

Achieving Jointness in War

One Theatre < One Strategy

*Ashish Singh**

The creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is a start to defence reforms. This should improve jointmanship in peacetime; however, joint wartime performance needs further reform and improvement. We face three problems: (i) historical lack of unified warfighting strategy formulation at the apex military level; (ii) the unclear division of responsibility and resources between service Chiefs and Commanders-in-Chief (C-in-Cs); and (iii) the differing natures of command and control between the three services, which manifest as differences in structural organisations. Treating India as one unified theatre can reduce these problems. It will allow the creation of a joint structure for strategy formulation at the apex level, resulting in one national strategy to guide subordinate strategy. Also, it will give ownership of all warfighting assets to a single commander who can centralise or decentralise at will, and yet not preclude formation of smaller military entities with collocated headquarters (HQ) of subordinate service formations. Examples from history support the arguments.

I believe in Theatre Command; India is one Theatre.

– Air Chief Marshal B.S. Dhanoa (Retd.)¹

INTRODUCTION

Two decades after the idea was mooted, the Prime Minister finally announced the creation of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) for the

* The author is currently serving in the Indian Air Force (IAF). The views expressed here are his own and do not reflect that of the IAF or the Government of India.



armed forces of India.² This announcement was followed by the creation of a new Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to be headed by the CDS. The reported mandate of this department indicates that the responsibilities of the CDS will largely focus on increasing synergy in the peacetime functioning of the armed forces.³ However, some authors have also merged this reform with the concept of creating multiple Theatre Commands, hoping that 'Theaterisation of commands...is the next logical step.'⁴ This author has conceptually separated the two forms of reform in a previous article, arguing that the Theatre Command is a lower form of reform and that higher defence reform has to precede the creation of Theatre Commands.⁵ Now that the CDS, which is largely a reform which focuses on peacetime synergy, has been announced, this particular article tackles the next step, the war-fighting function reform. The core argument herein is that we need to tackle India's defence as one *unified* Theatre in the move towards better joint war-fighting.

The following section of the article delineates the three main problems we currently face, and will continue facing even after the office of the CDS is established: the failure to formulate a unified strategy; dual-hatting of the Chiefs; and the complicated issue of differing levels of command and control of the three different forms of military power. Thereafter the article delves into two philosophical questions regarding the establishment of our theatre(s) of war. Next, flowing from the above enquiry, it shows how treating India as one theatre will allow us to reorganise better than other suggested models, mainly because our historical failure of joint fighting has been due to the failure to formulate joint strategy at the highest level.

THREE MAIN PROBLEMS

No Unified Strategy

The first problem that the Indian military has been unable to overcome with its current structure is formulating unified strategy for wars at the national level.⁶ In 1947, our forces mobilised in haste and tried to improvise with what they had. Nevertheless, the joint performance was satisfactory, in the context of the Partition and given the peculiar circumstances of the Chiefs being British. The forces that went into battle consisted of experienced veterans of Second World War, who had fought jointly in the Burma campaign.⁷ The credit must also go to the

British, for it was a military formed and trained under them which had not yet got the time to reorganise and reorient.

Subsequent credits and critiques, however, belong to the Indian military leadership. The 1962 Sino-Indian war showed the first failure of joint strategy; the Indian Air Force's (IAF) offensive element was not used.⁸ Even the transport element that was used was often unclear of ground deployments. This was because '[t]he air force knew nothing about the army plans and was not consulted in any way about defence against a Chinese attack.'⁹ The same lack of joint military strategy was evident in 1965 too. In the build-up to the 1965 war, the IAF and the Indian Navy (IN) were excluded from army-driven strategy, until the army asked for help.¹⁰ Even during its conduct, the official history records that 'both the Army and IAF had their sights firmly fixed on their respective objectives, and the co-operation between them was incidental, rather than well planned.'¹¹ The fighter aircraft of the navy were left out of the land and air battles, despite the fact that the carrier was undergoing repairs.¹² This occurred because there was no common strategy flowing down from any joint HQ at the apex level. The only exception was the 1971 war. This was the only war where we were proactive rather than reactive. The focus of this war was East Pakistan, and the Indian leadership, both political and military, *together* decided to hold in the west and gain territory in the east.¹³ The results of unified strategy were spectacular—Pakistan was cut in two. The Kargil conflict in 1999 again saw regression to single-service strategy. The IAF (and IN) was called in *after* land forces had already been committed to frontal assaults, leaving no other option but an attrition-style land war supported by artillery and air-delivered fires. Thus, except for 1971, joint military strategy at the highest level has either been absent or has been a single-service strategy, with the other two services trying to catch up.

The blame lies with both structures and processes at the highest level as well as the perceptions. Structurally, the only level at which *all three* services sit together is the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). However, without a permanent Committee with a permanent war planning staff, strategy formulation is almost impossible at this level. The next level at which even two service staffs sit together is at the army/navy command level, where the IAF has delegated a portion of its control staff as an Advance HQ or at HQ Maritime Air Operations (MAO).¹⁴ Apart from structure, there is no *process* which ensures that the military solution to

any warfighting problem offered to the political leadership mandatorily has to be a tri-service output. In addition, due to pro-rata staffing of even joint institutions, decisions tend to unconsciously be army (doctrinal) outputs by what Allison and Zelikow call a Model II process.¹⁵ Last, given our large army—a colonial inheritance—the perception of most of our public and political and even military leadership is that military equates to the army and its way of fighting. A diversity of strategic options are neither evaluated nor jointly tabled as strategy options.

