
Appointment of Chief of Defence Staff and Creation of the Department of Military Affairs: A Gamechanger*

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The announcement by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address to the nation of Government's intent to appoint a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) marked the gamechanger event that the country was to embark up on.¹ The subsequent appointment, in December 2019,² of General Bipin Rawat, to the newly created appointment as its first incumbent and the simultaneous creation of a Department of Military Affairs as a separate vertical within the Ministry of Defence with the CDS as its ex-officio Secretary are each and together tectonic shifts that have moved the balance in Civil-Military relations to a new normal. It has also disruptively altered the entire edifice of the structure of decision making relating to matters of military.

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* This article was originally published as web article at CLAWS website on 1 May 2020.

The “why” and “why now” for these decisions is best understood from the following excerpts from the Hon’ble Prime Minister’s address:

“... The world is changing today, the scope of war is changing, the nature of war is changing. It is becoming technology driven; in the circumstances India too should not have a fragmented approach ...

... Our entire military power will have to work in unison and move forward ... things cannot move smoothly if anyone from the Navy, Army and Air Force is a step ahead from the other two forces, while the other two are lagging behind. All the three should move simultaneously at the same pace ...

... today we have decided that we will now have a Chief of Defence Staff—CDS and after formation of this post all the three forces will get effective leadership at the top level.”²⁸

Three aspects stand out in this very deliberately drafted excerpt of the address. First, an acknowledgement that the (then) approach was “fragmented.” Second, the need for the three Services to “march in step” with good coordination. Third, and importantly, there was an expectation that “the three forces will get an effective leadership at the top level.”

Later, when the decision to create a Department of Military Affairs (DMA) was announced, in a rather direct and unexpected manner, with its notification and list of allocated subjects, it took a while to absorb the sheer gravity and implications of this decision.

The need for a CDS for India’s Armed Forces had been felt for several decades and even recommended by various Reform Committees in the past, in more recent times by the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) under the Chairmanship of the venerable K. Subrahmanyam. The committee was set up by the Government of India on July 29, 1999 three days after

the conclusion of the Kargil War “to examine the sequence of events and make recommendations for the future.” This was followed by subsequent recommendations by the Group of Ministers in May 2001.⁴

The focus here is not so much on the thought underlying the decision or the processes leading to the appointment of the CDS and the DMA, as the need to understand the implications for the future, especially how the Armed Forces will take their long denied space in the decision-making edifice of the Government of India.

Creation of the Department of Military Affairs

The creation of the DMA was enshrined through Government of India (Allocation of Business) Three Hundred and Fifty-third Amendment Rules, 2019⁵ by which the **Allocation of Business Rules, 1961** were amended as follows:

- Inclusion as a separate Department in the First Schedule of the Rules under “Ministry of Defence (Raksha Mantralaya).” These Departments now are:
 - Department of Defence (Raksha Vibhag)
 - Department of Military Affairs (Sainya Karya Vibhag)
 - Department of Defence Production (Raksha Utpadan Vibhag)
 - Department of Defence Research and Development (Raksha Anusandhan aur Vikas Vibhag)
 - Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (Poorva Senani Kalyan Vibhag)
- As notified vide Cabinet Secretariat Notification of 30th December 2019, the subjects allocated to the Department of Military Affairs (Sainya Karya Vibhag) are:
 - The Armed Forces of the Union, namely, Army, Navy and Air Force.
 - Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence comprising of Army Headquarters, Naval Headquarters, Air Headquarters and Integrated Defence Staff Headquarters.

- The Territorial Army.
- Works relating to Army, Navy and Air Force.
- Procurement exclusive to the Services except capital acquisitions, as per prevalent rules and procedures.
- Promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing for the Services through joint planning and integration of their requirements.
- Facilitation of restructuring of Military Commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands.
- Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the Services.

