



Why Is It Where We Are? And Prognostication of India's Civil–Military Relations



Col **Rajneesh Singh** is an Infantry Officer with an interest in India's Higher Defence Organisation (HDO) and its management practices. The officer has to his credit a number of published works on the subject in reputed professional journals.

The Indian civil–military relations (CMR) is an outcome of the higher defence organisation (HDO) and the higher defence management (HDM) system designed at the time of independence in 1947.¹ 'Pug' Ismay was invited by Mountbatten to help restructure independent India's security establishment.² The system devised by Ismay ensured firm political control of the Indian military and also ensured that the elected leaders received uncorrupted military advice, first hand, from the Service Chiefs. The system also provided for mechanisms for coordination among the three services. The architectural design of the HDO and the management practices put in place by Ismay were appropriate at that time, considering the turbulence in the early years of independence. Over the years, the security environment affecting the country, the geo-strategic situation of the world at large and South Asia in particular, changed in a manner unimaginable in the 1940s. In all these years, India continued to make economic progress, especially in the last quarter of the century, making it imperative to develop structures and mechanisms to protect its legitimate interests and resources. However, the country's security establishment continues to remain largely as conceptualised by Ismay six decades back.³

India's CMR became a subject of public interest ever since the uneasy Nehru–Cariappa, Krishna Menon–Thimayya relations were reported in the media. The more recent events, such as the disappointment expressed by the Services with the pay commission recommendations, the reasons

Key Points

1. Structural reforms to the Indian Higher Defence Organisation (HDO) may be undertaken in two stages. In Stage I, the Armed Forces Headquarters may be integrated with the Ministry of Defence and in Stage II, reforms within the Armed Forces may be undertaken. A gap of 10 years between the two stages is considered appropriate.
2. In order to reform the Indian security establishment the elected representatives will have to be convinced that the defence reforms are a national imperative.
3. Appointment of a Defence Reforms Commission by an Act of Parliament would facilitate reforms in an expeditious manner.
4. Parliamentary legislation articulating the architecture of the HDO, the system of its functioning, the position of its appointments as well as the functional relationship between them would institutionalise the defence establishment.

Why Is It Where We Are? ...

for the veterans to spearhead the 'one rank one pension' (OROP) movement and the government's handling of the situation, the response to 'Pathankot terror strike', leaking of a top secret letter from the Chief of the Army Staff addressed to the Prime Minister (PM), to the media complaining of the weakness in 'defence preparedness', are all indicative of the troubled CMR in India. The matter came up when the Indian Express ran a story about how the Ministry of Defence (MoD) was 'spooked' by an alleged unplanned move of some army units near the capital in January 2012. The matter was denied by the then PM; nonetheless, the obvious breakdown in the CMR had by then become public knowledge.

Many military officers have been vocal in articulating the problems of the CMR, even as the civil bureaucrats and the political class have been conspicuous in their silence on the matter.⁴ Some of the issues concerning the HDM, which the military resents, are given under:⁵

- Exclusion of the military in institutional decision making at the level of the MoD and the government,
- Delays in defence procurement and lack of accountability of errant officials,
- Deliberate erosion of the status of Service officers vis-à-vis civil services officers,
- Unfair recommendations of successive pay commissions concerning the Services and non-implementation of the directions of the Supreme Court on the subject.

India's national security architecture suffers from several systemic and structural weaknesses. The Indian HDO is not seamlessly integrated between the political leaders, the civilian bureaucracy and the military leadership, nor does India have a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) or a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). Consequently, even though India is a nuclear-armed state, the national security decision-making system does not enable the government to get single point military advice. The political leaders must consult with all three Service Chiefs and may have to contend with varying views in moments of crisis.⁶

Failed Attempts at Reforms

Ever since the 1950s, the governments have constituted committees to suggest reforms to address the problems of the CMR. The Public Accounts Committee Report of 1958 was critical of the duplication of the effort between the Service headquarter (HQ) and the MoD and of proposals emanating from senior level at the Service HQ being examined by junior officials in the ministry. In 1967, two committees on defence, presided over by Nawab Ali Yavar Jang and S. N. Mishra, recommended integration of Service HQ with MoD.⁷ These recommendations were not considered important either by the bureaucracy or the politicians, and these reports were not heard of after their

submission to the government. The then PM, V. P. Singh had also instituted a Committee on Defence Expenditure headed by Arun Singh, ostensibly to rationalise military expenditure but was meant to comprehensively enquire into the complete defence establishment. The committee's report has not been made public despite repeated requests from the Parliamentary Standing Committee.⁸

