

Integration of Ministry of Defence with Service Headquarters

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ORGANISATION FOR HIGHER DEFENCE

The organisation for Higher Defence Control can be summarized as under :-

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| (a) Tier 1. | PM, Cabinet and Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA). | Lays down the aims and broad political and defence policy objectives. |
| (b) Tier 2. | Defence Minister COSC and other policy interpreting agencies including the Ministry of Defence. | Interprets the aims and objectives and formulates the policy and plans. |
| (c) Tier 3. | Army, Naval and Air Headquarters. | Formulates plans for execution of the policy and plans laid down by Tiers 1 and 2 and is the main executive level. |

Tiers 1 and 2 of the organisation generally function through committees.

The Ministry of Defence as constituted at present, is partially a policy interpreting or formulating agency and partially an executive and coordinating agency. Details of the organisation and functions of the Ministry of Defence are given later in the paper.

Till September 1946, the Defence Department of the (British) Government of India functioned directly under the Commander-in-Chief in India in his capacity as the War or Defence Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The Defence Department was transformed into the present Ministry of Defence on August 29, 1947, as a unified agency for dealing with all the three Defence Services.

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

FUNCTIONS

Major responsibilities of the Ministry of Defence relate to :-

- (a) Defence of India and every part thereof, including preparation for defence and all such acts as may be conducive in times of war to its prosecution and after its termination, to effective demobilisation.
- (b) The Armed Forces of the Union, namely the Army, Navy and Air Force and their reserves.
- (c) The Territorial Army, Auxiliary Air Force and National Cadet Corps.
- (d) Works relating to Army, Navy, Air Force and Ordnance factories.
- (e) Military Farms organisation, Canteen Stores Department (India), Military Lands, Cantonments and connected matters.
- (f) Civilians paid from Defence Service Estimates.
- (g) Ex-servicemen and pensioners.
- (h) Hydrographic survey and preparation of navigational charts.

ORGANISATION AND WORKING

The Ministry of Defence provides the secretariat organisation to the Defence Minister for dealing with all matters pertaining to the three Services, Interservice organisations and civilian establishments under it; it also coordinates the actions of Department of Defence Production, Supplies and DRDO, where necessary. The professional head of the secretariat is the Defence Secretary (who has the status of a General, and takes precedence after the Service Chiefs in the order of precedence). He is assisted by an additional secretary and a number of joint secretaries, deputy secretaries and under secretaries (equivalent to Lieutenant Generals, Major Generals, Colonels and Majors respectively in the warrant of precedence).

It is to be noted that the structure of the secretariat is not as formalised and fixed as in the services; distribution of work, charter of duties and chain of responsibility are frequently modified and changed to meet the requirement

of the moment. Frequently, the same secretariat official is responsible to different superiors for different subjects. Also as the internal structure of the Ministry does not strictly correspond to that of the Service Headquarters dealings between the two are, therefore, on subject basis rather than on counterpart basis; the level of correspondence between the two is on a functional basis, unrelated to the status of the individuals.

INTEGRATED FINANCIAL ADVISER SYSTEM

The Integrated Financial Adviser System was introduced in the Department of Defence Production, Defence Supplies and Research and Development of the Defence Ministry in May 1976. It was decided to introduce the Integrated Financial Adviser System in the Ministry of Defence also with effect from August 1, 1983 with the issue of the following instructions :-

- (a) The Defence Division of the Ministry of Finance (Department of Expenditure), headed by the Financial Adviser, Defence Services was transferred to the administrative control of the Ministry of Defence and forms the Finance Division of the Ministry of Defence.
- (b) The officers and staff of the Finance Division of the Defence Ministry would be required to have a background and training in Finance and Accounts and FA(DS) will be consulted in the filling up of all posts in the Finance Division of the Defence Ministry.
- (c) The Defence Accounts Department will continue to report to the Financial Adviser, Defence Services who will be the cadre controlling authority as before.
- (d) In matters within the delegated powers of the Ministry of Defence, FA(DS) or his officers will be consulted before exercise of financial powers. In such cases, it will be open to the administrative secretary to over-rule the advice of the Financial Adviser Defence Services, by an order in writing, but it will also be open for the FA(DS) to request that the matter be placed before the Defence Minister.
- (e) Keeping in view the special requirement of the Defence Ministry the following procedure will be adopted in respect of schemes costing more than Rs 2 crores :-
 - (i) Scheme costing more than Rs 2 crores but less than Rs 10 crores will be processed on file for obtaining the concurrence of Ministry of Finance.

