Rudra Brigades: India's Leap towards Agile and Integrated Force Structures

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Abstract

This article examines the Indian Army's formation of integrated 'Rudra Brigades', all-arms groupings that combine Infantry, Mechanised and Armoured units, Artillery, Special Forces, and Unmanned Aerial Systems. Conceived as part of the army's modernisation and transformation drive, these formations are intended to enable agile, technology-enabled, and rapid responses in multi-domain operational environments. The restructuring reflects a shift in India's warfighting philosophy, designed to adapt to challenges posed by nuclear overhang, contested borders, and evolving hybrid threats. This article also highlights persistent concerns—such as the absence of government sanction, redistribution of resources from existing units, gaps in logistics, and the need for decentralised control of force multipliers like cyber and electronic warfare assets. The success of Rudra Brigades depends on clear command structures, realistic training, doctrinal evolution, and effective leadership development. While representing a strategic leap forward, the initiative requires validation in simulated operations, policy alignment, and sustained budgetary support.

Introduction

On the occasion of Kargil Vijay Diwas on 26 Jul 2025, General Upendra Dwivedi, the Chief of the Army Staff, announced the formation of new 'All-arms Brigades' named 'Rudra'. As part of

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the Indian Army's drive towards modernisation and transformation, he said that all-arms brigades and lethal Special Forces units were being developed to build a 'Future-oriented Force'.

Speaking at Dras, he said, "Today's Indian Army is not only successfully addressing current challenges but is also rapidly advancing as a transformative, modern, and future-oriented force. Under this, new all-arms brigades named 'Rudra' are being formed. This will have fighting components like infantry, mechanised infantry, armoured units, artillery, Special Forces, and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), supported by tailored logistics and combat support".[1]

He also stated that "Agile and lethal Special Forces units, 'Bhairav' Light Commando Battalions, have been established to shock the enemy on the border. Every infantry battalion now includes drone platoons, while artillery has enhanced its firepower manifold through 'Divyastra Batteries' and Loiter Munition Batteries. Army Air Defence is being equipped with indigenous missile systems".[2]

As per reports, two infantry brigades have already been converted into Rudra Brigades. The concept of Rudra Brigades is built on the Indian Army's previous proposal of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs). On the other hand, the 'Bhairav' Commando Unit is a lethal Special Forces unit. It is intended for quick strikes and rapid border deployment.[3]

The plan involves converting existing units and formations without fresh troop accretions. Presently, it does not appear to have been accorded government sanction, hence, the manpower and equipment would have to be offset from existing organisations and would create voids there, which of course will have its own impact. But it is a seismically important shift in the integration of various combat, combat support, and logistic elements to fight in a multi-domain environment together.

Existing System

Typically, a brigade is made up of three infantry battalions or their equivalent regiments of armour, mechanised infantry, artillery, Army Air Defence with supporting troops forming part of a division. The same, so far, are also arm-specific, like an armoured, infantry, or artillery division.

There are also independent brigades, namely armoured, mechanised infantry, para, infantry, and engineers, with a mix of various arms and services, which come directly under a Corps Headquarter (HQ).

As per reports, Rudra Brigades will comprise a mix of battalions or regiments from different arms. The composition will vary depending on the operational requirements and tasks at hand. These would also be adequately equipped with force multipliers like drones' surveillance equipment and area saturation weapons.[4]

For example, in the mountains, it may have two infantry battalions and an artillery regiment or in the plains, it may have two armoured regiments, a mechanised infantry battalion, a self-propelled artillery regiment, and an Air Defence (AD) regiment more suited for offensive operations. The latter being on the lines of an existing independent armoured brigade. Along the Line of Control (LoC), it could be infantry battalions along Special Forces elements.

The question, therefore, being asked in some quarters is whether the Rudra is just an upgraded form of these independent brigades with certain additional elements such as drones and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. In other words, is it old wine in a new bottle or does it mark a seismic shift in India's warfighting philosophy and methodology?

Foreign Armies

The United States Army has a Brigade Combat Team (BCT), which is the basic deployable unit of manoeuvre. It consists of combat arms and its assigned support and fire unit. It was designed to be self-contained, able to fight independently and have all the combat, support, and logistics capabilities required to conduct sustained military operations. This necessitated those capabilities at the division level such as artillery, engineers, and intelligence level to be shifted to the brigade level. This was intended to provide greater flexibility, decrease the logistical footprint, improve its ability to leverage command, control, communications, computers, ISR, and precision fires to increase lethality and meet the contemporary threats.