In the wake of the Kargil War, the government appointed the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) to study Pakistan's aggression in the Kargil Sector. The committee's report was a severe critique of the national security system and led to the formation of Group of Ministers (GoM). The GoM identified a number of problems with the HDM⁹ and its report on Management of Defence contains 75 recommendations.¹⁰ Almost a decade after the KRC and the GoM submitted their reports, the government constituted the Naresh Chandra Committee to revisit the defence reform process. The committee submitted its report to the government in May 2012, which has not been made public. The purpose of the committee was to "undertake a review of challenges to national security, and recommend measures that will improve our ability to deal with them."¹¹

The governments have, from time to time, made attempts to address the inadequacies of the CMR but have failed for a variety of reasons. A study of the state of the CMR is thus in order, to understand the existing status and to find possible solution to the ills plaguing the Indian defence establishment. The committees in the past have made some well-meaning recommendations to reform the Indian CMR; however, most of the reports of these committees have been lost in the offices of the government. What is important is to find new and innovative methods to implement the recommendations of the committees.

State of CMR and Impediments to Reforms

India's security establishment is in a dire need of reforms because of the problems of the present system and the complexities of modern-day security challenges. The inadequacies of the Indian defence establishment are a result of flaws in its architecture, deficiencies in its management practices and in the manner the reforms have been attempted in the past. The decision-makers can initiate reform measures if there is a clear understanding of the problems afflicting the Indian CMR and the impediments to reform measures. These issues have been analysed in the paragraphs below.

Architectural Inadequacies

Non-Integration of Service HQs with the MoD

The KRC and the GoM recommended the integration of the Service HQs with the MoD to 'promote improved understanding and efficient functioning of the ministry'. There has been no forward movement on this issue

except for the change in nomenclature of the Service HQs with no change in the status or the manner of functioning or staffing in the HQs or the ministry.¹² The delay in implementation of this recommendation has been attributed to the machinations of civil servants who have distorted the concept of civilian supremacy, since the early years of independence, to be interpreted as a bureaucratic control. As a result, the Service HQs are placed outside the MoD, which can be approached only through the medium of files, and this situation has persisted for the last six decades.¹³

Absence of Single Point Military Advisor

The modern-day security challenges are complex and fast changing. Resultantly, there is a requirement of a very responsive and dynamic HDO which is able to macromanage the defence planning process and the combat operations.¹⁴ The present system in the country is incompatible to counter the modern day security challenges and one reason for this is the absence of a single point military advisor to the government. The debate surrounding the appointment has been very vibrant and all interest groups, the three Services, the bureaucracy and the elected representatives, have at some time or the other opposed the appointment of the CDS. The above notwithstanding, it is an irrefutable fact that the absence of a single point military advisor results in the unsatisfactory use of operational capabilities, besides inefficient use of administrative resources, including the allocated budget.

Jointness

Independent India inherited a joint higher command structure, wherein the Commander-in-Chief was the head of the three Services, a role comparable to today's CDS. Since then, the structure has been dismantled and the Indian armed forces have innovated a unique structure and procedures to fight coordinated battles. The present system does not facilitate jointness, either in peace or war.¹⁵ The three Services work largely in isolation resulting in the wasteful expenditure of scarce resources and military capability. Efforts to usher real jointness among the Services have been resisted mainly by the Services themselves, as it would result in the displacement of privileges and authority of a select few in power and they have made certain to scuttle any attempts at reforms.

Problems of Management Practices

Ineffectual Decision-Making Process

The present hierarchal organisation of the HDO obligates sequential examination of the proposals initiated by the Service HQs. It starts with the lowest level of the MoD, followed by Defence Finance and the Finance Ministry, depending on the financial implication of the proposal. The process is the same for force planning, manpower accretion, defence acquisition or any other issue. The duplication at every level of the bureaucracy results

in time delays. The consequence of the separation of the Service HQs from the MoD becomes even more pronounced since the HDO architecture and the system permits the Service HQs to only recommend proposals and the MoD, manned by civilian staff, to dispose them. This is not a satisfactory arrangement and the delays have a telling effect on the defence preparedness and the state of readiness of the armed forces.

