



CLAWS

Why Chief of Defence Staff?

■ V Mahalingam

In seeking to estimate the nature of the next war, the course of our thought must inevitably reflect the progress of scientific invention.

— BH Liddell Hart

The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) headed by late Mr. K Subrahmanyam recommended the appointment of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as a part of its report in Jan 2000. The Naresh Chandra Committee on Security Reforms constituted in June 2012 watered down the proposal to suggest a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). Neither of these reports is in the public domain, thereby thwarting any worthwhile professional or public debate. Even after 13 years, the necessity of a CDS to strategise and coordinate future wars has not been recognised in India, which could lead to undermining the country's defence preparedness.

The transformations that have come about in terms of technology, military hardware and threats between 1971 and today will affect strategising, planning and executing military operations in the 21st Century. Future wars in the sub-continent will neither be designed nor fought in the manner of the 1971 Indo-Pak War or the Kargil conflict of 1999. As war-fighting instruments have undergone a drastic up gradation technologically, the need for an overall commander to handle joint military operations and his role in such operations is a vital necessity today.

Technological Transformations that Dictate Paradigm Shift in Warfare

Technology has enabled increased ranges of weapon systems with capability of bringing down very heavy

volume of fire with precision. This will result in the dispersal of forces, spread of deployment areas of indirect firing weapons and weapon platforms going beyond the confines of land boundaries. The theatre of war will extend both in depth and laterally. With the capability of advanced ballistic/cruise missile technology weapon systems to reach targets anywhere in the globe with precision, the war zone, even in the case of a limited war has the possibility of extending to sea, air, space and urban areas in depth. Destructive power originating from unexpected directions with minimal warning could lead to unnerving military commanders and the civil population. In addition, advances in night vision technology have enabled the continuation of conflict in hours of darkness and low visibility, thereby resulting in maintenance of momentum and intensity of conflict without a break. This will necessitate swift responses in more than one front and by different elements in accordance with the strategic blueprint.

Today, precision guided munitions have made their way into the armories of nations. Surveillance and target acquisition systems available to a commander, which include real time satellite imageries, have undergone a quantum jump. The process of 'systems integration' has made it possible for surveillance systems to acquire and direct indirect firing weapons, long range missiles and other weapon systems on to target with accuracy. Thus, the advantages provided by platforms such as submarines, ships, aircrafts and space to strike at select targets at the strategic level with almost no

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warning, demand integrated employment of all available resources. While accuracy of weapon systems will reduce collateral damage and moderate the quantum of ammunition needed to neutralise targets, the spread of battle zones and frontages will demand increased number of widely spread out logistic installations and infrastructure. Coordinated optimal employment of logistic resources available with the forces and their efficient management will therefore be the key.

The surveillance and integrative technologies have made the battlefield transparent resulting in the ability to obtain real time tactical as well as operational information and intelligence. Modern weapon systems, electronic equipment and platforms carry and in some cases are surreptitiously loaded with components capable of obtaining and transmitting information. GPS transponders show to a commander, real time pictures on a laptop screen. Coupled with the drastically improved communication systems, commanders have the option to choose the most appropriate instrument within the war zone to react precisely with speed to unnerve the opponent.

Electronic countermeasures, attacks in the cyber domain and operations by Special Forces will have the effect of paralysing command and control structures besides bringing about a standstill situation in government functioning and in various civil sectors. Space based systems will provide out of reach information including missile warnings. Movement and deployment of forces will become instantaneously transparent, unmasking enemy's strategic intentions.

300 mm Smerch Multiple Rocket Launcher Systems (MRLS), 214 mm Pinaka MBRL, BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, night vision devices, Dual Purpose Improved Conventional Munitions (DPICM), UAVs or Drones and Agni as well as Prithvi missile systems are

realities in the Indian context. These transformations will have to be objectively directed and made use of rather than events imposing itself on the country. Under such circumstances, the need for synergy amongst different services is paramount and fundamental.

The Shape of Future Wars

In extended war zone conditions with multifarious threats, war planning cannot be limited to the frontages within the confines of a particular service. The restricted notions of fighting and winning a war in the traditional main battle area are no longer valid. Since wars are fought for strategic purposes, the strategic context of application of force will have to be the main objective, which will go much beyond the scope of a single service. Under transformed conditions, it will be necessary for the overall commander to consider a large spectrum of issues on a long-term basis to evaluate enemy intentions and strategy options. This will include topography, locations, and strengths and weaknesses of own and opposing forces, which will influence the operations of more than a single service.

The ability of the enemy air force to achieve air superiority, the resources available with own forces and strategies to disintegrate his air resources will need careful consideration. The aspect of a land-air forces combine to engage and restrict the enemy's expansion in his selected thrust areas and deny logistic sustenance for his offensive need detailed joint planning. The options to deal with his strategic reserves and prevent his ability to concentrate his attention, assets and firepower at his designated point of decision in a transparent battlefield scenario will need smart solutions and lightning reactions. With the threat of tactical nuclear weapons and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) looming large, the overall design will necessitate wide dispersal with ability to concentrate forces and firepower at decisive points and the skill to disperse with least amount of delay.