However, at the operational and tactical level of war, historical *execution* has not been as dismal. This is because, at the lower levels of war, structures (and established process) like Advance HQ of the IAF have ensured a degree of jointmanship at the army and navy command levels and below. The IAF was formed as a ‘tactical air force’ for army cooperation and, in keeping with that ethos, is the only service which has built organisational structures to offer combat power in support of the army and the navy.¹⁶ And yet, these are not truly joint; for they presuppose a supporting role for air power to land and naval battles and do not cater for support of the navy to the army, or army to the air force.¹⁷ Nevertheless, with existing structures and processes, in 1965, the IAF flew 1,400 offensive fighter bomber sorties in offensive air support between 6 and 23 September 1965, which translated to 35 per cent of total war effort dedicated to close air support (CAS) and interdiction.¹⁸ In 1971, the quantum of offensive air support to the army by the IAF increased to 49 per cent of the total effort.¹⁹ However, these joint efforts at tactical level were not entirely efficient. As per Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal, it was because ‘no one in the army assigned priorities to the battles for air support. It was left entirely to the TAC commander and one Major (GS02) to send air effort where they judged it was needed most.’²⁰ He also laments the waste of sorties in terms of excessive ‘search and strike’ missions.²¹ However, the point remains that the main problem has been above the operational level of war—the absence of joint strategy *formulation*—and not as much tactical execution.

Dual-hatting of Chiefs

The problem is made worse by the Chiefs of the three services being dual-hatted, which is the second main issue to be resolved. The problem with dual-hatting is that in today’s complexity of war, it does not allow the commander to concentrate his mental energies on both management

of services in peace and orchestrating war. While the nomenclature of Indian service Commanders-in-Chief (C-in-Cs) changed in 1955 to Chief of the Army/Navy/Air Force Staff, their C-in-C responsibilities were not allocated away.²² De facto they remain part C-in-Cs too, responsible for warfighting outcomes, but having to work through Command C-in-Cs.²³ Reform processes in other countries have separated the responsibilities and chains of command between these two functions. For example, a study of the United States (US) reform process over time shows how they, first, united disparate services by creating a Department of Defense in 1947, then separated command/war and staff/peace functions between commanders and Chiefs of Services Staff in 1958 and last, created a clear channel of command between the commander and the political leadership in 1986.²⁴ The reform has been top-down, with a clear demarcation of responsibility, authority and empowerment of the *single* fighting commander.

Dual-hatting is usually an ‘invisible’ problem, appearing only in times of war. In peacetime, the tasks involved in just running the complex organisations which constitute our armed forces occupy most of the mental and temporal faculties of the leaders. On the other hand, sub-organisations responsible for prosecuting war, like air operations centres or military operations directorates, appear to be underemployed in peace. So, in prolonged no-war situations, they are either burdened with non-warfighting responsibilities or appear to underperform professionally—for they seem to have no work in peace. Why then did the US separate the two functions? The US is an exceptional nation that has continuously been at war for the past century. Its lessons have been learned from its own wars and not others’ experiences. Countries like Britain, however, have rarely seen conventional conflict after the Second World War, and do not face existential threats on their borders. Hence, Britain continues with dual-hatting of its CDS. Dual-hatting reduces the time and attention paid by leaders and their staff to keep focusing on war.

Differing Levels of Command and Control

It is the third problem, however, that is the knottiest issue: the problem of command and control of the different elements of military power. The creation of navies as a separate element from armies gave rise to this problem, but it was the creation of air forces as ‘a third element of military force, that brought the problem of command structure to the

forefront in modern times'.²⁵ This was discovered in the Mediterranean Theatre in the Second World War and a reorganisation was done, and:

a new command was therefore set up, a satisfactory command structure in which a single overall commander was given overall responsibility for the conduct of all operations by land, sea or air, with single Service commanders subordinate to him. This supreme commander's position (Chief Allied Expeditionary Force), therefore, became a point for decision at which many inter-service arguments could with authority be resolved.²⁶

However, after facing failure due to parcelling out air assets under land force commanders, all air assets were exercised by a single air commander and Montgomery even issued a directive forbidding any army commander from trying to control air assets.²⁷ This failure repeated itself when Americans landed in North Africa in 1942 as part of Operation Torch. After repeating earlier British mistakes, they too reorganised to place all air assets under a single air commander.²⁸ More than 40 years later, the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986 reiterated those original lessons by de-facto placing all air assets, irrespective of service, under an air commander, but working under a single military commander who enjoyed an unfiltered chain of communication with the political leadership.

By nature, armies and air forces work on contrasting principles. Where armies permanently allocate assets to commanders at every level, air forces ensure that assets are rapidly switched to whomsoever needs them the most.²⁹ Armies decentralise control, while air forces exercise control at fairly high level. Army strategy is relatively long term, while air forces operate on a short-timed tempo and so, switch emphasis in roles or geographical application of force rapidly. Navies fall between these two contrasting poles.³⁰ The challenge is to preserve core strengths of each service while bridging differences in doctrine and structure; and the solution is not to make each service's doctrine or organisation mirror the others'.

One of the most important lessons learnt about joint planning from the North African campaign was the importance of collocation of commanders and planning staff of the different services.³¹ However, because air forces exercised control at organisational levels higher than armies, a practical solution found was to create Advance HQ of air forces to be collocated with command elements of armies. This

structure continues in the Indian military even today, where the higher Air Force HQ temporarily allocates forces to Advance HQ, who further allocate sorties to lower army elements to allow a degree of air force decentralisation suitable for armies. Air forces have deliberately not been organised identical to army echelons. Occasionally, when air power has been organised and used as per land force doctrine, the result has been spectacular failure.³² This challenge of how to organise different forms of power to work synergistically (and not identically) is going to be the most important question of any theatre reorganisation.

Before discussing the solution(s), we need to investigate the nature of the problem a little more.