Elected Representatives and the Military

The nature of the Indian security establishment provides for a firm control of the military by the elected representatives. This is, however, not the case, as many times elected leaders have shied away from exercising their authority.¹⁶ The deficiency also partly arises from the nature of the electoral politics in India, which is a demanding enterprise both in time and effort.¹⁷ As a result, the space ceded by the elected representatives has been abrogated by the bureaucracy resulting in bureaucratic control of the military, and bureaucrats now loathe giving up their privileged status.

Bureaucracy and the Military

Civilian officers of the MoD are important cogs in the functioning of the defence establishment. The business of the government is transacted based on the provisions of the Allocation of Business Rules (AOB) and Transaction of Business Rules (TOB). As per the provisions in the rule books, the Defence Secretary is responsible for the 'Defence of India', while there is no mention of the responsibilities of the Chiefs. The governance system of the country, the architectural design of the HDO and the provisions of the AOB and the TOB enable the 'generalist bureaucrats' to comment or even overrule the advice of the 'specialist Service officers'. The problem gets further accentuated because of the limited knowledge and lack of experience of the civil servants, their selection and the manner of career progression and the developments in military-related technology.¹⁸ Some measures to develop expertise in the bureaucracy of the MoD were proposed in the past, but they did not find favour with the civil servants and never saw the light of the day.

Problems within the Military

The Indian military, like the other constituents of the HDO, the elected representatives and the bureaucracy, also suffers from inherent deficiencies. The problems concerning the military, inter alia, include the COSC and its functioning, the absence of a single point military advisor to the government and the issues associated with the appointment of the Chiefs.

The functioning of the COSC has come under severe criticism, both from within and outside the Services, for a variety of reasons. In its present form, the COSC has been found to be ineffective to resolve inter-Service

differences and the advice of the committee to the MoD is only recommendatory in nature and cannot be enforced even in a conflict situation. The position of the Chairman of the COSC is rotational and results in short tenures, with consequent inadequacies.¹⁹ Moreover, the Chairman wears two hats, that of the Chairman and of the Chief, hence his loyalties are divided and he is unable to devote adequate time to all his responsibilities.

Problems in Implementation of Reforms

The calls to reform the CMR have been raised from time to time; however, the Kargil conflict gave impetus to the demand for reforms. The conflict laid bare many of the faultlines in the defence establishment and the government constituted the GoM to undertake the review of national security. Impediments to reforms have been analysed in the paragraphs below.

Lack of Political Will

The Indian political establishment has proved that it has the political sagacity and astuteness to comprehend the most complex of issues, yet reforms to the CMR have not been on the forefront of their agenda. The lack of political will has been attributed to their engagement in high-intensity electoral politics and lack of substantive electoral gains in this enterprise. As a result, the successive governments have found it convenient to procrastinate issues related to defence reforms, specifically the appointment of the CDS.²⁰

Resistance from the Bureaucracy

The present system bestows vast decision-making powers upon the bureaucracy. The recommendations of the GoM and the KRC, if implemented, would curtail some of those powers and make Service officers partners in decision-making, thereby eroding the authority and the influence of the civil servants. The bureaucracy, since independence, has thwarted any attempt to reform the system, under the garb of 'civilian control' of the military, ensuring that the process of decision-making is dominated by the civil servants.

Resistance from within the Services

There has been some resistance to the appointment of the CDS from within the Services too.²¹ The Air Force has vigorously resisted this aspect of reforms apprehending that some of its assets and roles might be usurped by the other two Services. The army too has, at some point in time, indicated its disinclination to the proposed appointment. Many of the Chiefs too have not been very enthusiastic about the proposal. The Service Chiefs exercise a great deal of influence and authority over their respective Services. If the appointment of the CDS is instituted, then the role and authority of the Chiefs would be curtailed greatly. Since no Chief would like to do so, off late, their response has been lukewarm.