The critical decision of course is the appointment of the CDS. In addition to his functions as Military Advisor to the Raksha Mantri and as Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, is to also be the ex-officio Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs. The point of utmost significance is that it is now a Military officer in uniform who is the Secretary of the Government Department whose work areas include the direct oversight of the administration and management of the Armed Forces of the Nation.

Major Areas of Work Transferred to the DMA

It is the specific subject heads as listed in the respective charters of each of the transferred sections that define the immensity of the transfer. These subjects include:

- Military Operations including CI Ops. Deployment of Forces, Border Intelligence, Air Defence.
- Neighbourhood countries.
- Organisation and Manpower Planning, Pay and Allowances, Defence Services Regulations.

- Personnel Management—Postings, Promotions, Cadre Management and Reviews, Complaints, Discipline, etc.
- Terms and Conditions of Service, Grant of PC, SSC, etc., Recruitment, Policy, Exams through UPSC for CDS/NDA & Naval Academy Examination/IMA.
- Training Matters—CAT “A” Estts., Field Firing Ranges.
- Defence Diplomacy.
- Budget Aspects, Appropriation/Accounts and Annual Training Grant, War and Peace system of Accounting.
- Planning and procurement of wherewithal through Revenue route.
- Development of communication/roads.
- Policy, provisioning and procurement of clothing (including special clothing) and special equipment.
- Maintenance of Platforms—Aircraft, Ships.
- War Wastage Reserves.

Transfer of Work and Personnel to Department of Military Affairs (DMA)⁶

A total of Twenty-two Sections of the Department of Defence stood transferred to the newly created DMA. These were the Sections already executing the Subjects at Sers 1 to 5 of the above list of transferred subjects. Along with the Sections and their respective complement of authorised staff, two posts of Joint Secretary, thirteen in the ranks of Director/Deputy Secretary and twenty-five in the grade of Under Secretary also stand transferred.

Subjects Retained to be Dealt by the Department of Defence (DoD)

To give contextuality, it is pertinent to also see the subjects that remain

allocated to the Department of Defence. These are, principally, the following:

- Defence of India and every part thereof *including defence policy*, preparation for defence and all such acts as may be conducive in times of war to its prosecution and after its termination to effective demobilisation.
- The Reserves of the Army, Navy and Air Force.
- The National Cadet Corps.
- Remount, Veterinary and Farms Organisation.
- Canteen Stores Department (India).
- Civilian Services paid from Defence Estimates.
- Hydrographic surveys and preparation of navigational charts.
- Defence Accounts Department.
- Cantonment and Cantonment Boards, Defence lands and Property.
- Purchase of food stuffs for military requirements and their disposal excluding those entrusted to Department of Food and Public Distribution.
- All matters relating to Coast Guard Organisation.
- Matters relating to diving and related activities in the country.
- “Procurement exclusive to the Defence services” substituted by “Capital Acquisitions” exclusive to the Defence Services.
- All matters relating to BRDB and BRO.
- Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, National Defence College and any other organisation within the Ministry of Defence *whose remit is broader than military matters*.

The highlighted portions, which are both modifications to existing subjects indicate that all policy would be in the realm of the DoD with its role pitched at the level of “defence” of which, by implication, the “military” is a subset.

Organisation of the DMA

The DMA is now one of the five verticals of the Ministry of Defence, headed by the Chief of Defence Staff, who acts as its ex-officio Secretary and reports directly to the Raksha Mantri on subjects allocated to his Department. In addition to the Chief of Defence Staff, the Department staff comprises of two Joint Secretaries, thirteen Deputy Secretaries, and twenty-five Under-Secretaries and Twenty-two Section Officers whose sections had earlier formed part of the Department of Defence and now stand transferred to the DMA vide Department of Defence ORDER dated January 9, 2020.

Is the DMA Adequately Empowered to Execute its Charter?

A persistent apprehension in the strategic community is whether the DMA has been adequately empowered to effectively fulfil its charter. A close analysis of the charter of the DMA vis-à-vis the powers accorded to it would largely dispel such doubts.

