



# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Jointness Through Tri-Services Integration



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*The merely impediment towards accomplishing true jointmanship is merely attitude ; combined with a sense of insecurity; whereby the services fear that their single individuality and functional liberty will be compromised, because a peculiar service, will merely dominate the other two services.*

– Giulio Douhet, Italian General &  
Air Power Theorist

Joint efforts in military operations are coming into increasingly sharper focus because of technological advances and future battlefield milieu. The battlefield of tomorrow is certain to be more complex than it is today, and for success to be guaranteed, the entire edifice of the current decision-making process shall have to be upgraded.

The type of coordinated trilateral operations, which were typical of warfare in earlier days, is no longer appropriate or even relevant. And the fact that almost all countries have followed the integrated command concept shows that this has nothing to do with the global scale of operation, as defended by some.

Theatre commands are the way most modern militaries are structured, today. China junked

### *Key Points*

1. India's weakness on jointness calls into question its ability to formulate a coherent tri-services response to the 'two-front threat' posed by ongoing territorial disputes with Pakistan and China.
2. The present organizational structure and system of operation have several limitations and insufficiencies which adversely impact the military's aggregate capability. Present force constructions are not best structured and organized to optimally undertake security challenges which are on multiple fronts and multiple dimensions. .
3. Jointness can be envisioned in two main ways: coordination and integration. In the coordination approach the jointness is left to the discretion of the service commanders. On the other hand, the integrated model of jointness is one in which there is 'unity of command and effort', wherein the three services operate under a single commander.
4. Most western militaries have transitioned from the coordination to the integrated model of jointness. Jointness through integration enhances the effectiveness of the military, optimises planning, preparations, weapons acquisition, training and logistics, and obviates unnecessary duplication and wasteful expenditure.
5. The Central Military Commission (CMC), the People's Liberation Army and the theatre command system have been reformed after Xi Jinping assumed Chairmanship of the CMC.
6. The creation of the joint services Western Theatre Command by merging two former military regions would impact on the Chinese military response along the unresolved land border with India, leading to more synchronised operations against India.
7. Unlike China, the Indian Army has four commands on the northern frontier (bordering China) plus three Air Force commands. This has a direct impact on the defence preparedness and response options of India vis-à-vis China.
8. What we need is comprehensive reforms and restructuring to include higher decision making at the politico-strategic level, integration and restructuring at the Ministry of Defence and service Headquarter level. We need to create appropriate structures for jointness, both operational and functional, and set up the institution of Chief of Defence Staff as a keystone to this structure.

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## Jointness Through ...

the obsolete regional commands and transitioned to the far more effective theatre command structure in 2016. In Pakistan, all the branches (Army, Navy and Air Force) work together during operations and joint missions under the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. The United States, the world's largest military power, usually has a four-star Navy Admiral commanding its largest Pacific (now renamed US Indo-Pacific) command. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, for example, was led chiefly by the 'Coalition Forces Land Component Command' headquartered in Kuwait that reported to the central command in Doha, Qatar.

### Background

Shortly after assuming office, the then Defence Minister, Manohar Parrikar, had raised hopes for defence reforms when he stated on May 26, 2015 that "Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is a must...because the three forces' integration does not exist in the present structure".<sup>1</sup> However, within a few months he seemingly backtracked and said that the decision was not his to make.<sup>2</sup> In December 2015, Prime Minister Modi, while addressing the Combined Commanders Conference, made a comprehensive speech encouraging jointness and defence reforms and argued that it would be an 'area of priority' for him.<sup>3</sup>

Fully ceased of the need, the Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, said on July 13, 2018 that the government wanted the military to move towards creating theatre commands. She further added that the "issue of jointness is very dear to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's heart." A serving senior Navy Officer wrote in a paper for the military think-tank Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, stating that the Indian Air Force (IAF) with their service bias is opposing theatre commands and stalling the idea. IAF may have reasons to oppose the theaterisation plan however, this is not the only reason, we have not been able to move forward on such an important issue of reforms, affecting operational efficiency of the Indian Armed Forces.