The Independent BCTs (IBCTs) are designed for combined arms offensive operations in restrictive or complex terrain against conventional or irregular threats. The design is such that it has all the necessary capabilities to allow it to operate autonomously or semi-independently. The central capability of the IBCT resides in its lethality provided by the two or three infantry battalions and their ability to bring additional combat power to bear on an enemy force.[5]

China's Combined Arms Brigades (CAB) are a key component of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Ground Force, representing a shift towards a more mechanised and integrated force structure. These brigades are designed to be highly mobile and capable of conducting combined arms operations, incorporating various combat arms like armour, infantry, artillery, and AD, all within a single, integrated unit.

The CAB is the primary ground unit of action of China's self-described 'World Class Military' designed to outmatch the US military by 2049.The PLA has 78 CABs spread across 13 group armies, which are corps-sized formations. CABs vary in size from approximately 4,500 to 5,000 personnel. Their composition in equipment and personnel, and the types of operations they are assigned are roughly equivalent to a US BCT.[6]

The PLA, it appears, is focusing on increasingly integrated systems and force structures that can conduct operations in and across all domains, combining a range of kinetic and non-kinetic effects.

In the Russian case, what has been witnessed recently, especially in Bakhmunt, is that while such a formation may be balanced in mechanised forces and supporting elements initially, it ran short of infantry, artillery, and air support. During the Battle of Grozny, in 1995, it faced a similar problem due to a lack of infantry as dismounted infantry is critical when fighting in urban settings, or seizing or holding terrain, as its Battalion Tactical Groups had tons of metal but little manpower.

As a result, after the initial setbacks in Ukraine, the Russians became more flexible and adaptive. Their battalions and brigades were provided tailored solutions based on the battle requirements by the higher formations, which is somewhat similar to the existing

Indian concept of combat commands and combat groups, which are flexible and tailor-made organisations for mechanised operations.

The Advantages

There are advantages to initially opting for such a grouping and mix, as the all-arms integration of armour, infantry, mechanised infantry battalions, artillery, AD artillery, Special Forces, and unmanned aerial vehicles operating under a single brigade leads to seamless coordination due to their training and affiliation.

These formations will also provide rapid deployment and flexibility. Being tailored to certain terrains and missions will enable swift offensive or defensive actions.

In the present environment of technology-enabled warfare, the use of drone surveillance, area saturation weapons, and precision-guided munitions increase battlefield effectiveness. Dedicated combat support to include artillery, AD, engineering, and communications as well as in-built logistics will allow operational independence and sustainment.

Combined arms warfighting argues against like-system fighting (i.e., tank against tank). Instead, combined arms require incorporating a diverse array of combat arms into a single organisation, so that the weakness of any single arm is compensated for by other arms' strength. Further, when properly coordinated and synchronised, combined arms complement one another: an opponent defending itself against one arm makes it vulnerable to another combat arm.[7]

Building on the proposed IBGs and Cold Start Doctrine enables generation of tempo and generates more options for employment. While rethinking the use of force to meet today's new challenges is a necessity, what is important is how these formations will be integrated into the current army's warfighting structures.

However, there are inherent disadvantages. The principal disadvantage is the logistic support and sustenance required to handle these formations, which may necessitate a change in the logistic units, which also includes the repair and recovery echelons. The other, of course, being a relook at the staffing at the Rudra

Headquarters so as to be able to manage these combined arms formations. Finally, and most importantly, is human resources, which includes developing the skill sets required and nurturing a mindset to enable prosecution of the envisaged tasks in keeping with the operational design and force application matrix. As Lieutenant General AB Shivane, former Director General Mechanised Forces, stated, the focus should be on "Molding competent leadership and directive style of command with traits such as boldness, initiative, audacity, innovative tactics, and non-linear thinking".

Analysis

While most may see the timing of the announcement to be fallout of Operation Sindoor but the army has been working on the restructuring of formations as part of its transformation studies for the past few years.

India is confronted with a strategic and operational environment characterised by complex interactions between multiple domains and fronts. This proliferation of domains and the interactions within and across them necessitates developing and implementing an effective strategy and operational art. The challenge necessitates the development of new concepts to design future capabilities and force development, basically a coherent theory of how to prepare, operate, deter, fight and win.

Hence, this restructuring is based not only on the threat perceptions and changes manifesting in the character of war but also on drawing lessons from the ongoing conflicts and experiences, following both Doklam and Galwan as well as along the LoC. With this as a background, the concept of IBG was initially mooted by General Bipin Rawat and the formation of Rudras seems to be an outcome of this exercise.