- **Control of the Armed Forces of the Union—Army, Navy and Air Force and HQ IDS, Army, Navy and Air HQ and Territorial Army:** All major aspects of Armed Forces functioning have been brought under the ambit of the DMA. These include the organisation, recruitment, training, terms and conditions of service, personnel management including career management of all ranks. The advantage of the flurry of proposals that would need to be taken to reorganise the Forces to roll out integration, etc., now being processed for Government approval through a Department headed by the CDS are obvious.
- **Works relating to Army, Navy and Air Force:** Works planning, sanctions and oversight over execution have been brought under the DMA. This would enable hands-on oversight and close monitoring of several projects.

- **Procurement exclusive to the Services except Capital Acquisitions:** All revenue procurement for the Armed Forces would now be carried out with the oversight of the DMA. The participation of the CDS and the Service Chiefs in the Capital procurement process remains unaltered. Even for Capital procurement, the CDS has been chartered to assign inter-services prioritisation.
- **Promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing of the Services through joint planning and integration of their requirements:** The powers bestowed on the DMA are adequate for it to assume the role of an integrator of planning, coordination, procurement, resource management and training. Even though the CDS may not have operational control over the three Forces, his role as “Single Point Advisor” would necessarily have bearing on the political approval and guidance to the conduct of operations. More on this later in the Chapter.
- **Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the Services:** With control over revenue procurements, the DMA could, through gentle guidance move the procurement regimen towards one where non-critical procurements are increasingly sourced indigenously. This would require to be done at a “measured pace” item-wise, so as not to cause shortfalls. The CDS would also collaborate and coordinate with the three Services Chiefs at forums like the DAC to make a push for indigenisation of platforms, large equipment and critical spares.
- **Facilitation of restructuring of military commands for optimal utilisation of resources by bringing about jointness in operations, including through establishment of joint/theatre commands:** As emphasised by the Hon’ble Prime Minister in his Independence Day address, this is the very *raison d’être* for the decision to appoint a CDS. The CDS has been empowered with requisite control over entities, organisations and structures that would need to be amalgamated/

reorganised. It is now his alacrity, astuteness and professional wisdom to visualise what the restructured theatres would be and to draw up the roadmap to seamlessly transition without compromising operational efficacy. This has been elaborated in detail later in the Chapter.

Induction of Armed Forces Officers in the DMA

The subjects allocated to the DMA can be grouped into those that have been transferred from the DoD to the DMA and the three “greenfield” subjects (Sers 6-8 of list of subjects allocated to DMA) that have not been in the undivided list of subjects of the DoD.

Work pertaining to the transferred subjects are already being executed in the Sections along with their hierarchies that have been transferred to the DMA.

It is in regard to the “greenfield” subjects, the very nature of which requires experienced military hands with high professional knowledge and understanding that would per force make it imperative for induction of Armed Force officers and personnel into the DMA. Work on these subjects have to be visualised, planned and structures created for execution. By their very nature, these subjects require specialised military knowledge and experience. Accretions to DMA staffing would be required to execute its functions in these “greenfield” areas. These three “new” subjects of work allocated to the DMA would require induction of Armed Forces Officers into the DMA.

Alongside, the prospect of including Armed Forces Officers in the Central Staffing Scheme also merits consideration.

Devolution of Authority and Powers to Services HQ

The GoM Report itself had strongly suggested “decentralisation of decision-making” and “delegation of powers to Services HQ wherever feasible,” to commence with on routine administrative issues relating to personnel management of respective Forces up to a particular rank. This would considerably ease pressure on the CDS and allow the DMA space

and time to focus on forward planning. Such a move would again de facto nullify the “Attached Offices” status of the Services HQ.

Restructuring Service HQ in Tandem with DMA

The “mismatch” between various “levels” of functionaries at the Services HQ and the Ministry of Defence lies at the root of issues relating to equivalence, etc., that have caused so much angst in the recent past. There is occasion now to review the structures of the Services HQ to bring them “at par” with those in the DMA—level for level. This would ease the eventual process of the Services HQ themselves becoming Departments of the Ministry of Defence.