The Way Forward

The Indian security establishment has to function in an environment shaped by a wide range of factors which include actions of belligerent states, non-state actors, economic environment and technological development besides others.²² It is in this environment that India's HDO would be required to formulate policies and macro manage the actions and requirements of the Services. The Indian armed forces have steadfastly performed beyond the call of duty in the service of the nation. It has, in the process, won respect, admiration and adulation of the country. On most occasions, the armed forces have been able to rise to the occasion and have performed even beyond the expectation of the nation. However, in some areas of defence where Services have not met the expected standard is because of the constraints imposed by the nature of the CMR, flawed HDO and management practices. The Indian HDO and its practices designed for conventional warfare have been found unsuitable for the 21st-century challenges and need to be reformed post-haste. The defence reforms will have to be attempted at two levels, namely at the highest level of the HDO, which includes Service HQs, MoD and all institutions above them, and also at the level of the Service HQs and within the Services.

Role of HDO

India's HDO, through the MoD, undertakes activities related to policy formulation, programming and managing programs and oversight functions. Whenever any entity is made responsible for all three functions, it becomes inefficient and to an extent, ineffective. This is so because the managers of programs tend to become advocates for their programs, rather than dispassionate evaluators of how well the program in question meets the policy objectives and priorities. The MoD in its present set-up, thus becomes ineffective to undertake oversight functions over those programs which are initiated and approved by it. For example, in all capital acquisitions, the MoD, by default, becomes the initiator and the manager of the program after it approves the proposals of Service HQs. The MoD is unable to undertake oversight functions even when there are delays in acquisitions which have a direct impact on operational readiness. In view of the above, it is recommended that the HDO should only be responsible for policy formulation and oversight and the execution should be delegated to subordinate agencies. In the instant case, this would involve structural reforms of the HDO wherein the responsibility for acquisition will have to be delegated to an organisation outside the MoD, perhaps to a new organisation to deal with acquisitions and logistics.

Roadmap of Reforms

This essay posits holistic structural reforms of the HDO. The reforms may be undertaken in two stages, however,

some of the activities of both the stages may be undertaken concurrently. In Stage I, the Service HQs will have to be integrated as three additional departments of the MoD, while allowing the Services to retain their independent identities. Concurrently, the existing departments of the MoD will need to be reorganised to enable the ministry to undertake the proposed role of policy formulation and oversight. The reorganisation may include the creation of organisation for logistics and reorganisation of the present Department of Defence. The government may also consider the appointment of the Permanent Chairman of the COSC, at the same time there will be a requirement to define the relationship between the Service officers and civil servants and more specifically between the Permanent Chairman and the Defence Secretary.

In Stage II, the appointment of the Permanent Chairman may be considered to be upgraded to that of the CDS. This would entail reorganising some of the branches of the MoD as also redefining the relationship between the CDS, the Chiefs and the Defence Secretary. The Service Chiefs will have to be divested of their operational responsibilities and made capability managers of their respective Services.²³ Simultaneous actions will have to be taken to establish theatre commands and joint functional commands (suitable to the Indian context).

Stage I of the reforms is recommended to be implemented at the earliest. A time period of 10 years is considered appropriate for the system to stabilise before Stage II can be initiated.

Relationship between the PM, RM, the Chiefs and Their Staff

The armed forces are among the most important resources available with the government to implement its policies. Therefore, since the ancient times, the control of the forces has been exercised by the CEO of the country. This is true especially during wars and conflict situations where the role of the RM becomes somewhat anomalous.²⁴ The Services too have proved to be the most effective and efficient when there is direct interaction between the PM and the Chiefs during wars.²⁵ The RM should act as a facilitator to build this relationship. The RM's role is more pronounced during peacetime when he is expected to exercise oversight over the operational activities through the Chiefs and over the managerial activities through the MoD.²⁶ In times of relative peace, there should be direct and open channels of communication between the RM and the Chiefs, without the 'lurking presence of civil servants'. The staff at the MoD who represent and assist the RM also have their task cut out. They must not act as General Staff and manage the activities of agencies subordinate to the MoD but focus only on policy formulation and undertake oversight in their areas of responsibilities. This will only be possible

if the government undertakes holistic reforms, including amending the AOB and TOB Rules.