India's weakness on jointness calls into question its ability to formulate a coherent tri-services response to the 'two-front threat' posed by ongoing territorial

disputes with Pakistan and China. There is an inevitable need for enhancing functional jointness in the field, emphasising interoperability and strengthening joint planning, training and operations. The lack of jointness is problematic not just from the perspective of military effectiveness but also on grounds of fiscal efficiency.

### Previous Wars and Engagements by Indian Armed Forces

In all the wars or major military operations undertaken by Indian Armed Forces, the three services have participated more or less in isolation, at best, supporting each other where necessary. The conflict of 1947/48 was an army-predominant operation. The roles of the IAF were restricted to transportation of troops and equipment, and provide limited air support to troops on the ground. In the 1962 war, the IAF and Navy were bystanders. IAF did actively fight the 1965 war but that was again without a well-conceived plan. The 1971 war was the first time when all the three elements of Indian Armed Forces actively participated. However, it lacked integrated planning of the campaign which resulted in quite a few unplanned and uncoordinated decisions being made. Operations in Sri Lanka (1987-90) or Kargil (1999) do not give any consoling analysis, though in both the operations, all the three elements of armed forces were actively engaged.

### Current System of Coordination-based Jointness

It would amount to exaggeration if we say that there is no jointness among all arms of our hard power. Moving forward with the establishment of the National Defence Academy (NDA), the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), the College of Defence Management (CDM) and the National Defence College (NDC), lot of comradery and coordination among officers from all the three services have been achieved. However, this is limited to the level of coordination, and not integration. Moreover, there is a need to institutionalise the integration/jointness and not leaving it to personal associations. This is not to undermine the very positive bearing even such jointness has on operational efficiency.

The present organisational structure and system of operation has several limitations and insufficiencies

which adversely impacts the military's aggregate capability. The present system causes the sub-optimum use of the available finances and resources due to overlap and commonality within the three services. There is a deficiency of centralised planning and prioritisation of equipment acquisition ensuing in wastage of finances and duplication of the procurement process. Owing to non-implementation of the most significant recommendation made by the Kargil Review Committee, that is, setting up the institution of CDS, there is a deficiency of single point advice to the Government on national security affairs in an amalgamated and holistic mode. Present force constructions are not structured and organised to optimally undertake security challenges which are on multiple fronts and multiple dimensions.

### *Need for Integration*

The war-ramping potency of any state would not merely be dependent on superior arm platforms, arms and a sound scheme but also upon the effectual integration of all the forces in a theatre battleground. A nation with a highly superior military capacity may still not withstand an adversary with lower capacity but if the same is put to optimum utilisation through structures, procedures, doctrine and integration, it can lead to a superior capability development.

As alluded above, jointness can be envisioned in two main ways: coordination and integration<sup>4</sup>. The coordination approach allows maximum autonomy to the services and does not require resolution of potentially contentious issues over turf, roles and, most importantly, command and control. In this, the jointness is left to the discretion of the service commanders. On the other hand, the integrated model of jointness is one in which there is 'unity of command and effort', wherein the three services operate under a single commander.<sup>5</sup> The integrated model usually appoints CDS or Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, has theatre commands and Joint Headquarters (HQs) at the operational level. Most western militaries have transitioned from the coordination to the integrated model of jointness<sup>6</sup>. Jointness through integration

enhances the effectiveness of the military, optimises planning, preparations, weapons acquisition, training and logistics, and obviates unnecessary duplication and wasteful expenditure.

### *Hurdles to Integration Process*

Why has there been no progress despite so many committees having recommended it? The blame for this must rest with all stakeholders, that is, the political class, parliament, the bureaucrats, the strategic community, but most of the blame should rest with the services themselves, who have strongly resisted change and preferred to preserve turfs and the status quo.