In the Indian context, we may be presented with more than one front in the event of a war with either of our adversaries. A synchronised asymmetrical war in the hinterland is a possibility. Operational areas of the future will therefore have physical dimensions, which will include a combination of air, land, maritime and space domains. Operational areas may or may not be contiguous. When operational areas are not contiguous, suitably composed task forces consisting of components

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from more than one service in accordance with the overall commander's strategy will be the norm. The state of existing communication infrastructure and the availability of facilities such as ports, helipads and airfields would also have to be dovetailed into the planning parameters.

The weight of the military may require application on widely separated points and on various types of targets. These would also shift as the battle progresses. This could include operations conducted on land, sea, air, space and the cyber domain as well as interdiction operations. This necessitates a professional institution to assess intelligence inputs, prioritise military actions, conceive a joint operations plan, allocate war efforts and get the plan executed. Larger operational strategy in the envisaged environment will depend on the ability of the overall commander to identify the 'centre of gravity' of the enemy and destabilise him to a level where he loses his ability and the will to engage in conflict or continue with the operations. Such operations based on the larger strategic plan would require concentration of fire power, destabilising efforts to render the enemy's electronic equipment and communication facilities inoperable besides creating psychological impact on the enemy by interfering in his rear areas through various means including Special Forces. The overall commander will have to cater for the center of gravity shifting in the course of battle. Overall, the aim is to produce the right combination of effects in terms of time, space, ambiguity and disorder in relation to the 'centre of gravity' to neutralise, weaken, destroy or otherwise exploit the situation in a manner that best helps achieve military objectives. All this will require the overall commander to have a macro view of the complete situation over the entire battle space.

The Basic Architecture

The nature of future wars imposes the need for an overall commander to strategise and coordinate military operations. Besides providing 'strategic vision' to military operations in the context of larger political aims, he will head the apex planning body of the country and may be designated as CDS. Considering that he will be required to coordinate, take decisions on the employment of the services and be in a position to alter individual service plans and priorities to suit the larger strategic aims, he will necessarily have to be senior in rank to that of the Chiefs of Staffs of the three Services.

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A CDS, made responsible for strategic planning, coordination and setting priorities of the three services would be in a much better position to be the single point military advisor to the government rather than the Chairman COSC who would be more of a post office in the absence of any part or stake in the operational role of the services. The CDS would head the Strategic Nuclear Forces Command with the decision-making authority on its employment resting with the highest political head. Under the CDS would be all tri-service commands both present and future, Special Forces command (SFC) as and when created, Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and certain electronic warfare and cyber warfare units. With SFC coming under the CDS, intelligence available with the NCTC as and when created will also be available to the DIA. There would be a need to integrate intelligence inputs from all sources. The role and organisation of DIA will require an exclusive study.

CDS will not be tied down to day-to-day administrative issues or with the military procurement process. The Service Chiefs will continue to remain independent and head their respective service as hither to fore. The CDS will however formulate the inter services priority for procurement of military hardware, deal with budgeting, provide directions to the three Services and other components under his command and formulate National Defence Strategy based on the National Security Strategy formulated by the Government. The CDS would also evaluate threat perceptions, visualise operational roles of various services, equip them based on priorities and put them through joint training to enable jointness in all respects. He will issue joint warfare doctrines and training directives.

The selection process of the CDS must be kept well beyond politicisation of the appointment and should provide no incentive to senior military officers to curry favours from the political and bureaucratic establishment.

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To be of any use to the services and the profession, the incumbent needs to be provided a minimum tenure of 3 years. CDS thus created will provide strategic direction to war fighting, plot a synergised operational plan, and provide freedom of action to various services and other heads to plan and execute their part in the joint operational plan. Putting in place other inter-operable systems would be crucial for developing joint culture and synergy within the defence services.

Conclusion

The conventional military threat to India has not diminished, despite India being a nuclear weapon state. India has unresolved border and territorial disputes with China and Pakistan. The nation would have to effectively deal with border incidents as in the case of the Daulat Beg Oldie in April 2013 and cross border infiltration and attacks on Indian soil like in Mumbai (26 November 2008), Kaluchak (May 2012) or on an armoured regiment in Samba J&K (September 2013). Weak conventional deterrence will deprive diplomacy the legitimate strength and backup it deserves in negotiations besides affecting our credibility amongst other neighbours. Creation of CDS signals India's strength and military potential in keeping with the advancement of technology.

Armed forces overwhelm the enemy's ability to fight by coordinating indirect and direct fires, and by employing all available resources including those from ground, sea, space and air-based platforms. Inter alia, these would include assaulting with armour, mechanised forces, air assault, and infantry, jamming the enemy's communications,

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rendering his computer systems and electronic equipment inoperable, concealing own operations, making deliberate moves to divert and divide his attention and combat power and attacking him from several directions simultaneously. This cannot be done without employing the services in a coordinated manner through joint operations under a unified command.

Rendering military advice on matters influencing military operations without ground knowledge of problems involved in implementing strategies of vital national interest would be disastrous. Appointing a Chairman COSC to render 'one point military advice' would fall in that category. Far reaching changes such as joint warfare affecting the basics of war fighting will take time to sink in, in the minds of junior leaders, higher commanders and troops. Time will be needed to professionally prepare commanders at all levels and train troops and to remove glitches. It would require a leader to guide and develop the system right from its inception. It is imperative that a CDS be appointed without delay, lest the country's ability to defend itself gets compromised.



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