singh to put the proposal on hold because the IAF view was not taken into account.

The opposition of the IAF to the revamp of the country's defence management, it now unravels, is proxy war for the control of the 2,500 km Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile Agni II, a nuclear warhead delivery vehicle. The Government has decided to hand over the Agni-II IRBM to the Army, which has been asked to raise a Strategic Rocket Command to operationally handle surface based nuclear weapons.

All the recommendations contained in the GoM report were accepted by the Government with a modification that before a view is taken on the recommendation relating to the institution of CDS, various political parties could be consulted. The process of consultation with political parties was initiated by issuing letters to National and State level political parties by the Raksha Mantri on 02 March 2006, eliciting their views on the establishment of CDS. A reminder was issued by the Raksha Mantri on 12 June 2006 and again on 11 January 2007. Replies from four political parties only were received and replies from the majority of the political parties are still awaited. The government is seeking a consensus among all the political parties before going ahead with the creation of the post.

The MoD would like the services to believe that pending creation of CDS, the COSC with the assistance HQ IDS, would continue performing the functions of CDS to a large extent. India is perhaps the only major democracy where the Defence Forces Headquarters are outside the governmental structure. The Chiefs of Staff have assumed the role of operational commanders of their respective forces rather than that of Chiefs of Staffs to the cabinet. They simultaneously discharge the roles of operational commanders and national security planners/managers, especially in relation to future equipment and force postures. Most of their time is devoted to the operational role. Future-oriented long term planning suffers even though all the three services headquarters have been integrated with the MoD. At a theoretical level, civilian-military interaction constitutes a critical as well as controversial relationship in any country, whether it is a democracy or a dictatorship. Ideally, civilians and the military form two distinct domains, each with a specific set of functions. As per Clausewitz, while the decision to go to war is made by the political establishment, the military is responsible for the actual conduct of war on the battlefield. Yet this relationship is not as simple as it appears at first glance.

The crying need for a General Number one will not be met anytime soon. Apart from political apathy and bureaucratic opposition, even the Defence forces are reluctant to move forward on the crucial CDS issue at this stage.

Experts, however, feel that in the absence of a CDS, Army, Navy and IAF may well continue to behave without cohesion and effective direction as was seen during the 1999 Kargil conflict.

In fact, it's felt the CDS should be a five-star general, instead of being just a four-star general like the three Service chiefs, with clear-cut authority and full operational powers over the three services and in addition he would be an adviser to the cabinet on defence and national security matters.

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