Time to Develop a Robust Bench Strength of Competent “Defence Administrators”

Nether Civil or Military Officers can expect or hope to serve in the DMA or the Services HQ beyond stipulated tenures. It is only the AFHQ Civil Service, entirely dedicated to the Ministry of Defence that can effectively serve this purpose. Amongst the early initiatives should be to review the deployment of this Service, train and utilise it to provide the backbone of support to decision-making across the DMA and the Services HQ. A long-standing suggestion to open the cadre to retiring Services Officers to facilitate ploughing back the wealth of their experience for the benefit of the organisation, should be reconsidered.

Shift in Work Culture

Above all, it is imperative for a culture of “Responsibility-Authority-Accountability,” as already being practised for operational matters, to be inculcated even for administrative decisions. This is an absolute “must” for effective and speedy decision-making and ensuring a change in prevalent work culture.

Jointness and Integration in the Armed Forces

To ensure true 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. Most important, it cannot be a please all effort. Some may gain or lose, so be it. We have been held hostage to such thinking/balancing for too long—not anymore !

The first step towards achieving jointness is for the COSC headed by the CDS to define the threats that the country is likely to face, in the near term, i.e., 5-7 years, as also over the horizon threats in the long term, i.e., 15-20 years. This threat perception should then prompt an updation of the joint services doctrine, followed by individual service doctrines. Capability development and prioritisation will axiomatically follow.

There is great scope to bring about jointness in operations, training, communications and logistics to include supply, transport, as also repair and maintenance within the three services. Whilst operations and training will get greatly enhanced through the creation of “Integrated Theatres,” the other aspects also lend themselves to greater optimisation and savings through jointness. Some of the measures that should be adopted are detailed below:

- Establishment of common logistics nodes where the three services can draw on rations, fuel and other miscellaneous logistics requirements.
- Commonality of transport, less specialist vehicles.
- Optimisation of the repair and recovery organisations and facilities available with EME and their counterparts with the IAF and IN. There is a lot of duplication within the three services, based on common equipment like B vehicles, small arms, AD weapons systems, UAVs, helicopters, etc.
- Annual maintenance contracts of commonly held equipment like Herons, Brahmos, etc., can also be optimised. The vast resources and expertise of DGEME can be put to optimum use.

- It may be worthwhile to order a study under the aegis of CISC/VCDS to recommend logistics optimisation within the three services. Similarly, the SO-in-C may be tasked to work out common signal communication protocols, as also standardisation, to the extent feasible, of communication equipment, medium and secrecy protocols, to ensure seamless inter-services communication. A small set-up like “TRAI” may be created under the CDS to coordinate and oversee this critical aspect.

Inter-Services Prioritisation for Capital Acquisition Proposals

In times of inadequate defence budget, especially for capital acquisitions, this role of the CDS has become critical, so that the meagre budget is put to optimum usage. The existing procedure mainly revolves around the LTPP/LTIPP (Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan) prepared by HQ IDS, based on which inter-services allocations are made by the MOD (which will continue to do so, being the charter of the Defence Secretary).

Intra Service priorities are laid down by respective Services, though this doesn't get reflected in the actual procurement. Based on the tedious procurement process, it is possible that quite often, a lower priority item gets through, whilst a higher priority equipment faces hurdles. This anomaly needs to be set right, through the creation of a long-term budget purchase plan, so that the meagre resources are spent on priority items. It is learnt that the Government is already working on a five-year budget for defence capital acquisitions, which will greatly facilitate procurement of priority items.

The CDS, of course, as per mandate will have a major say in inter-services prioritisation of the defence budget for capital acquisition. It is a challenging mandate, the more so because of already existing committed liabilities. The best way is for the CDS to scrutinise all big-ticket items and see how they fit into the joint war fighting doctrine/plans; also, examine

the affect it will have on prolonged committed liabilities, especially for the other two services. A good example is the recent decision to drop plans to acquire a third aircraft carrier, which would have severely curtailed the availability of funds for modernisation of the other two services.