TWO SALIENT QUESTIONS

How big should theatres be? As I have argued elsewhere, in terms of area, history shows that theatres should be big enough to be able to freely exercise the form of power with maximum reach and flexibility.³³ In line with greater reach and mobility of newer technologies, theatres have continuously grown in size. As its name suggests, the CBI Theatre in the Second World War included the combined area of China, Burma and India.³⁴ Even in that time when aircraft as well as surface transport had 'shorter legs', theatres were bigger than today's India. So, today, the US Pacific Command (PACOM) or the renamed United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) is even bigger than CBI: large enough to contain 36 countries, while in terms of forces, Commander USINDOPACOM controls 200 ships (five carrier battle groups [CBGs] and approximately 30 submarines), between 1,100–1,360 aircraft and 375,000 personnel;³⁵ and these do not include the surge assets he would be allocated in hostilities. The numbers, sophistication and combat power of air and maritime power he controls is larger than possessed by the entire Indian Armed Forces. Therefore, India need not be divided into smaller theatres, either in terms of area or combat power possible to be wielded under one commander.³⁶

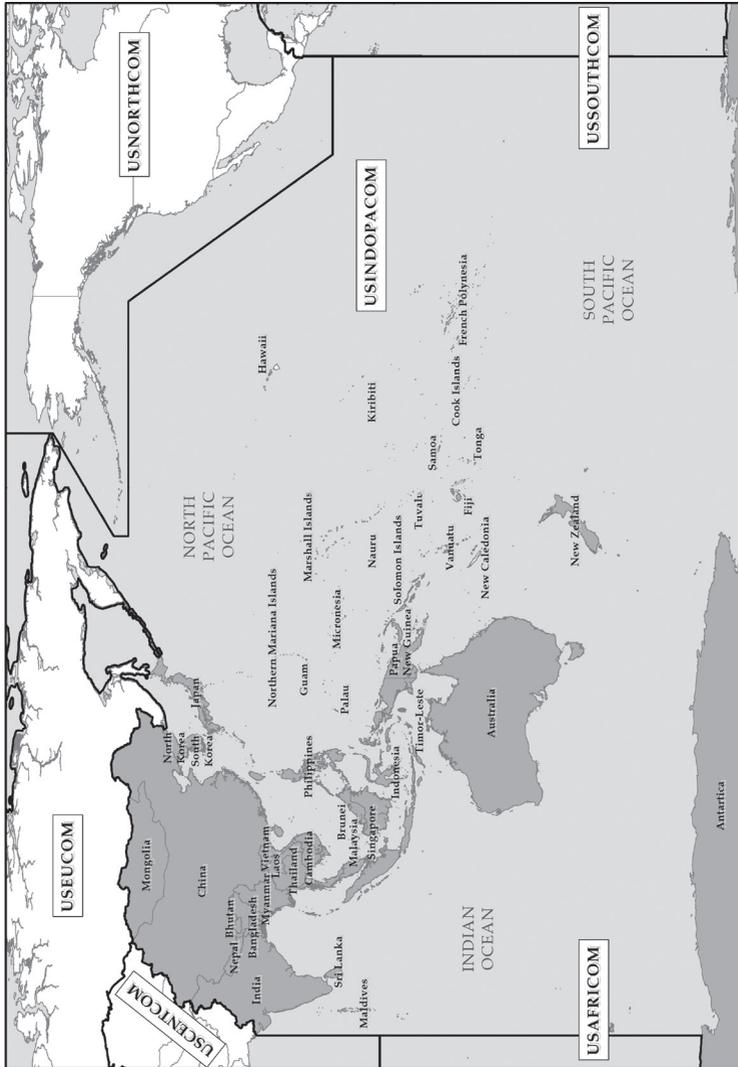
To visually depict this point, three comparative figures are given below which show the relative size of historical theatres in the subcontinent as compared to India: Figure 1 for CBI, Figure 2 for UNINDOPACOM, and Figure 3 for the Western Command of China. Each of them is larger than India. A division of India into smaller entities would increase the asymmetry of size, especially against Western Command of China.



Figure 1 The CBI Theatre of Second World War

Source: Available at http://22ndbombsquadron.com/uploads/3/4/8/6/34868206/1205825_orig.jpg accessed 14 December 2019.

In fact, if we do divide India into more than one theatre, we will not solve the problem of unified strategy. Historically, for reasons mentioned earlier, services have formulated only single-service strategy at the highest level. If we create more than one theatre, the problem will morph to each theatre creating its own strategy. If we had possessed more than one theatre in 1971, we could never have arrived at the national military strategy which the Chiefs decided, that is, hold in the west and gain territory in the east. In line with what Clausewitz has commented on the nature of war, each commander of every theatre will exert maximum force. The biggest two conventional threats this country is geared to fight are the militaries of Pakistan or/and China. One school of thought would have our forces geographically organised towards each threat.³⁷ But at the level of national military strategy, would it not be better for



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Figure 2 USINDOPACOM Theatre

Source: Available at https://www.pacom.mil/portals/55/Images/USINDO_PACOM-MAP-L1_Oct-2018.jpg, accessed 14 December 2019.



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Figure 3 China's Western Theatre Command

Source: Available at http://rukor.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PLA_Theater_Commands-2016.png, accessed 14 December 2019.

one commander to address both, especially if they might collude? And even if the conflict is against only one adversary, it again makes sense to wield unified strategy, with all elements of combat power of the nation working in concert and not dispersed in theatres left out of battle. Even after reorganisation, China's theatre oriented against India is bigger than India's landmass. In other words, China's theatre to our north faces multiple countries, under one commander.

How does the proposed reorganisation of the Indian Army affect theatisation? The Indian Army is going in for creating multiple Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs), each smaller than division size.³⁸ This move will help align the Indian Army with the structural organisation of the IAF/IN. In the IAF, after the command level, the next fighting level is the squadron. While these squadrons are housed in wings, the wings are no longer the autonomous entities they used to be from the Second World War to the 1970s, where operations were planned and executed at the wing level. The creation of IBGs allows the Indian Army to function a little more like the IAF and the IN, with a two-level structure, following centralised control (of strategy) and decentralised execution (at the tactical level). This increases the possibility of synergistic inter-service operations under a unified command.