The threshold of use of atomic weaponry has been debated ever since the first atomic bombs were dropped in 1945. Thankfully that threshold has not been breached again. Nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan has reduced the likelihood of major war but simultaneously increased the salience of military coercion below the threshold of war. It is in this nuclear overhang, which is increasingly being seen as flexible that the Rudra Brigades will be operating.

Armies around the world base their structure on the kind of wars they are likely to fight, how they plan to fight them, and the best way to balance capability, capacity, and readiness. Hence, reorganising the armour and infantry capabilities into lighter yet more effective brigade-level formations can be seen as fallout of the harder look taken regarding the evolving threats expected to be encountered on the modern battlefield.

Structural transformations succeed changes in doctrines and are based on the thought process of the concept of employment in a given terrain and environment, keeping a particular response mechanism and end state in mind. Hence, these changes would have been well thought out.

However, the key lies in training and developing its unique skill sets as well as defining the command and control, and balancing both centralisation and decentralisation in a manner that the Commander of the Rudra Brigade is able to have adequate operational freedom to identify the decisive point of an operation, synchronise assets in time and space, and mass combat power against a capable and dynamic enemy to achieve the desired results.

The Unanswered Questions

The major question that needs to be answered is whether these formations indicate a shift in the army's military doctrine for the conduct of operations which presently centre around a division and, therefore, will divisions gradually give way to prosecuting operations at a brigade level?

Further, integration of force multipliers such as Electronic Warfare (EW), cyber, AD, and firepower beyond integral support is presently controlled at a higher level and, hence, decentralising these assets to a brigade level has its own issues regarding the matrix at which a brigade operates. Knitting together sensors and shooters, and the long-range precision weapons that can target the enemy's vital rear areas and lines of communication is essential but is unlikely to be meshed at a brigade level. More importantly, it is essential to provide the robust structures for the larger span of control that these independent brigades would require. These forces would also require to be self-contained with integrated tailor-made logistics as an enabling factor.

While writing on the IBGs, Lieutenant General Shivane has stated, “Knowledge of employment of all arms and operational dimensions of battle space as the science of war and leadership cum human-will as the art of war will result in decisive outcomes of IBGs. Risk taking, audacity, and initiative are essential for success”. Therefore, he said that along with restructuring IBGs, it is also important to focus on moulding competent leadership and directive style of command with traits such as boldness, initiative, audacity, innovative tactics, and non-linear thinking. IBG commanders need to fight smart and not allow predictability and set piece operations to stall their tempo.[8]

While currently these formations are being formed from within existing resources by offsets and creating voids in existing structures, they will need to have their organisational structure and equipment accorded the necessary government sanction is required with matching budgetary support, sooner rather than later, if this path is visualised as the way forward.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Indian Army’s Rudra Brigades represent a transformative step in modernising its operational capabilities along the borders with China and Pakistan. The all-arms integrated formations combining various combat elements and UAS into a single cohesive unit, supported by dedicated logistics and combat support, will be a force multiplier in the contemporary and future conflicts.

This integration allows the Rudra Brigades to deliver swift, flexible, and technology-enabled responses to diverse border scenarios. It is also part of India’s larger strategy to build a modern, self-reliant military, integrating cutting-edge technology with traditional combat strategies to ensure national security in an increasingly complex geopolitical and multi-domain environment.

Rudra gives tempo, better ISR, and sharper combined-arms edge potency. It is more modern and flexible but needs to transform into a multi-domain task force with the ability to coordinate air strikes, cyber, and EW, and jam enemy radars. There needs to be extensive cooperation between different weapons systems on land with assets operating from the sky, as well as in the domains of space and cyber. The formation will become more complex with each new capability that needs to be integrated.

The EW, communication, AD control and reporting linkages, Army Aviation, integration of sensors, and any other capabilities available at the Corps HQ should also be integrated into the operational concept. But transformation and restructuring is more than only new equipment and organisation; it also involves doctrinal changes regarding responses along the full spectrum of conflict.

Undoubtedly, Rudra Brigades are a step in the right direction. This is a thoughtful initiative designed with lessons from past experiences adapting to future threats. Though the changes in organisation, equipment, and tasking will need to be refined, following validation of these formations under simulated operational conditions. The feedbacks will then need to be examined, which will enable these formations to mature and evolve.

Successful military operations are the product of combined arms warfighting carried out by the appropriate force for both the threat and the operating environment. Their proficiency is the product of organisation, being well-led and capable of effectively integrating, synchronising, and executing all-arms tactical engagements and operations. The key being employability, interoperability, and access to capabilities between the services.

Endnotes

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