Similarly, the requirement of IAF to build to a strength of 44 Squadrons needs deeper analysis, in light of acquisition of sophisticated aircraft and air defence systems. Unmanned aerial platforms are likely to revolutionise future warfare, that too at a fraction of the cost of 4th/5th Generation aircraft. A deeper analysis is necessary to get the right mix. The Indian Army has already dropped its ambitious plans for the “Battlefield Management System” and deferred some big-ticket purchases, like the FICV and FRCV.

The Robotics revolution is well under way and we haven’t even started with a clarity of what that means, both in terms of doctrinal changes as well as development of related technology. We are aware that DRDO is doing some good work, but that’s not enough. The book *Wired for War* by P. W. Singer (*New York Times Bestseller*, Penguin Books, 2010) is a compelling and authoritative account of how robots will become integral to twenty-first century conflict in all the four dimensions, land, sea, air and space. In the words of the author, science fiction has turned into science reality. The killing of Iranian General Suleimani in a US drone strike recently has illustrated this starkly. Our recommendation is that this subject be taken under direct aegis of the CDS and a comprehensive task force assigned to take it forward. This must be accorded the highest priority both doctrinally and for capability development, involving both DRDO and the best of private sector.

Desired End State

In our view the best way forward is to adopt regressive planning, i.e., first decide the end state and then work backwards how to achieve it, in

phases, as may be necessary. To achieve true jointness we need an end state based on “Integrated Theatres” under 4-star Generals/equivalent with tri-service/bi-service assets under one Commander. At the apex level, should be a 5-star CDS with integrated staff to support him. The integrated theatres should report to the CDS and through him to the Raksha Mantri and the CCS. The three Service Chiefs should head their services and be responsible for manning, equipping, individual training and other miscellaneous aspects. This should be the long-term desired end state. However, for now, this article will confine itself to what has been sanctioned by the Government, i.e., A 4-Star CDS (First amongst equals), with no operational role and military command, which will continue to rest with respective Service Chiefs.

Integrated Theatres

An Integrated Theatre of Military Operations envisages a unified command of the three/two services within the defined theatre, under a single Commander who may be from the service(s) which has the most prominent role within that theatre. The Theatre will normally be defined by a geographical space and include the land, sea and airspace as applicable, which is likely to get involved in military operations. The Integrated Theatres may also be defined functionally, based on the commonality of role/purpose, i.e., an aerospace/air defence theatre.

So far, the Indian Armed Forces have been functioning as single service commands, which support each other during operations. This at best is an arrangement that may be functional, but certainly not optimal for meeting the requirements of fast-paced synergised operations in the Twenty-first Century.

Based on the threat on either flank or the maritime domain, certain geographical theatres stand out, along with some key functional theatres. A few options exist, each having their own merit. A reasonably viable option is detailed in succeeding paragraphs. Certain specific service commands, for the present, will continue to remain directly

under the Service HQ. Presently, the following Integrated Theatres are recommended:

- **Northern Theatre**
 - Including jurisdiction of current Northern Command, including 14, 15, 16 corps and 9 corps (extended up to Ravi River).
 - Will also be responsible for the China front in Ladakh, HP and Uttarakhand, with an Inf/Mountain Division, suitably located for reaction in HP and Uttarakhand.
 - The IAF will have to designate an Air Command (between WAC and SWAC) to be part of this theatre and provide air support and conduct air operations in support.
 - The Northern Army Commander may be upgraded as the Northern Theatre Commander with HQ at Udhampur.
- **Western Theatre**
 - Will include the Army's Western Command (less 9 Corps), SW Command and Southern Command, organised into two Commands—Western and Southern, with the SW Army Commander being designated the Western Theatre Commander, with HQ at Jaipur.
 - One of the Air Commands (between WAC and SWAC) will look after the Western Theatre with suitable adjustment of boundaries, location and rationalisation of assets.
- **Eastern Theatre**
 - Responsible for the Eastern China border, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh borders.
 - Comprised of Eastern Command, now redesignated as the Eastern Theatre with HQ at Kolkata and the Eastern Air Command, which may be suitably relocated, if considered necessary.
- **Maritime Theatre**
 - Comprising the Navy assets of Western and Eastern Naval Commands, with the WNC redesignated as the Maritime Theatre.