A SATISFICING SOLUTION

Difficult problems like defence reform do not have perfect solutions. Thus, whatever solutions we devise will remain 'satisficing'.³⁹ However, laying limits or boundaries to solutions helps narrow down to better options. So far, this article has laid down an important limit, namely, India should be considered one theatre, needing unified strategy. This will allow us to address the biggest warfighting problem, that is, the historical lacuna of unified strategy formulation between the three elements of military power at the highest level.

Treating India as one theatre allows us to create a structure for unified national military strategy, as well as cleanly separate the responsibilities of warfighting and peacetime management at the level of Chiefs of services. Thus, as a first step, we need to *create* a joint warfighting organisation at Delhi. Ideally, this organisation should have one overall commander, a C-in-C who works through domain-specific C-in-Cs, with the four of them responsible solely for prosecuting war. To solve the problem of dual-hatting, this structure must be distinct from the staff function currently exercised at HQ of the three services. Thus, the HQ

would largely retain their current structure, with their head being the Chief of Staff (COS) both in name and function. The responsibilities of this service COS would be that of managing the staff functions of training, equipping and evolving the respective services. They would handle an important role, that of 'defence', as defined by J.C.T. Downey. He says that today there are almost two different roles armed forces are organised for: 'defence and war'. Defence amounts to 'a forum for philosophical debate and long term investment'.⁴⁰ In such a division, the CDS, the first among staffs, would become the single-point advisor to the government on such philosophical matters as future force structure, while the C-in-C becomes the single-point advisor (and commander) for prosecuting war.

This solution is not radical. It borrows from both the US lessons in terms of having a single entity responsible (only) for theatre warfighting as well as from the British reforms of the Permanent Undersecretary and CDS together evolving policy and providing advice. Whether it is Commander USINDOPACOM as the single warfighting commander in the Indo-Pacific Theatre or the CDS responsible for Downey-style 'defence' in the British system, precedents exist.⁴¹

In essence, this structural reform would create two parallel structures responsible for war and defence. Thus, the political leadership would have two types of advice from two military men: the C-in-C for matters relating to prosecution of war; and the CDS for matters relating to peacetime functions, policies and force accretions. In terms of relative power, while the C-in-Cs would command forces, it is the Chiefs of Staff who would be more powerful. This is because 'the management of defence is a much broader undertaking' than the prosecution of war.⁴² Fundamentally, we would be separating the thinkers from the doers, but ensuring that the outputs of both entities in peace and war has jointness structurally inbuilt.

This solution is less likely to see opposition from the IAF as it does not entail permanently dividing its assets into multiple theatres. This 'parcelling out' of air power is what air power practitioners fear the most, for history shows that the tendency exists and that results of such division lead to dilution of combat power and loss of operational flexibility. It is not just air forces which suffer but also the land forces become vulnerable to unified air power of the enemy. The IN, too, would not have problems in managing its fleet of approximately 295 vessels of all sizes.⁴³ In fact, this solution avoids the problem France has historically faced, which

is dilution of combat power due to maintaining two fleets as a result of geography.⁴⁴

However, the army may have objections, not to the area of the theatre (for we have seen that armies have handled larger areas even a century back) but to the numerical forces under one commander.⁴⁵ Historically, the organisational division of army formations has depended on two factors: the 'span of control' management problem; and logistics requirements of large bodies of troops.⁴⁶ Can one army C-in-C wield the combat power of the Indian Army? History shows that increasingly larger forces have been commanded by one man, even in an era where communications were rudimentary. Napoleon revolutionised the existing doctrinal limits on span of control when he personally wielded eight corps in 1805.⁴⁷ In 1945, the Italian campaign of Second World War saw Field Marshal Kesselring command 26 German divisions arrayed against 21 Allied divisions.⁴⁸ The Indian Army has 37 divisions.⁴⁹

Ownership by a single commander at the national level does not hinder the administrative distribution of assets into smaller manageable entities, like field armies/corps/divisions/brigades/battalions or IBGs. The IBG system may not warrant multiple echelons as control can be exercised through a robust central staff. It will be the concern of C-in-C India to see that lower-level command and control elements of all three services are so structured as to ensure synergy in operations; for synergy in strategy would flow down from the top. As covered earlier, current structures and processes for bi- or tri-service operational synergy at various levels of operations *below* HQ have been working, and only need tweaking.

The two smaller services, the navy and the air force, might fear doctrinal subjugation to a permanent national C-in-C from the army. However, once again, history shows that it matters not from which service the top commander emerges. His responsibility is military strategy, not domain-specific operational art. Once more, history has precedents. The PACOM has always been commanded by a naval Admiral. The commander of the CBI Theatre (SEAC), under whom the Burma campaign played out, was Lord Louis Mountbatten, again a navy man.⁵⁰ The commander of the German forces in the Italian campaign was Field Marshal Kesselring, a Luftwaffe General. He brilliantly executed a successful withdrawal from Sicily, and then cannily fought a gradual retreating battle against the superior combat power of the Allied forces on the Italian Peninsula, costing them two in years in time. In

the planning of this strategy, he opposed Rommel's plan of defending Italy northwards, and history proved his acumen right. Surely, we can produce leaders of equal calibre, who can break free of service-specific indoctrination in execution of higher responsibilities.⁵¹ Thus, the C-in-C India can, and must be, from any service.