- (ii) Scheme costing over Rs. 10 crores will be examined by the Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) presided over by the Secretary (E), with Defence Secretary, Secretary (EAD) as member and FA (DS) as secretary. Secretary (Defence Production) and SA to Defence Minister would be invited when items concerning their Departments come up for discussion. The recommendations of the above committee will be subject to formal approval of the Ministries concerned and CCPA etc, as per existing instructions.
- (iii) Cases relating to revision of cost estimates in respect of items approved by EFC, where excess is over 20 per cent than the originally approved cost, will be referred to EFC as hitherto.
- (f) FA(DS) have the right of access to the Defence and Finance Ministers through Secretary (E) on such issues where he differs from the view of the administrative ministry.

INTEGRATION

Having reviewed the higher control of defence, it is necessary to highlight the shortcomings in regard to the relationship between the Service Headquarters and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). These are enumerated in the succeeding sub paragraphs :

- (a) The lack of direct and regular interface between military professionals with the political leadership.
- (b) The supremacy of the bureaucracy and the triplicated bureaucratic channel which requires examination of all matters first at the Service Headquarters, then by the MOD and finally by the MOD (Finance). In his paper* on the subject Mr Arun Singh has highlighted the bureaucratic bottleneck and the business of unnecessary repetitive analysis of issues. He says, "the passage of time has seen a drawing tendency of checks to overwhelm the balance." Further, he refers to the duplication (in fact triplication of work at Service Headquarters, MOD, Defence Finance) of the thinking processes and "thus a very fine set of intellects and experience in the form of middle and senior civil servant are spending an inordinate amount of time in relatively wasteful activity."
- (c) The MOD in its present role of a superior military headquarters, which requires that every issue has to be referred to it, whether it pertains to courses to be run at service schools of instructions or the establishment

*This paper by Mr Arun Singh, a former Minister of State for Defence, was published in the *USI Journal*, July-September 1989, Vol 119, No. 497, pp. 263-268.

of a movement control detachment at a rail head where the movement of troops returning from leave or courses of instruction necessitates its presence. In this role it duplicates the Service Headquarters and is redundant.

(d) The management of the day to day running of three Services, their training, administration and operational planning should logically be the domain of the Service Chiefs exercised through their respective Command Headquarters, intermediate and subordinate headquarters within the charter spelt out by the MOD.

(e) The MOD should primarily concern itself with national security issues and it should provide the secretariat for the "National Security Council" and other committees for the higher control of defense. At all such forums direct military advice to political leadership of the nation must be available rather than being sifted by the MOD. It would provide the coordinated views of the Chiefs of Staff (Chief of Defence Staff-when established). It would coordinate intelligence under the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), defence research and production. Procurement of weapon systems would constitute a major responsibility.

(f) Integrated finance with Service Headquarters will facilitate speedy and efficient functioning. Detailed expenditure within budgetary constraints on the advice of the integrated finance would constitute the necessary checks and balance.

(g) Integration of operational plans of the three Services can best be achieved by the Chief of Defence Staff system, rather than by the Chairman Chiefs of the Staff Committee; wherein the Chief longest in the chair as head of a service assumes the position of chairman. This would dilute the bureaucracy interface in the form of Secretary Defence, but would be an appropriate reorganisation. Almost all countries have now introduced unification of Services at the top by appointing a professional expert as Chief of Defence Staff. In India in the absence of any such arrangement, we continue to rely on the civil servants in the Ministry of Defence to resolve any conflicting plans or recommendations of the service, and specially so in respect of resource and budget allocation. Not unnaturally, the MOD has gradually assumed the duties and status of inter service arbitrator and director, a responsibility for which it is not constituted, or even competent.

