Nature of Modern War and Theatre Command

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Introduction

The changing global security scenario and the dynamic and fluid nature of modern war have not only altered the way a nation prepares to defend itself from aggression but, consequently, the armed forces and security apparatus of the country have to modify themselves to adapt to the realities existing in the neighbourhood. Sun Tzu, in his classic treatise *The Art of War,* stressed the necessity of adaptability and flexibility as major factors in the conflict process—from planning to execution and then the post conflict resolution and analysis. He further amplified that flexibility must transcend all levels of command and warfare, from the strategic to the tactical. In fact, adapting a strategy to cater for the situation extant to the adversary was propounded as a critical aspect of the "intellectual flexibility" of an effective commander.[1] The need to be flexible in all aspects of the conduct of war is an implicit requirement for commanders and the force as a whole, in contemporary situations.

The erstwhile Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Mshl FH Major, elaborated on the types of threats now being faced by liberal democracies like India and spoke of the fact that the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the transnational character and growing sophistication of the methods adopted by protagonists,

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coupled with the unique geo-political situation existing in this part of the world, dictate that we, as a nation, be prepared to deal with threats, both conventional and non-conventional. Specifically, he said, "An understanding of the paradigm shift and the implications thereof actually holds important consequences for our own strategic posturing. The world in 2050 will be far more dynamic, independent and fluid even though the forms of instability and triggers for conflict may be difficult to define. What is perhaps certain is that the nature of future conflicts will undoubtedly be more challenging and unpredictable, requiring a capability for assured, swift, clean, calibrated, varied and flexible response and, most importantly, transportability of our national power in all forms."

Evolving War-Fighting Concepts and Transformation

Revolution in Military Affairs: The term Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) took on great significance in the Seventies and early Eighties with the advent of the Soviet–North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) standoff and the Cold War period. Futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler while, defining the RMA, stated, "A military revolution, in the fullest sense, occurs only when a new civilization arises to challenge the old, when an entire society transforms itself, forcing its armed services to change at every level simultaneously—from technology and culture to organization, strategy, tactics, training, doctrine and logistics."[2]

Andrew Krepinevich stated, "… A military revolution occurs when the application of new technologies into a significant number of military systems combines with innovative operational concepts and organizational adaptation in a way that fundamentally alters the character and conduct of conflict. It does so by producing a dramatic increase— often an order of magnitude or greater—in the combat potential and military effectiveness of the armed forces."[3] Analysing these facts closely, we will realise that combat effectiveness is dramatically increased essentially by four types of simultaneous (and mutually supportive) changes, namely:

- Technological change.
- Development of systems.
- Innovations in the operational environment.
- Ability of the organisation to absorb the change and adapt to it.

It would be pertinent to note that none of these can be effective in isolation and the four, in fact, are inexorably intertwined.

Combat Effectiveness

In the pursuit of greater combat effectiveness, the relationship between "accuracy" and "distance" in the application of military force underwent a major change. There is no doubting the fact that the effectiveness of every weapon reduces with increasing distance to the target. Throughout history, as technological developments threw up new systems, the need for increased distance was uppermost in the designer's mind. Some examples that come to mind are:

- The creation of the compound bow.
- Rifling of small arms.
- Invention of recoil systems for artillery.
- Development of strategic bombing.
- Invention of the guided missile.
- Precision guided munitions/weapons.

While sceptics may say it is relative, there is no doubting the fact that today 'pin-point accuracy' is virtually a reality. Weapon effectiveness, therefore, actually contributes to the revolution in military affairs. While various factors impinge on warfare or war-fighting, perhaps the greatest destabiliser is when a medium changes. A change in medium will (virtually) always bring a halt to the proceedings until a remedy is found and/or the organisation is able to adapt to the changed medium. Can a medium be superior to another? Subjective, is an obvious reaction.

But consider the fact that this medium can actually straddle the other two mediums, dominate them and be all-pervasive. Would it, therefore, not qualify as being superior? If that be so, the usage of this medium to transport war-fighting will naturally translate into the fact that this type of war-fighting will actually dominate and oversee the outcome of what happens in the other two mediums.

Modern war is a war of speed, mobility, penetration, encirclement, envelopment and, finally, force annihilation. In modern conventional war, 'linear' tactics are replaced by, what some people term as 'swirling' tactics. Parallel warfare is the need of the day, straddling the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war or, as the Army would like to hear it, the ability to fight the "direct" battle, the "deep" battle and the "rear" battle, simultaneously. Battles, therefore, have become more intense and destructive, ranging over greater areas and, paradoxically, over shorter periods of time.