The last important point concerns the chain of command for the C-in-C India. Ideally, he must take his orders directly from the political leadership, just as the Goldwater–Nichols Act ensured for the US commanders. From the C-in-C, the chain of command must flow directly to the service C-in-Cs. It was not just the Americans who have learnt this lesson. Indeed, K. Subrahmanyam quotes General Manekshaw in attributing the success of the 1971 war to clear political guidance. Subrahmanyam also endorses the annual report of the time which states, 'in a democratic polity the armed forces are an instrument of the political policy of the government and must therefore, reflect the nation's political style and ideology in actual operations.'⁵² This implies not only a clear and unimpeded chain of communication, but also a close relationship fostered by frequent interactions. However, practically, strategy formulation by the C-in-C India needs two other caveats. First, the C-in-C and his service commanders must be collocated.⁵³ Second, the C-in-C must have a strong staff structure to both formulate strategy (with the service C-in-Cs part of this staff) and to monitor execution of the strategy which emerges. Figure 4 below presents a pictorial depiction of a suggested structure which can address the problems explained earlier, forcing generation of unified strategy for the Indian theatre.

There are two important facets which this article has not addressed and each of them has the potential to bias people against this particular solution. The first is the practical aspect that the numbers of existing C-in-Cs would reduce as the existing 14 geographic commands are abolished. Human resource departments of all organisations vehemently oppose downsizing, especially in the higher ranks. However, one way to look at this structure is that each service would have combined their existing three (navy), five (air force) and six (army) geographic C-in-Cs into the post of one C-in-C for each service. Such unification of service C-in-Cs does not preclude division of assets into smaller administrative groupings at levels below service HQ.⁵⁵

Second, this article has not commented on power redistribution and protocol issues amongst all four players who currently wield power, that

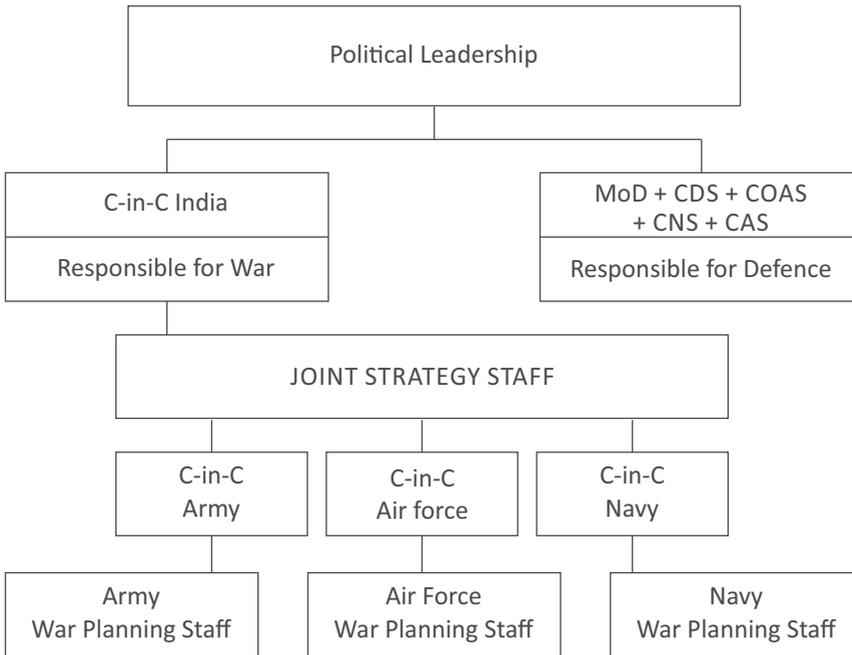


Figure 4 A Possible Model⁵⁴

Source: Author.

is, the three services and Ministry of Defence (MoD). At this stage, the reader must only concentrate on the problems we need to address and the boundaries of the solutions. After defining the ideal, we may derive the practical solution(s). This was the approach Clausewitz followed in approaching problems relating to warfare.

So, versions of this solution may be a practical possibility. If we want to keep the CDS as the *single* military advisor to the political leadership, we may reduce the degree of dual-hatting at one level lower, that is, the level of service Chiefs. For each service, we may make a single service C-in-C under the service Chief, responsible for prosecuting war in that domain, and still ensure joint strategy at the apex level by giving the CDS a powerful tri-service staff and processes which ensure that single-service strategy is impossible to generate. As this article commented earlier, we are not looking at the perfect solution, just a satisficing one—but one which solves the most major problems. Figure 5 below depicts this idea pictorially.

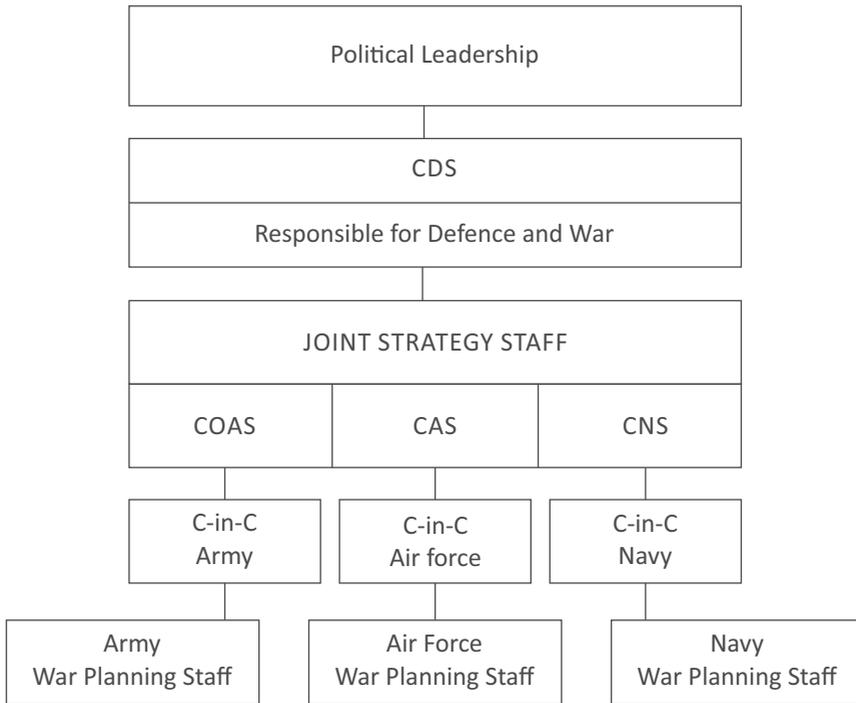


Figure 5 An Alternative Model⁵⁶

Source: Author.

