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Defence Reforms: Chief of Defence Staff

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IntroductionThe article is based on **“Can a CDS act as a catalyst for further defence reforms?”** published in The Hindu on 20th August. It talks about the role and challenges ahead for the newly-announced post of Chief of Defence Staff.

Context

- In his Independence Day speech, PM announced that India will soon have a **Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS)**.
- The CDS is meant to be a single-point military advisor to the government, and to coordinate long-term planning, procurement, training and logistics of the three services.
- Its creation was recommended in 2001 by the **Group of Ministers (GoM)** that was tasked with studying the **Kargil Review Committee (1999)** coming up with concrete proposals from it, led by K. Subrahmanyam.

Why had India not appointed a CDS until now?

- Apprehensions in the political class about a powerful military leader, along with inter-Services bickering, have long worked to disincentivise creation of CDS.
- After the GoM recommendations, in preparation for the post of CDS, the government created the **Integrated Defence Staff (IDS)** in 2002, which was to eventually serve as the CDS's Secretariat. However, over the past 17 years, this has remained yet another nebulous department within the military establishment.
- No consensus emerged among the Services, with the Indian Air Force especially opposed to such a move. The opposition, was against the idea of concentrating too much military power in the CDS's post. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) too, opposed it subtly for the same reasons, and because it could disrupt civil-military ties in the latter's favour.

Why now?

- India has had a feeble equivalent known as the **Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC)**; but this is a toothless office, given the manner in which it is structured. The senior most among the three Service Chiefs is appointed to head the CoSC, an office that lapses with the incumbent's retirement.
CoSC arrangement is seen as unsatisfactory, and its Chairman as a **figurehead**. The post did not further tri-service integration, resulting in **inefficiency and an expensive duplication of assets**.
- In 2012, the **Naresh Chandra committee** recommended the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee as a midway to allay apprehensions over the CDS.
- The CDS is also one of the 99 recommendations made by the **Lt General D.B. Shekatkar (retd) Committee** which submitted its report in December 2016 which had 34 recommendations pertaining to the tri-services.
- All major countries, especially the nuclear weapon states, have a CDS. With increasing complexity of security challenges in modern warfare arena, it requires a more integrated approach to defense strategy.

Task ahead for the CDS

- **Achieving Inter-services Synergy:**
 - improving **inter-services synergy** and laying the road map for time-bound integration
 - attaining a **seamless integration of the MoD** with service headquarters
 - assuming the **operational responsibilities for all tri-service commands** and agencies
 - steering the **creation of integrated battle groups** for various contingencies as a precursor to validating the concept of theatre commands
- **Strategic Challenge:**
 - India currently faces multiple security challenges. Because of frequent conflicts on the land frontiers, both internal and external, **India's security landscape has been naturally dominated by the Indian Army**.
 - Balancing this reality with a realisation that **both maritime and air power are going to play an increasingly important role** in India's rise as a leading power will be among the initial strategic challenges the CDS faces.
- **Balancing the Competing Interests:**
 - Balancing national interests, shedding his own service affiliations, and looking after the interests of all the three services will always be a tough act.
 - CDS must also have the world view and political awareness necessary to engage with diverse stakeholders.
- The CDS is also seen as being **vital to the creation of "theatre commands"**,

integrating tri-service assets and personnel like that in the US military.

The creation of the CDS will need to be followed up with further reforms to reconfigure the armed forces to meet India's aspirations to be a global power.

Drishti Input

"Explain the role of Chief of Defence Staff(CDS) in strengthening India's security and military mechanism. Identify the challenges ahead for the CDS."