The Defence Minister (Smt Nirmala Sitharaman) gave an idea of how the government intends to go about. She said on July 13, 2018, "We want a bottom-up approach, create the base and then add layers to it, that way it will not be top-down." Looking at the issue de novo, the bottom-up approach through common training institutes such as NDA, DSSC, CDM, NDC, and through so-called joint procedures and planning has not worked. Intended jointness will not happen till we adopt a 'top-down' approach. We have not been able to come up with a commonly accepted roadmap towards jointness and prefer the existing coordination model. Without a consensus, the government is reluctant to accept the risks of imposing their vision of jointness. This could be out of the fear that doing so will make them responsible for military setbacks, if any<sup>7</sup>, or may be due to a limited understanding of the armed forces. Their hesitation towards appointing a CDS is also borne out of the fear that this may weaken civilian control and upset the supposedly 'delicate' civil-military balance.

### *Chinese Model of Military Integration and Theaterisation*

The Central Military Commission (CMC), the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the theatre command system have been reformed after Xi Jinping assumed Chairmanship of the CMC. The main thrust areas of the long-anticipated military reforms have been on the revamping of structures and systems at the political, strategic and operational levels. The aim of the reforms

was to establish a three-tier system where the CMC would be the first tier, the Battle Zone Commands/Theatre Commands system, the second functional tier and the administrative system that runs from the CMC through the various services, the third.<sup>8</sup>

#### Map showing Chinese Theatre Commands



Source: The Straits Times

The basic objectives of Xi's reform, as it appears, are two-fold: to centralise the PLA's decision-making in the hands of the CMC and Xi, and transform what has historically been a land-dominated military into a nimble, integrated force.<sup>9</sup> As the second part of this broader agenda, the PLA finally reorganised its seven military regions (MRs) (*jun qu*) into five new 'Theatre Commands' called *zhan qu* in Chinese. The powers of the CMC have been strengthened. The PLA's four General Departments have been restructured into 15 different Departments; these will be under the direct control of the CMC. The PLA will be downsized by 300,000 personnel by 2020. With increased reliance on technology for warfighting, the PLA Army is being streamlined into a leaner, more efficient force.

The creation of the joint services Western Theatre Command by merging two former MRs would impact on the Chinese military response along the unresolved land border with India, leading to more synchronised operations against India. Unlike China, the Indian Army has four commands on the northern frontier (bordering

China) – the Eastern Command in Kolkata, the Central Command in Lucknow, the Western Command in Chandimandir and the Northern Command in Udhampur, plus three Air Force commands. This has a direct impact on the defence preparedness and response options of India vis-à-vis China.

A case in point is the recent roadblock encountered on the issue of protocol and operational command with respect to setting up of a hotline telephone link between the militaries of China and India. The military hotline talks have stumbled after China proposed that the connection should be between its Western Theatre Command, headquartered in Chengdu (designated official) and Indian Army headquarters in New Delhi (Director General Military Operations). China argued that since the dispute along the 3488-km-long frontier was not settled and transgressions were routine, it was important that theatre commanders be quick to resolve differences. However, on the matter of protocol, Indian Army HQs is apparently being equated for practical purposes with a Chinese theatre command.

The ongoing resistance to theaterisation by various stakeholders is a natural reaction to any change. As also in case of China, after the draft plans were finalised in 2011, it took substantial time and effort by Xi Jinping and his predecessor, Hu Jintao, to build the required consensus in the PLA to begin the process of these transformational structural reforms and downsizing of the troops.<sup>10</sup> However, if its implementation is inescapable to meet the present and future security challenges India is faced with then, any amount of resistance will have to be overcome and apprehension allayed.

#### Suggested Roadmap

We should avoid falling into the trap of 'Hesitant Incremental Reforms' and instead grasp the great opportunity offered by our Prime Minister (PM) (Shri Narendra Modi) who has brought this very sensitive and important subject to centre stage in the Combined Commanders Conference held with the PM at the helm on December 15, 2015 and January 21, 2017.

What we need is comprehensive reforms and restructuring to include higher decision making at the politico-strategic level, integration and restructuring at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and service HQ level. We need to create appropriate structures for jointness, both operational and functional, and set up the institution of CDS as a keystone to this structure.