CONCLUSION

Defence reform in India has to tackle many problems. The first step of creating a post for single-point (staff) advice to the political leadership has been announced. The next step is to improve joint warfighting. Historically, the problem in operational jointness has been at the strategic level. Thus, the solution also needs to start at the top. We have to first create a structure and process for joint strategy formulation at the national level.

This article lays out the boundaries of the proposed solution. The first and most important boundary is territorial. India is one theatre and the solution must work within this understanding. The Indian theatre is smaller than every other theatre which has been established in this region, starting from the CBI, PACOM and now, China's Western Command. These historical precedents should be enough to convince any reader that a single theatre is not only manageable but also required.

The opposition to this idea will come from inbuilt biases, not objective evaluation of what we need and what is feasible. The creation of any number of theatres more than one will not solve our historical problem of isolated strategy formulation at national level. This is the biggest problem about joint warfighting to solve.

Within this important idea of India is one theatre, the simplest structural solution is to (re)create the post of C-in-C India responsible (only) for warfighting. He, or his office, must have the tools to formulate joint strategy. This implies having all fighting force commanders as part of his staff. Even if a C-in-C India post is not created, the three fighting commanders of each service must sit together with a *joint staff* responsible for strategy formulation. This structural boundary will not allow single-service strategy to emerge in isolation. Of course, below these commanders will be subordinate commanders and staff who execute service-specific operational art.

The second big problem is to separate war responsibilities from defence responsibilities. Thus, while C-in-C India and the land/air/maritime forces commanders would spend all their energies on war problems, it would be the CDS and service HQ staffs who would be responsible for the philosophical side of the defence function (manage/train/equip/conceptualise), as defined by Downey.

The third problem, of catering to the differing command and control methods/echelons of the three services, has no simple answer. It must follow the lesson of collocation of HQ elements as far as feasible and embedding of control elements at the needed echelons. However, as existing structures of joint warfighting at operational and tactical level have worked in the past, it would be advisable for the C-in-C to follow a tinkering approach to organising his forces in terms of these control mechanisms. This would be work in progress.

The option presented in this article is only one possibility. The exact solution is not as important as understanding where the problem lies. Whichever solution we go for, its boundaries must stay within the caveat, India is one theatre, and needs unified tri-service strategy at the highest level.

NOTES

1. This was the reply by the then Chief of Air Staff (CAS) in response to a question by an officer regarding the CAS's views on theatre command, after a talk by the Chief at Army War College, Mhow, in 2017. This simple but

profound statement planted the germ of the idea on which this entire article is based. Quoted with permission.

2. Sandeep Unnithan, 'PM Modi announces Chief of Defence Staff', *India Today*, 16 August 2019, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/how-cds-make-military-lethal-pm-modi-independence-day-1581229-2019-08-16>, accessed on 28 December 2019.
3. 'Government creates new Department of Military Affairs, to be headed by CDS', *Onmanorama*, 31 December 2019 at <https://english.manoramaonline.com/news/nation/2019/12/31/department-of-military-affairs-created-to-be-headed-by-cds.html>, accessed on 2 January 2020.
4. For example, Sandeep Unnithan, 'Chief of Defence Staff; Can the new superchief call the shots?', *India Today*, 23 August 2019, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20190902-enter-the-superchief-1590316-2019-08-23>, accessed 29 December 2019.
5. Ashish Singh, 'The Two Forms of Reform', *Synodos Papers*, Vol XII, No 22, October 2018, Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, published 8 January 2019, available at <https://cenjows.gov.in/synodos-detail?id=92>, accessed 14 December 2019.
6. Strategy has many definitions. Defining strategy as the 'ways' to achieve selected 'ends' within available 'means', I claim that strategy exists at every level of war. To understand this concept, see Ashish Singh, 'Thinking Strategically', *Air Power: Journal of Air Power and Space Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Winter 2017, pp. 109–32.
7. This opinion is supported by former Cabinet Secretary S.S. Khera in his book, *India's Defence Problem*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1968, p. 213.
8. Most accounts of use of air power in this conflict focus on the reason behind the non-use of offensive air power. The official history opines that the non-use was due to the 'weighty professional opinion' of the Air Headquarters (HQ). It cites a note written by the then Director of Operations at Air HQ, Air Commodore H.C. Dewan, to the Air Chief, as recounted by Dewan in his memoirs. However, B.N. Mullik, in his first-person eyewitness account, categorically states that the Air Chief, Air Marshal Engineer, pressed for offensive air action against the Chinese troops in a war council meeting on 18 September 1962, but the consensus which emerged was to not use offensive air power lest the Chinese retaliate with 'strategic bombing' of Calcutta and other cities. It is possible that the memories of Japanese bombing of Calcutta and the panic it caused in the Second World War were still fresh in the political minds. Mullik's description of how these meetings were conducted also indicates the high probability of a strategy-making mistake called groupthink, where dissenting opinion is automatically suppressed. See S.N. Prasad (ed.), *History of the Indo-Pak War 1965*, New