Reform Process

Since the 1950s, various committees constituted by the government have recommended reforms which should have been implemented long back. This has not happened because of the parochial interest of various parties of the defence establishment, including the bureaucracy and the Services themselves. Countries which had the bipartisan support of the political parties have been successful in implementing defence reforms, as was the case in the United Kingdom and the United States. Taking a leaf out of their experience, the elected representatives will have to be convinced of the necessity of the reforms.²⁷

This essay also recommends the appointment of a reforms commission by an Act of Parliament to recommend to the government the measures required to reform the HDO and the HDM.²⁸ The appointment of the commission will provide the government with the ownership of the project and ensure that the appointments concerned demonstrate personal commitment and take responsibility for the initiative. This will also provide legitimacy and urgency to the process. The Commission after having made its recommendations must be reconvened every year till the implementation of all its recommendations to monitor the progress and give feedback to the government and the Parliament.²⁹

In order to ensure that the recommendations of the Commission are implemented, a senior level committee headed by a Secretary/three-star general must be instituted. This committee will have to be resourced adequately in terms of manpower, finance, training and leadership. The RM and the senior leadership of the MoD as well as the Services will have to support this committee. The implementation process will have to be planned, sequenced and managed.

Promulgation of Legislation

An important step in establishing the condition of positive CMR will be enunciation of the roles and responsibilities of the principal appointments of the HDO through legislation and government orders. The essay recommends that legislation be passed by the Parliament which articulates the architecture of the HDO system of its functioning and defines the position of the important appointments as well as the functional relationship between them.

Role of Media to Alleviate Problems of CMR

Indian media, both print and electronic, have forever been a source of great strength to the armed forces. In the recent instances of Services and veterans raising the issue of the discrepancies in the recommendations of the Pay Commission and during the agitation to

implement OROP, most of the reputed media houses supported the cause of the Services. The television channels and the print reporting devoted a reasonable amount of time and space to carry out debates on the subject and in many cases, one could sense a leaning towards the cause of the Services. However, most of the debates and reporting played on the emotional quotient of the audience rather than educating them on the essentials and basics of the problem. To that extent, the role of the media has been commendable and praiseworthy. With regards to the issues related to CMR, the media lacks expertise. The media needs to develop in-house experts who understand the nitty-gritty and the complexities of the problem to be able to

explain it in a manner that a layman can understand and for this, they would require the help of the Services.

Conclusion

The recommendations being made in this essay would be a challenge for any government to implement, since changes would result in an overhaul of the system and bureaucratic winners and losers, as also provide for a greater oversight over the functioning of the appointments and the organisational entities. This will be resisted by all interest groups. However, since it is a matter of national security, the government will have to take bold steps and reform the defence establishment and redefine India's CMR.