- Southern Air Command, suitably augmented with assets, will be placed under Command to provide the air support.
- 91 Inf Bde, should also be placed under Command to provide the Army component of the amphibious capability.
- **Aerospace and Air Defence Theatre**
 - This will cater for the overall air defence responsibility of the country, with bulk of army and air force AD assets under it.
 - The Central Air Command would be upgraded to a theatre, also retaining a portion of air assets as central reserve to provide flexibility. This theatre should also be responsible for all space assets of the country, providing space support to other theatres.
- The Central Command of the Army will remain directly under Army HQ and be responsible for the hinterland and lines of communication, with ATNK&K, MG&G and MB areas under it.
- The individual services will also retain direct control of their training and maintenance commands (Southern Command in case of Navy).
- Similarly, the Strategic Forces Command and Andaman Nicobar Command will continue as hitherto fore, under HQ IDS/CDS.
- For out of area contingencies, both Aerospace and Maritime theatres should be mandated, with asset allocation for the task decided by the CDS from other theatres also, as necessary.

As far as command and control is concerned, the Theatre Commanders would report to the Service HQ to which the Theatre Commander belongs.

The CDS will of course have a major coordination role and approve shifting of assets as may be necessitated by an operational contingency. The role of the COSC may have to become more prominent, with the military directive to the Theatre Commanders being issued by the COSC, rather than individual Service HQ.

The status of Theatre Commanders will have to be enhanced; could be done either through conferring 4-star rank or even if 3-star, a select rank superior to the status of an Army Commander. This can be decided in consultation with the Government.

Why Are the CDS and DMA a Gamechanger?

For a single significant reason—that the Government has placed intrinsic faith and trust in the capability of the Armed Forces to administer themselves and manage the “military space” in the canvas of Government functioning.

It is however the combination of the three roles the CDS would play that makes his appointment and creation of the DMA a gamechanger. As the Permanent chairman COSC, the CDS can set the agenda and pace for collaborative decision-making on jointness of plans and integration of resources through creation of “Integrated Theatres,” as mandated. In addition, based on the likely threat perception (both short and long-term) an updated joint warfare doctrine should be formulated on priority.

Further, optimisation of resources for training, logistics, communication, personnel management and inter-services prioritisation of capability acquisition will get us the desired interoperability and the best out of the limited defence budget.

As secretary DMA and Principal Military Advisor to the Raksha Mantri, the CDS would have the final secretarial word on the administrative processing of these proposals and approval of implementation plans and orders. At each stage, the CDS is the veritable “Shepherd” who will guide and monitor the course and pace of military reform.

It is now up to the Armed Forces to “seize the opportunity” and make the institution of the CDS and DMA a success—not just for the good of the Forces, but also as much for the Nation.

Notes

1. PIB (Press Information Bureau) (2019), “English Rendering of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi’s Address to the Nation from the Ramparts of the Red Fort on the 73rd Independence Day—August 15, 2019,” Government of India, August 15. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=192663>. Accessed on April 30, 2020.
2. Manjeet Singh Negi (2019), “A Day Before his Retirement, Gen Bipin Rawat Appointed India’s First Chief of Defence Staff,” *India Today*, December 30. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/gen-bipin-rawat-appointed-as-first-chief-of-defence-staff-1632705-2019-12-30>. Accessed on April 30, 2020.
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6. Ministry of Defence (2019), Department of Defence (DoD), Government of India. <https://mod.gov.in/dod/>. Accessed on February 20, 2020.