- Delhi: History Division, Government of India, 1992, pp. 360–61 and B.N. Mullik, *The Chinese Betrayal*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1971, pp. 348–51. For groupthink and parallels between these councils and the ones which led to the Bay of Pigs fiasco a year earlier, see Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982.
9. George K. Tanham and Marcy Agmon, *The Indian Air Force: Trends and Prospects*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1995, p. 23. This fact seems truer before the conflict erupted, which is a recurring pattern in all conflicts. Joint councils of war increased to once daily after 10 September 1962, once hostilities had commenced. Before this date, Mullik mentions occasions on which the Prime Minister would confer only with the Army Chief. The joint consultation came too late to alter the momentum of strategy already set in place by actions like the Forward Policy and Mao's counter-strategy. Mullik, *The Chinese Betrayal*, n. 8, pp. 328, 340.
 10. P.C. Lal, 'A Critical Look at the 1965 Operations', National Security Lecture, United Service Institution, New Delhi, 1973, available at <http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/IAF/History/1965War/Lal-65.htm>, accessed on 25 January 2013.
 11. Prasad, *History of the Indo-Pak War 1965*, n. 8, p. 272.
 12. Arjun Subramaniam, *India's Wars: A Military History, 1947–1971*, Noida: HarperCollins, 2016, p. 299.
 13. Pushpindar Singh, *Himalayan Eagles: History of the Indian Air Force, Vol. II*, New Delhi: Society for Aerospace Studies, 2007, p. 154 and Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, *Defence from the Skies*, New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2007, pp. 123–24.
 14. This solution was devised in the North African and Italian campaigns in the Second World War.
 15. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Longman, 1999. The authors claim that as per this model, organisations work like metaphorical factories. Their metaphorical machinery is designed to produce only a certain kind of output, just like a factory. So the armies', navies' and air forces' doctrinal or strategic 'outputs' usually lie within a narrow range. When integrated organisations are staffed by a preponderance of personnel from any service, the final output of the integrated organisation will be proportionally skewed.
 16. It has established Advance HQ collocated with army commands, embedded elements at corps and allocated forward air controllers to work with battalions. Similarly, the HQ MAO works with navy commands.

17. So, for example, there is no process in place for the army to ask for air support from naval aviation aircraft or for the Air Force Command HQ to ask the army to execute a supporting operation to destroy the enemy's forward radars.
18. A.K. Tiwary, *Indian Air Force in Wars*, Atlanta: Lancer Publishers, 2013, Kindle edition, Loc 2253 of 5864.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
20. P.C. Lal, *My Years with the IAF*, New Delhi: Lancer International, 1986, p. 233.
21. This type of tasking implies lack of clearly defined targets.
22. Ministry of Defence (MoD) website, available at <https://mod.gov.in/about-ministry>, accessed 14 December 2019.
23. Defence ministers/Cabinet Committee on Security interact with service Chiefs and not C-in-Cs for consultations relating to war problems. There is no clear division of responsibility between Chiefs and C-in-Cs, especially regarding strategy. Additionally, service HQ have a relatively small operational staff—essential to warfighting today.
24. See Singh, 'The Two forms of Reform', n. 5, pp. 6–7.
25. John C.T. Downey, *Management in the Armed Forces: An Anatomy of the Military Profession*, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Book Company Limited, 1977, p. 123.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
27. The directive stated: 'Nothing could be more fatal to successful results than to dissipate the air resources into small packets placed under command of army formation commanders, with each packet working on its own plan. The soldier must not expect, or wish, to exercise direct command over air striking forces.' Stephen J. McNamara, *Air Power's Gordian Knot: Centralized versus Organic Control*, Maxwell: Air University Press, 1991, pp. 10–11.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
29. Thus, air forces work at essentially two levels: strategy generation, the Air Command in IAF or Combined Air Operations Centre for Western militaries; and squadrons as the tactical executors of strategy. Navies have an almost similar two-level structure between commands and fleets/ships/submarines. Armies, however, have a multi-level structure with independence of action at every level. Matching these differing vertical groupings between services is a primary challenge in designing organisational structures towards joint fighting.
30. These are but some differences. For more on the same, see Singh, 'The Two Forms of Reform', n. 5, p. 5.

31. One of the first tasks Montgomery did after relieving Auchinleck as 8th Army Commander in Africa was to move his Army HQ alongside the HQ of his Air Commander, 'Mary' Conningham. David Ian Hall, *Learning to Fight Together: The British Experience with Air–Land Warfare*, Maxwell, AL: Air Force Research Institute, March 2009, p. 20.
32. For example, in the Second World War, the Soviet Union organised its air forces as per land doctrine and organisation. They lost 7,000 aircraft between June 1941 to October 1941, and 20,392 by December 1941, against German losses of 2,505 aircraft. Richard Overy, 'The Air War in Europe, 1939–1945', in John Andreas Olsen, ed., *A History of Air Warfare*, Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2010, p. 37.
In North Africa, when Air Marshal Tedder was forced to provide an air umbrella over Operation Battleaxe, the failed counteroffensive against Rommel, the Royal Air Force could neither provide offensive support nor effectively prevent attacks on land forces from Axis aircraft. See Mike Bechthold, 'Raymond Collishaw, the Royal Air Force and the Western Desert Campaign, 1940–1941', PhD Dissertation, University of New South Wales, 14 November 2014, chapter 10, pp. 323–58.
33. Singh, 'The Two Forms of Reform', n. 5, p. 3.
34. Even here, the US Air Force established a rear HQ in New Delhi and a forward HQ at Chunking. Later, when this theatre was divided into two theatres in 1944, India and Burma still remained one theatre. See http://www.cbi-theater.com/cbi-history/cbi_history.html, accessed 14 December 2019. Some people claim that the Second World War had only two theatres: Europe and the Pacific. The CBI was a popular name, but it was the responsibility of South East Asia Command (SEAC).
35. See <https://www.pacom.mil/About-USINDOPACOM/> and <https://news.usni.org/2019/03/27/42212>, accessed 14 December 2019
36. Armies usually prefer smaller theatres, while navies and air forces argue for larger theatres. See Singh, 'The Two Forms of Reform', n. 5, pp. 3–4. Also, see Air Marshal Ramesh Rai, 'Integrated Theatre Commands—Does the Concept Suit India', *DefStrat*, Vol. 13, No. 4, September–October 2019, available at https://www.defstrat.com/magazine_articles/integrated-theatre-commands-does-the-concept-suit-india/, accessed 14 December 2019. The author explains in detail how India cannot afford division of air assets to small geographical areas.
37. For example, see Rajeev Bhutani, 'Integrated Theatre Commands for Indian Armed Forces', available at https://cenjows.gov.in/upload_images/pdf/8.%20Bhutanui-Integrated%20Theatre%20Commands%20for%20India.pdf, accessed 14 December 2019.