Notes

1. In the absence of a common understanding of CMR, HDO and HDM in India as also abroad, the three terms are used loosely and sometimes interchangeably. For the purpose of this essay, the CMR is being understood as the functional relationship which the Indian Military has with the elected representatives, the civil bureaucracy and the management practices of the Indian HDO. Although, the study of the relationship between the military and the society also forms an important part of this branch of political science, it has not been dwelt upon in this essay.
2. Hastings Lionel 'Pug' Ismay, was a British Indian Army officer and a diplomat. He was Winston Churchill's chief military assistant during World War II and the first Secretary General of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He is remembered in India primarily for his contribution in designing the Indian HDO at the time of independence.
3. Prakash contends that Ismay's defence management model was meant to 'evolve and change as per the needs' of the country. The Indian HDM, however, has remained in a "time-warp since independence, and has thus become outdated and dysfunctional". See Adm. Arun Prakash, "Defence Reforms: Contemporary Debates and Issues" in Anit Mukherjee, ed., *A Call for Change: Higher Defence Management in India*, (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses).
4. Mr K. Subramanyam and Mr P. R. Chari, both bureaucrats, but above all very eminent and respected strategic and security experts have commented extensively on the subject. Mr. Jaswant Singh, former Defence and Foreign Affairs Minister, has also expressed his views on the need to reform the Indian HDO. Such exceptions are, however, a rarity in Indian bureaucratic community and among the political representatives. The minister and the civil officials have publicly articulated their views on the need for defence reforms.
5. R. Adm. A. P. Revi, "Fault-lines in the Civil-Military Framework in India and the Way Forward," *Defence Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, p. 135.
6. Brig. Gurmeet Kanwal, *Defense Reforms in India: Slow but Steady Progress Issue Perspective*, (Washington D.C.: Centre for Strategic and International Studies).
7. Ali Yawar Jang with a keen insight observed, "The subordination of the military to the civil power should be interpreted in the political and not in the bureaucratic sense. There is the factor to consider seriously of duplication of work which constitutes a waste, both financial and in terms of talent and time. Such duplication occurs mostly in the name of co-ordination and supervision, it contributes to little except delay". He also supported the concept of CDS. Mr. S. N. Mishra opined that "the principle of civilian control over the defence machinery should be interpreted to mean no bureaucratic or civil service control but essentially ultimate political control by the Parliament and the cabinet". See Brig. Vinod Anand, "Management of Defence: Towards an Integrated and Joint Vision," *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 24, no. 11, pp. 1975-1976.
8. Inder Malhotra, "A Tale of two Aruns", *The Hindu*, May 17, 2000, New Delhi edition.
9. The problems highlighted in the report and of interest to the subject of this essay are "...a visible lack of synchronisation among and between the three departments in the MoD, including the relevant elements of Defence Finance. The concept of 'attached offices' as applied to Services Headquarters; problems of inter se relativities; multiple duplicated and complex procedures governing the exercise of administrative and financial powers; and the concept of 'advice' to the Minister, have all contributed to problems in the management of defence. This situation requires to be rectified, to promote improved understanding and efficient functioning of the Ministry." The GoM was also of the opinion that there are serious flaws in the functioning of the COSC since in the present form it is unable to provide a single point military advice to the government, resolve interservice issues. The GoM report also highlighted lack of integrated approach in defence acquisition, weaknesses in linkages between plans and budgets and an absence of a dedicated, professionally equipped procurement structure within the MoD. See Government of India, *Report of the Group of Ministers on National Security* (Cabinet Secretariat: New Delhi, 2000), pp 97-99.
10. The Chapter of GoM Report on Management of Defence contains 75 recommendations. The MoD has completed action on 59 recommendations. Action on six recommendations is pending and ongoing on two recommendations. Eight recommendations of the chapter relate to institution of CDS which are pending for decision after consultation with political parties. See Ministry of Defence, Government of India, *Review of Implementation Status of Group of Ministers (GoMs) Report*

on Reforming National Security System in Pursuance to Kargil Review Committee Report – A Special Reference to Management of Defence, July 17, 2007, p. 5.