Strategic Effect and Effect-Based Operations

A discussion on modern war would be incomplete without a mention of strategic effect and effect-based operations. The objective of a strategic effects mission is similar to that of manoeuvre warfare itself—to shatter the enemy's cohesion and will, rather than simply destroy his manpower and materials as in the Cold War period model. This objective is achieved by applying strength against identified weakness through the application of firepower, manoeuvre and surprise, throughout the spectrum, with operations timed simultaneously at all levels of warfare. Target sets would, thus, include the government machinery, infrastructure, Research and Development (R&D) facilities, production facilities, logistics nodes, reserve forces and the existing forces in the tactical area. The concept of "centres of gravity", first mentioned by Clausewitz as a means to compel an opponent in a conflict or war to bend to your will, has apparently stood the test of time. While, in his time, he believed the Army to be the 'hub' of all power, centres of gravity today take many forms and need

to be given a priority, which, actually, may be flexible as the operation progresses.

Air power has the ability to display the needed flexibility with its reach and destructive capability to neutralise or incapacitate an opponent's strategic or operational centres of gravity. This is strategic effect. This can be achieved by independent action or through joint operations, depending on the level targeted. Attacks for strategic effect primarily do three things. Firstly, the shock effect on the population, the creation of panic and undermining the morale of the people—essentially, psychological coercion. Secondly, because of the effect on the civilian population, it diverts the opponent's military effort away from offensive operations towards homeland defence. Lastly, attacks for strategic effect engage well defined targets. Multiple target sets can be engaged by aircraft with swing-role capability, creating ripples across the levels of warfare. While operations for strategic effect or effects-based operations may be carried out by maritime or land forces, air operations have the ability to be launched independent of joint operations and from virtually any theatre in the country. Today, air power has transcended the levels of attrition and manoeuvre warfare to effects-based operations to inflict strategic dislocation and achieve strategic effect. Constraints placed on air power from operating at parallel levels of warfare would be gross misutilisation of assets, would reduce the war to one of attrition, be regressive in nature, and unnecessarily subject men and material to the excesses of battlefield exposure—all highly undesirable.

Air Power: The Misunderstood and Contentious Protagonist

The enormous potential of air power was possibly envisioned as early as the Wright Brothers' forays on to the drawing board. As air power became more prominent, it also became evident to both strategists and war-fighters that the Principles of War, which form the basis of all warfare, are actually straddled or supported by air power and its employment, possibly in a

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more holistic manner than any other form of force projection. Thus, in a joint environment, it provides three basic military roles in the pursuit of national security: the ability to find (and share the information, in real-time, today), the capability to shape, i.e. influence and manage the conflict space where and when necessary and to the desired degree, and, lastly, the capacity for timely response, i.e. carefully tailored, proportionate, accurate and timely application of air power. It may be argued that that these roles may not be exclusive to air power, but certainly it cannot be doubted that air power can provide the advantage for these roles to be conducted with enough flexibility and discretion to create asymmetry and, thus, effect.

Air power assets operate outside geographical constraints and directly influence the deep battle space because of their inherent reach, speed and flexibility. By the same token, they can also operate in different theatres simultaneously, creating a deterrent effect, both physical and virtual. The basic problem in exploiting air power to its full potential is that surface forces continue to see air power as a supporting arm to their surface actions. This, notwithstanding the fact that air power has provided some of the most significant and decisive results in joint warfare and joint action. Operating together, both air and surface forces can provide the required synergy to achieve the desired objectives. A professional assessment or appreciation in a joint environment should be able to identify which force becomes the lead or the principle force element in a particular operation.

Given the limited resources and the sheer capabilities of the machines, it becomes necessary to employ air power across the spectrum to undertake even strategic tasks like targeting the enemy's centres of gravity, and counter-air operations to contain and defeat the enemy's air power. Air power can

be used to indicate concern, to threaten and deter, to create a defence, to confuse, to deploy forces and then give them mobility options, to support other forces operationally/tactically/logistically/administratively and, finally, the ability to concentrate and strike with devastating effect. In terms of effectiveness, efficiency and versatility, nothing rivals the modern aircraft. In fact, as aircraft and doctrines evolved, the air power dimension came to dominate the battlefield and the space above. Air power has the ability to find, fix, locate, track, attack, and assess the result, as also engage multiple target systems. Unfortunately, land and naval power cannot do these to any finite degree to tilt the balance. The ability to conduct "parallel warfare" makes air power the element of choice in defining the battle space.