38. Shaurya Karanbir Gurung, 'Integrated Battle Groups on Pakistan, China Border Soon', *The Economic Times*, 10 September 2019, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/integrated-battle-groups-on-pakistan-china-borders-soon/articleshow/71057789.cms>, accessed 14 December 2019
39. The term was coined by Herbert Simon in 1956. Such decisions are just good enough in the light of constraints involved rather than being the optimum solution. Available at <https://www.behavioraleconomics.com/resources/mini-encyclopedia-of-be/satisficing/>, accessed 14 December 2019.
40. Downey, *Management in the Armed Forces*, n. 25, p. 67.
41. See Rajeev Bhutani, *Reforming and Restructuring: Higher Defence Organization of India*, New Delhi: CENJOWS, 2016, pp. 9–13 and Rajneesh Singh, *British Reforms to its Higher Defence Organization: Lessons for India*, Monograph No. 40, New Delhi: IDSA, July 2014. However, in the British system, the CDS remains dual-hatted. But unlike the Americans, the British are not organised for offensive warfare and so, the CDS probably leans towards management of defence in terms of attention allocation, with the subordinate Joint Forces Command responsible for out-of-area contingencies.
42. Downey, *Management in the Armed Forces*, n. 25, p. 67.
43. Data from Global Firepower, available at https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=india, accessed 14 December 2019. Also, 139 of these are littoral patrol vessels.
44. One reason France could not defeat rival sea powers in the age of sail was because it was forced to maintain a northern and southern fleet, as the peculiar geography of the Iberian Peninsula divided its navy. India too has separate fleets in an east–west orientation; geographically this is not essential.
45. Apart from the CBI and PACOM example, the Indian Army itself was divided into only four commands in 1895. With today's technology of communications, it is not difficult to reduce it to one command. Available at <https://mod.gov.in/about--ministry>, accessed 14 December 2019.
46. The Indian Army is organised on the framework of the colonial British Army. In European armies, the establishment of entities larger than squadrons/battalions is a fairly recent phenomenon. King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden first grouped battalions into brigades during the Thirty Years War in the early seventeenth century. The mid-eighteenth century saw the establishment of divisions. Improving technology of communications and mobility allowed the grouping together of fighting forces into bigger self-contained entities. John B. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution*

of Divisions and Separate Brigades, Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1998, p. vii.

47. This also marked the first use of the corps, an entity numbering 20,000–30,000 troops, created in 1794. See Martin van Creveld, *Command in War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 60. Before this, Maurice de Saxe (died 1750) declared that no General could wield forces larger than 40,000 in the field. In 1772, Jacques-Antoine Hypolite de Guilbert increased this estimate to 70,000. William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force and Society since A.D. 1000*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 159.
48. John Keegan, *The Second World War*, London: Pimlico, 1997, p. 304. This does not mean that there were no subdivisions below the C-in-C. There were two field armies under him; and similarly, organisational subdivisions of the Indian Army would remain.
49. Shravan Nune, 'CDS Exams: Structure and Formations of Indian Army', *Jagran Josh*, 26 November 2018, available at <https://www.jagranjosh.com/articles/nda-cds-exams-structure-and-formation-of-indian-army-1504098156-1>, accessed 14 December 2019.
50. Mountbatten commanded SEAC as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia and under him, CBI was commanded by General Stilwell.
51. To explain with an example, services trust the wisdom of the political leadership even though they have never worn a uniform, but are uncomfortable in serving under a commander from another service, precisely because he wears a uniform. The doctrinal biases the uniform brings with it is what they fear. The commanders will have to work at thinking without the doctrinal baggage attached to their service uniform.
52. K. Subrahmanyam, *Perspectives in Defence Planning*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1972, p. 170.
53. This collocation of HQ was an important lesson learned in the North African campaign. Many authors bemoan the fact that India currently has 17 service commands. Most miss the point that their headquarters are non-collocated.
54. This model cleanly separates the warfighting function and allocates responsibility for joint fighting to C-in-Cs and joint staff structures. India is treated as one warfighting theatre, with one overall C-in-C and only one service C-in-C for each service. All operations, including operations other than war, would be orchestrated through this vertical.
55. Analysts such as Maroof Raza have advocated the formation of three theatre commands for India, two organised as per country-wise threats and one as per domain. See Maroof Raza, 'What should be the Role of Chief of Defence

Staff', *Open*, 28 August 2019, available at <https://openthemagazine.com/special/what-should-be-the-role-of-the-chief-of-defence-staff/> accessed 14 December 2019. However, instead of forming multiple theatres, we can still subdivide India's geographical area into three or more such areas/sectors. Each can have *collocated* HQ of subordinate control elements, like armies/groups/fleets. But, overall command (and ownership of all fighting assets) must remain with one entity, which can sub-allot assets to lower echelons as per requirements and for defined periods. Tri-service strategy must flow from the top.

56. In this model, the CDS is the single-point military advisor to the political leadership. He remains responsible for warfighting too. Chiefs of services however sub-allocate responsibility for warfighting (as they do currently) by combining the appointments of all current service C-in-Cs in one theatre C-in-C for each service.