11. Manoj Joshi, "Shutting his ears to change", *Mail Today*, November 22, 2013, New Delhi edition.
12. The delay in implementation of the recommendation of the KRC and the GoM was noted by the Parliamentary Committee of the 14th Lok Sabha which had strongly recommended that the "staffing pattern in the MoD be suitably changed and the Armed Forces personnel of requisite expertise at the level of Joint Secretary and/or Additional Secretary should be appointed so that the Armed Forces Headquarters are intrinsically involved in national security management and apex decision-making processes." See Ministry of Defence, Government of India, *Action Taken Report on the recommendations/observations of the Committee contained in the Thirty-sixth Report (Fourteenth Lok Sabha) on 'Status of implementation of Unified Command for Armed Forces'*, December 16, 2009, p. 3.
13. Arun Prakash op. cit.
14. In India the requirement of the appointment has been advocated since the 1950s. The momentum for the appointment gained traction after the 1971 war. The debate was again revived in 1982 by Gen. K. V. Krishana Rao and more recently in the aftermath of the Kargil war.
15. General V.P. Malik, COAS during the Kargil conflict, had said "it is not my case that the Service Chiefs do not cooperate in war. Were they not to do so, it would be churlish. But in war, co-operative synergies are simply not good enough". See Lt. Gen. Prakash Katoch, "Permanent Chairman or CDS," *Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi*, <http://claws.in/Permanent-Chairman-or-CDS-Prakash-Katoch.html>, accessed on June 24, 2013. The GoM in its report was emphatic to advance the cause of jointness of the three Services, "Capabilities of Armed Forces can be enhanced significantly, if rather than operating as three individual units, they operate with a high degree of jointness and in close tandem with one another in conduct of various tasks, including training. Modern warfare demands much higher degree of coordination in operations by all the three Services than ever before."
16. This is a result of the 1962 debacle wherein then PM, Nehru and RM, Krishna Menon were widely criticised for interfering in the operational affairs of the military even to the extent of getting involved in deploying units and subunits of the Indian Army.
17. N. N. Vohra, former Defence Secretary, speaking of his days in the ministry has said "I worked with eight Raksha Mantris, of whom five became the Prime Ministers of the Country; and can say without any hesitation whatsoever that even the Prime Ministers who held charge of MoD remained most seriously concerned about national security management issues while being overburdened with a horde of crisis situations on varied fronts." Even though the views of the military may not be shared by their counterparts in the bureaucracy, the actual or perceived grouse of the Services need to be addressed.
18. H. M. Patel, a civil servant of distinction and former Defence Secretary, had once said "The ignorance of the civil servants in India about military matters is so complete...that we may accept it as a self-evident and incontrovertible fact. This reflected the fact that the Indian Government, politicians and civil servants alike, had had no experience of the military problems and technologies that became part of the civilian British and American culture from the First World War on. When added to the alienation from, and distrust of the soldiery which Congress politicians had inherited from the period before independence, this inexperience goes far to explain the failure to relate political decisions to military factors which led both to the border war and to the Indian debacle." See Neville Maxwell, *India's China War (Dehara Dun: Natraj Publishers, 1997)* p. 203. H.M. Patel had made this remark in the early years of independence; the situation today is not much different. N. N. Vohra, Defence Secretary in the 1990s, had voiced a similar opinion while delivering a talk in 2013, "(A)nother frequently voiced dissatisfaction is that the civilians who are posted in the MoD do not have adequate past experience of working in this arena and also do not have long enough tenures to gain specialisation for effectively dealing with military matters. This perception is largely true".
19. As a result of the existing regulation, the tenure of the Chairman varies between 30 days to twenty months, which is not adequate to do justice to this very important appointment. Admiral Arun Prakash took over the appointment of the Chairman of COSC in February 2005. He was the fourth successive incumbent in the preceding six months. Similarly, when he relinquished the appointment twenty months later under the existing rules, three more changes were likely to take place in the next 10 months.
20. Since 2001, various governments have maintained a consistent stand on the necessity of building a political consensus before appointing a CDS. In order to do so the then RM had issued letters to the national and state level political parties, one on March 02, 2006 seeking their views on the appointment of the CDS. A reminder letter was issued by the RM on June 12, 2006 and January 11, 2007. Four political parties have sent their replies to the government and the remaining are yet to respond. See P. K. Vasudeva, "Jointness in Defence Services: Chief of Defence Staff is a Must for the Defence Services," *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, vol. C38, No. 571. The inaction on part of the government had forced the Parliamentary Committee to come out with a scathing observation on the government's inaction, "One of the important recommendations made by KRC and GoM relating to the appointment of CDS could not be approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) in May 2001 since it was decided that the Government would take a view after consulting the political parties. In the long period of eight years that has passed since then, political consensus on the issue still could not be evolved. The Committee fails to understand the lack of political consensus on such an important issue concerning the security of the nation, particularly when the system of CDS is prevalent in 67 countries of the world which include the developed countries like France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States and had proved its efficacy. The Committee concludes from what has been stated above that the concerted efforts in this regard have not been made by the Government. Merely writing letters even from the level of the Defence Minister is not sufficient. There is an urgent need to use the various fora of interaction with the leaders of the political parties. Besides, the efforts can also be made by deliberating the issue in Parliament through various mechanisms available under the rules. The Committee expects the Ministry to take the effective steps as suggested above so that the institution of CDS is set up expeditiously." MoD, 2009, op.cit., pp. 5-6.
21. US model of 'Chairman of the JCS' with a strong centralised military authority results in enhanced jointness amongst the Services and also ensures better quality of advice to the government. This is borne out by lessons learnt from the operations conducted post

... Prognostication of India's Civil–Military Relations

implementation of Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Indian decision-makers would do well to take note of this important lesson from the study of US model of defence reforms.

