



Theatre Command in India

According to report of Pentagon, China continues to rapidly modernise its war-fighting capabilities. In this context, Indian Armed forces lacks on various front for a coordinated approach to tackle China threat.

China frontier is handled by Western Theatre command, which handles entire 4057-km of line of actual control. However, the problem of disjointedness still prevails in Indian army.

In such a scenario, creation of unified theatre command is needed for India.

Andaman and Nicobar Command

- It is the only integrated theatre command in India, formed in 2001 after the Kargil war.
- It is a very small command, with limited resources, and there has been a demand to revert the control of command permanently to the Navy.

What is a Theatre command?

A theatre command is an organisational structure designed to control all military assets in a theatre of war to achieve military effects.

- A joint command is called a 'theatre command' in military parlance (of army, air force and navy).
- It places the resources of all forces at the command of a senior military commander.
- For example a 'theatre command' in the East will integrate components of the IAF and the Army, and also have component of the Navy integrated with it.
- At present, the only joint command is learnt to be in Andaman and Nicobar islands.

Views in favour of Integration

- The integrated **theatre commander will not be answerable to individual Services**, and will be free to train, equip and exercise his command to make it a cohesive fighting force capable of achieving designated goals.
- The **logistic resources** required to support its operations will also be placed at the disposal of the theatre commander so that it does not have to look for anything when operations are ongoing.
- This is in **contrast to the model of service-specific commands** which India currently has, wherein the Army, Air Force and Navy all have their own commands all over the country. In case of war, each Service Chief is expected to control the operations of his Service through individual commands, while they operate jointly.

Views against Integration

- There has been no occasion, during actual warfare, when the three services have not operated with commendable cooperation.
- Faraway lands war and medium to high intensity wars are a distant possibility.

- With increased communication network , interaction between three organization is easy, they can come on board , can planning without much consideration of spatial distance, so there is no need for new organisation.
- Domain knowledge of the integrated force commander is likely to be limited in respect of the other two Services components under his command, thereby limiting his ability to employ them in the most suitable manner and at the appropriate time

Challenges posed by present structure

The structural problem with current structure

- None of the present 17 commands is co-located at the same station, nor are their areas of operational responsibility contiguous.
- In addition, there are 2 tri-service commands **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)** and **Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)**, which is headed by rotation by officers from the 3 Services.
- The **SFC (Strategic Forces Command)**, looks after the delivery and operational control of the country's nuclear assets. It was created in 2003, but because it has no specific geographic responsibility and a designated role, it is **not an integrated theatre command but an integrated functional command**.
- There has been a demand for **other integrated functional commands, such as the cyber, aerospace and Special Operations commands**, but the government is yet to approve any.

Other problems

Lack of coordination among the three services	▪ India is perhaps the only major military that does not have a CDS-type post. ▪ This has created problems for the integration of the three services and also on other issues like joint training and planning. ▪ Under the current structure, the three service chiefs are protective of their turfs and perpetuate a single-service approach to training, planning and operations. ▪ The service chiefs are used to almost complete autonomy, leading to unnecessary duplication, wasteful expenditure and a single-service mindset.
Chief of staff committee not very effective	▪ The COSC as an experiment has not worked very well. It is driven by single-Service requirements and perceptions. ▪ Chairman of COSC lacks executive authority over Services other than his own Service. ▪ The COSC works primarily by consensus and finds it extremely difficult to agree on hard decisions that are binding on all the Services.
Requirement for battle preparedness	▪ During war, the fate of an entire campaign can hinge on a single decision. ▪ Such a decision can only be made by a specially selected defence chief and not by a committee like the COSC that operates on the principle of the least common denominator. ▪ In the newly emerging scenarios, with threat perceptions ever changing the possibility of an unsymmetrical or lightning strike assault remains high. ▪ It would be outside the capabilities of any single service to respond effectively to such a diverse array of threats. It's in such conditions that the calls for a CDS assume further significance.
Need for unified expert advice from military	▪ The need for single point military advice for India's civilian political masters cannot be over emphasized. ▪ The political leadership would be in a dilemma if the three service chiefs offer separate opinions regarding a military campaign or another strategy.
Civilian bureaucracy acting as interface	▪ In the present structure, the military has limited access to the political leadership. ▪ The Defence Secretary and the National Security Adviser act as the interface between the Service Chiefs and the Cabinet Committee of Security or the National Security Council. ▪ However, these two posts are often manned by persons belonging to generalist services like IAS or IFS.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ This intermediate link often deprives the government of specific military opinion on important matters.▪ This also leads to turf battles between the civilian bureaucracy and the forces within the Ministry of Defence. |
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Opinion of Three Services on This Proposal

ARMY - In favour: It is time to move away from a service specific approach to operations towards a system which avoids duplication, ensures optimum utilisation of available resources.

AIR FORCE - strongly opposed

- It doesn't have enough resources — fighter squadrons, mid-air refuellers and AWACS — to allocate them dedicatedly to different theatre commanders.
- It believes that India is not geographically large enough to be divided into different theatres, as resources from one theatre can easily be moved to another theatre

NAVY-more nuanced, it too is not in favour of implementing the proposal currently

- The current model of control by the Navy Headquarters ideally suited for its strategic role.
- There are also underlying fears about the smaller Services losing their autonomy and importance.

Recommendation by various committees

Kargil Review Committee, Shekatkar Committee have lamented on compartmentalised planning against external and internal threats with some 'jointness' envisaged at the highest levels. According to these committees, this leads to a disjointed and fragmented execution at the operational and lower levels, leading to a lack of synergy within the battle space. To eliminate this, institution and operationalization is necessary.

Conclusion

Changing dynamics of national security which, now encompasses cyber, automation and such new challenges, cannot be solved by a disjointed general and MoD labyrinth but rather a clear and robust structure that should quickly respond to emergent situation.