

Restructuring India's Military: Out of Box Options

by Rear Admiral (Retd.) A.P. Revi, Delhi: Gyan Publishing House,
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This book, on a topical issue, is divided into nine chapters. The author has carried out extensive research and documented the process of the evolution of the existing models of higher defence organizations in the United States (US), Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)/Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and China. Briefly, he has also touched upon the systems adopted by France and Germany. These are covered in the first four chapters, and supported by functional charts. He also examines the options for restructuring India's higher defence management, and the last few chapters cover revolution in military logistics, coastal security and national disaster management.

With the main thrust on evolving a new structure for India, the author has traced the correspondence between Pandit Nehru and Lord Mountbatten in 1953, where the proposal of appointing a CDS (Chief of Defence Staff) was discussed, but was later dropped.

Recent events and developments based upon the recommendations of the Group of Ministers (which suggested that the latest UK model be examined) following the Kargil Review Committee and National Security Council (NSC) Directives issued, forms the basis of his analysis of the shortcomings

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in the existing system of higher defence organizations. While touching upon the civil (he implies 'bureaucratic', without stating so) control over the military of our country, he has listed the good work done by the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CIDS) over the last 10 years or so. Landmarks such as the creation of the unified Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Command, Strategic Force Command, and the proposals under consideration for creating C3ISR (command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) and Special Forces Commands have also been welcomed.

However, the author feels there are shortcomings in the Indian system. In his view, in order to overcome these, the options open to India are:

1. scrap the present concept and start afresh;
2. continue with the present system;
3. revert to the old system; or
4. find a way around roadblocks—through graduated modifications, from interim to the long-term stage.

The author recommends the last option.

Highlighting the need for incorporating revolution in military affairs and logistics as an essential element of future defence organization, he recommends the need to integrate these amongst the three Services, under the CDS.

In the interim, taking the Cabinet Committee on Security Directive of 2002, he suggests the upgradation of CIDS to the rank of four stars, equal to the three Service chiefs, as per the British model, with dual responsibility of heading the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) as well as exercising operational control over joint operations and other tasks, including logistics.

In the mid-term, once the A&N Command and other functions have stabilized, the ethos of unified commands should be implemented, for which the author suggests that the CIDS could deal directly with theatre commanders, while the Service chiefs may or may not be kept in the operational loop—their role being to provide required organizational and training support only. Here again, the American, British and the Russian models are suggested.

In the final stage, the CIDS is proposed to be upgraded to five stars, with theatre commanders and the Service chiefs being four-star officers. Special upgradations are also suggested for Chief of Integrated Logistics. Role and charter of all senior appointments have been suggested, and the interface with various organs of the services and ministries explained with charts and diagrams.

Recommendations have also been made for adopting an integrated management-oriented approach towards defence research and development (R&D), and acquisition and development projects. Related issues like the National Defence University and Intelligence Agency have also been covered. Keeping in view the joint operations, the desirability of merging existing independent service Command Headquarters (HQs) into Integrated Regional Command has been made. Also, before summarizing his findings, aspects of coastal security architecture, civilian control over military, and national disaster management have been covered, though in brief.

While Admiral Revi needs to be complimented for his effort, in the ultimate analysis, no 'out of box' solution emerges for evolving a new higher defence organization to meet India's security challenges. While the reality of integrated and joint operations is established beyond doubts, it is region and scenario contingent. The shortcomings, if any, in the present system could have been fully addressed before suggesting theatre commands. The A&N Command and other special commands have separate identities, reasons for which are well known, and that is why they have been kept exclusively under Chief of the Integrated Command, exclusive from Service HQs, which has worked well. Similarly, today, logistic needs of the three Services are large and mostly exclusive (except for rations, accommodations, etc.), for which well-oiled systems have been developed with expertise over the years.

Grouping all of them under a single Chief of Logistics may prove to be not only a heavy load for one appointment, but the proposed candidate might not possess the expertise needed for all aspects. While the suggestion for R&D and defence acquisition could be considered, once again, integrating all items under one head may not be feasible. Indeed, scope exists to consider the inventory and prune the overheads by centralized computer-assisted procedures, as developed by the Indian Navy and suggested in the book, where possible. As brought out by the author, upgradation of appointments of CIDS, Service chiefs, Chief of Logistics and theatre commanders is essential, but the final call has to be made by the government. The civil control over military in India forms the basic foundation of our country, service culture and ethos, and must be accepted.

During his research, the author has interacted with a vast number of foreign and Indian military personalities and the bibliography is impressive, indeed. Possibly, discussions with a wider selection of Indian personalities who have dealt with the issue in the past would have brought out some more solutions. Also, while brief mention of the strategic aims and objectives of the foreign powers guiding their defence organizations has been mentioned,

the same in the case of India could have been deliberated. The security environment prevailing around India and its impact on our defence structure required more emphasis. The flexibility inherent in the modern day weapon platforms and the impact of revolution in military affairs and logistics, as applicable to India, could have been analysed. Lacunae in the foreign models could also have been stated.

It may be pertinent to mention that in the recent military history of the world, the most successful joint and integrated military operation carried out was by India—the 1971 Indo-Pak War—on two wide fronts. Since then, we have gained experience during OP Pawan (Sri Lanka) and OP Vijay (Kargil, 1999), besides United Nations missions. In all these, all ranks of our three services have operated together for keeping our national flag flying high. Problems, if any, faced in these operations and the remedial measures adopted could also have been considered by the author. This would have made the resultant model more suitable for India, keeping all the constraints in view.

The model suggested by Admiral Revi merits consideration by those involved in research on the topic, as the work done by him in tracing the various models of higher defence organizations is laudable. The book will be of interest to all those connected with matters relating to national security, and is recommended for libraries of defence establishments.