### *Integration at Higher Level*

- An expanded and tailored National Security Council Secretariat having a Deputy National Security Advisor (Military) headed by a serving three-star general with an operational cum perspective plan division, linked to the integrated staff and the armed forces.
- Restructuring of the MoD, which has been long overdue. True integration with the service HQs by infusion of service officers at various levels and vice versa is a must to ensure professional analysis and inputs for consideration of the *Raksha Mantri*. This will facilitate the MoD to evaluate operational issues, especially when there are competing claims, deftly. Such a capability along with the CDS would fill the existing gap. In addition, there is a need to build a greater specialisation in the Indian Administrative Service cadre that mans the most important posts in the MoD. Most important is to give the armed forces, 'department status' within the MoD, so that the chain is shortened and made more responsive, as also responsibility and accountability are clearly established.
- All organisations related to production, procurement and inspections need to be restructured to ensure greater representation from the armed forces at higher levels and more accountability.
- Early establishment of the National Defence University.

### *Jointness in the Armed Forces*

- We need to move from symbolism to substance. The philosophy should be: 'Three Services-One Joint Force', which should lead to optimum operational effectiveness on the battlefield of the 21st century.

- New structures being created should not make us top heavy, therefore, where necessary the existing structures may be trimmed or shed.
- A major reform of such a magnitude will not happen again for many decades, therefore, let us set our sights high and not be satisfied with mere tinkering.
- While clearly detailing the end state and getting approval for the same, we may seek to reach there in a pragmatic and phased manner.

### *Integrated Theatre Model*

- To achieve true jointness, we need to have the end state based on Integrated Theatres under Four-Star Generals/equivalent with all tri-service assets under one man. At the apex level, should be a Five-Star CDS with an integrated staff to support him. The Integrated Theatres should report to the CDS and through him to the Defence Minister and Cabinet Committee on Security. The three service chiefs should head their services and be responsible for manning, equipping, individual training and other miscellaneous aspects. The HQ Integrated Staff and the MoD should also be integrated to an optimum level to avoid duplication and unnecessary interference. In addition, there should be jointness in all supporting streams and structures, that is, logistics, medical and so forth.
- A suggested model for creating integrated theatre would include – (a) Western Theatre, responsible for Pak front from Jammu and Kashmir to Kutch under an Army General; (b) Northern Theatre, responsible for China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh borders under Army General; (c) Southern Theatre, responsible for Eastern and Western Seaboards, Peninsula of India and the island territories under a Navy Admiral; (d) Central Theatre responsible for rest of India including Air Defence and Space under an Air Force Air Chief Marshal; (e) the functional commands such as Strategic Forces Command, Cyber and Special Forces should be directly under the CDS and dedicated to the Theatres based on the operational requirement. Out-of-Area Contingencies should also be under the CDS incorporating the

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capabilities available with the Central and Southern Theatres. A lot of integration can be achieved in tri-services training, however, service specific training/ Training Command (Army Training Command for Army) may remain under the respective service chiefs.

- Each Theatre will have appropriate bi/tri-service components and integrated staff, but all reporting to the Theatre Commander. Locations of the Theatre HQs can be finalised based on operational and functional requirements. Each Theatre HQ should also have representatives of Civil Administration, Ministry of External Affairs, Scientific Advisor and Defence Estates.

### Conclusion

The old concepts of jointness based on cooperation and coordination among different wings of the military with tri-service execution are no longer enough; there is a

need to cement this with structures which are based on integrated planning and operations under one unified authority with responsibility and accountability<sup>11</sup>.

The armed forces have to move in the direction of jointmanship and would have to sacrifice some of their parochial service interests. We are still largely thinking and acting in a single-service mode. We need to move forward towards integrating our field commands and set up additional joint structures.

The Grand Strategic Vision of our PM will need to be complemented by robust organisations and structures in the field of diplomacy as well as security. The time is opportune for the armed forces to begin the process now, and complete it in a phased manner over a 4–5-year period. The services should not show any more reluctance, or else it may have to be enforced by the highest political authority and through an act of Parliament.

### Notes

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