22. Review carried out by the Parliamentary Committee on the implementation status of the GoM's Report highlights the nature of threat to the country, "National Security is a function of a country's external environment and the internal situation, as well as their interplay with each other. The traditional concept of national security has undergone fundamental changes over the years. It is no longer synonymous with sufficient military strength to defend the nation and its interests. Both the external and internal environment are changing at an incredibly fast pace, with developments in nuclear weapons and missiles, increasing cross-border terrorism, the emergence of non-state actors, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, the narcotics-arms nexus, illegal migration and left-wing extremism, gravely impacting upon the security of the country. The rapid technological developments underway at the same time not only facilitate these events by reducing our reaction time but also add entirely new dimensions of threats and challenges." See MoD, 2007, op. cit., pp. 3-4.
23. In the UK and US models of reforms, the appointment of the CDS/Permanent Chairman of the JCS eventually results in the reduction of role and authority of the Chiefs. The CDS and the Permanent Chairman would become the representatives of the armed forces and the Chiefs would be relegated to a position of 'manager' of their respective Services. In the United States, one of the reasons for concentration of authority in the Permanent Chairman and Combatant Commanders was aimed to reduce Service parochialism.
24. "John Nott too played a well judged and significant part. In war, the position of the Secretary of State for Defence, who is not also the Prime Minister, can be anomalous. There has to be a direct relationship between the Prime Minister and the Chiefs. Nott cast himself as something of a devil's advocate in his discussions with the Chiefs within the MoD, ensuring that political requirements and military planning were co-ordinated, and that realism always prevailed". See John Nott, "THE FALKLANDS WAR – 25 YEARS ON Inside the War Cabinet Reflections by Britain's Defence Secretary during the Falklands War", *RUSI*, vol. 152, no. 2, pp. 74-77.
25. During World War II, British PM, Churchill combined the roles of the PM and the Defence Minister. During the Falkland War, John Nott, Secretary of Defence ensured nobody came between the PM and the CDS, not even Defence Minister and the civil servants. In both cases, the system benefitted from such practice. In India, during the 1962 Sino-India War, the role of the Defence Minister has been commented adversely, while in 1971, the positive relationship of then PM and the COAS is considered as an important enabler in the outcome of the war.
26. "When the Prime Minister asked me how I wanted to present the military proposals of the MoD to the War Cabinet, I said that this role was better filled by Lewin, rather than by me. Lewin was infinitely more important in the War Cabinet than I, the Defence Secretary. And so he should have been. The position of the Defence Secretary in times of war is anomalous. In times of peace, or near peace, the Defence Secretary has to be in charge, but in war, that role must be exercised by the Prime Minister, supported by the CDS." See John Nott, op. cit.
27. The UK and the US experience has been that whenever the reforms have been driven from the top they have nearly all succeeded. Realisation of necessity of reforms by the government is a prerequisite to undertake reforms in the MoD.
28. British government launched the Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010 under Lord Levene. The study of the composition of the Levene Committee is indicative of the inventive thinking in composition of reform committees. The British Government was determined to get the benefit from the best practices available in the military and in the public and private sectors. This reflected in the composition of the Committee. The Committee was headed by Lord Levene, a distinguished businessman with a stint in the government and banking sector and six other members with equally distinguished careers in the civil services. Ursula Brennan, 2nd Permanent Under Secretary and General Sir Nick Houghton, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff provided the defence expertise and departmental standpoint.
29. The follow-up actions to the recommendations of the committee form a significant part of the reform process. Involvement of the Parliament provides legitimacy and a sense of urgency to the process. The Levene Committee went a step further to recommend that the Committee itself should be reconvened on an annual basis for three years to report the progress to the Secretary of Defence, who will then report to the Parliament.

The contents of this Issue Brief are based on the analysis of material accessed from open sources and are the personal views of the author. It may not be quoted as representing the views or policy of the Government of India or Integrated Headquarters of MoD (Army).



CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS)

RPSO Complex, Parade Road, Delhi Cantt, New Delhi 110010

Tel.: +91-11-25691308, Fax: +91-11-25692347, Email: landwarfare@gmail.com

Website: www.claws.in

CLAWS Army No. 33098