(h) Drawing on the British experience, and making the Service Headquarters part of the MOD would ensure an integrated approach by Service Headquarters, Finance and MOD. This would change the role of

civil servants to a participatory one with Service officers who are specialist in their fields providing advice.

(j) Unlike the procedure in any other country in the world, our defence services are processed by three tiers of command and managerial control; ministerial, secretariat and financial. Ministerial and financial controls are but necessary in any democratic organisation, however, this novel feature of secretariat control is peculiar to India and is unnecessary and what is more uneconomical. In this respect today the position appears to be that although the civilian administrators in the MOD have a very important say in the strategic planning and coordination and financial control of three services in almost all day to day policy matters affecting defence, nevertheless, they have no responsibility towards military failures. To illustrate this, after the NEFA debacle in 1962 and for the many failings of the 1965 and 1971 conflicts with Pakistan, the fiasco that took place in OP Blue star, OP Pawan, Brasstacks and for what goes on in the Kashmir valley, no blame has been accepted by any single civil servant in the MOD or for that matter the Finance.

(k) Interservice rivalry and the lack of cooperation has further aggravated issues and lend credence to the fact that the requirement of civil servants in the MOD to arbitrate and resolve claims and counter claims is a must. While not unified in their argument for a Chief of Defence Staff, or for that matter on most issues of importance including operational planning, our political leadership is not left with any option but to have the civil servant as an interface between the political leadership and the military. For all practical purposes inter-service cooperation does not exist. At a point in time, it is a well known fact that the three Service Chiefs were not on talking terms. This is the first issue to be resolved.

HIGHER DEFENCE ORGANISATION

The integration of Service Headquarters with MOD is in itself not a panacea for all the ills of the system. It is a very small part of the larger issue - the Higher Defence Organisation in India. Let us briefly examine what is expected of such a Higher Defence Organisation before suggesting integration of Service Headquarters with the MOD.

(a) There exists a requirement for Service Chiefs to interact directly with the national political leadership on matters pertaining to defence. No dilution of the advice rendered, by intermediate organisations in the hierarchy is desirable.

- (b) On matters relating to defence, where many departments and ministries are involved, coordination by civil servants would be indispensable and is essential.
- (c) The Financial Advisor must be fully integrated into the system at the Service Headquarters level.
- (d) Duplication and triplication of examination of issues must be eliminated.
- (e) The creation of a system, similar to Chief of Defence Staff, to coordinate operational planning and allied functions of the three Services.
- (f) The MOD accept a participatory and accountable role in the operational planning from the inception.

A Higher Defence Organisation model which incorporates the above issues would be most appropriate. That is not to say that the present system of the Higher Defence Organisation is inadequate. It has stood the test of time and has effectively arbitrated issues between the three Services. However, a more efficient manner of realisation of this role would warrant a degree of change. This can best be brought about by having an appropriate Bill passed in Parliament; similar to the Barry Goldwater Act of 1985 in the USA. This would integrate Service Headquarters into the direct operational planning along side the civil servants and those who have their role at the national level.

CONCLUSION

To understand the requirement of the need for integration of Service Headquarters with the MOD we have examined at length the various departments in the MOD as also the financial advisors role. The duplication and triplication of examinations of issues, lack of direct access of military leadership to the political leadership, arbitration by the Defence Secretary on inter-service related matters and the non accountability by civil servants in the MOD for lapses in the Defence Services are some of the undesirable issues. The present Higher Defence Organisation has worked over the last 48 years; however, to make the system more efficient and responsive, it has been suggested that a Bill to reorganise the Higher Defence Organisation in India be enacted in Parliament. This would lead to a comprehensive integration of the Service Headquarters with the MOD and make the latter more accountable and participatory in its role in the defence of the nation.