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It would not be out of place at this stage to emphasise the swing-role capability of modern fighter aeroplanes. Platforms that are capable of performing more than one air power role are considered to be multi-role. While there are different crew training requirements for each of the different roles, generally only reconfiguration of a multi-role platform before a sortie is required to suit it to a particular type of mission. Swing-role takes this to the next level by allowing for responsive and flexible role change after take-off, i.e. during the mission. While some multi-role aircraft, like the Mirage 2000, have this capability to some extent and conduct "self-escorted strikes" (continuing to have an air defence capability during a ground attack mission), recent developments in networked capabilities and flexible munitions have contributed to aircraft having swing-role capability. The principle issue is a suitable Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence (C3I) system which can enable timely direction and redirection of aircraft, once launched. This is based

on getting quality information to the pilot in a usable and timely fashion, known as "time sensitive targeting" in contemporary parlance. It not only demonstrates the flexibility of the platform but also the adaptability and mastery of the fighter pilot—a core competency of the Air Force.

Whither Jointmanship?

Jointmanship is a natural fallout of warfare. In the pursuit of conquests in far-off lands, Armies had to take the help of sea-faring friends who could transport them across the seven seas. It is also a fact that the Armies did not reach the docks and demand to be taken to distant destinations—some joint planning was required to be done with the ships' captains on weather conditions, sea states, rations and logistics, time to reach the destination, etc.

There is no doubt that joint planning was a prerequisite for any campaign. It was also found to be true that a well planned joint operation was actually the most effective force multiplier in a war. It could achieve economy of effort, enhanced responsiveness and concentration of force at the desired time and place. The synergy achieved in effective joint warfare makes it an imperative feature of modern war. But it also became quickly evident that no single Service could win a war by itself. Various combinations of land-air, maritime-air and amphibious assault became necessary to achieve success. It was also evident in joint operations that the presence of the air element was essential, probably to the extent of ensuring the success of the operation. In short, surface operations, whether on land or at sea, cannot be undertaken, or at least, be successful, in a hostile environment, without air power providing the necessary support.

Jointmanship in the Indian Armed Forces

Having already participated in two World Wars, the Indian armed forces were not new to the idea of joint operations, which began in right earnest in the Northwest Frontier Province. But come 1962, the lessons learnt

from 1948 were forgotten and the Indian Army decided to take on the brunt of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) and faced a bitter result. Three years later, the 1965 Indo-Pak War brought all the three Services into play. While "joint" operations were undertaken, there are enough books and articles to underline the fact that lack of joint planning was evident all through. Possibly the closest the armed forces have come to effective joint planning which resulted in a successful campaign was the 1971 War with Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. The three Services went into operations with a reasonable sense of mutual support and cooperation. However, there was a strict no-no to turf intervention and the end of the war saw the usual spats to say, "The Air Force was not there when we needed them most…" or "The Navy destroyed Karachi harbour without any help from the Air Force…" But it took another 30 years and another war (Kargil 1999) for the government to wake up to the fact that we must take a serious look at jointmanship—in fact, at integration.

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Higher Defence Organisation

In the progression towards integration of the armed forces of India, it would be prudent to briefly scan the directions of defence and its policy formation over the years. While political control is generally, the norm in a democracy, what started correctly, slowly but surely, degenerated to the control shifting to the bureaucracy. The slow but gradual slide to this sorry state of affairs was probably a combined result of the treatment meted out to the Chiefs of Staff by the erstwhile Defence Minister, VK Krishna Menon, and some of the major committees like the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC)

and Defence Minister's Committee (DMC)—both strategically critical committees for policy formulation—falling by the wayside and becoming defunct.[4] This effectively led to the senior leadership of the military not only not being part of the committees involved in discussing national security issues but also not conveying professional military advice to the government. In short, they were not part of the policy forming apparatus for national security. It was a sad commentary when Shekhar Gupta of *The Indian Express* said, "In no other major democracy are the armed forces given so insignificant a role in policy-making as in India. In no other country do they accept it with the docility they do in India". It is important that the interface between the senior military brass and the polity be reintroduced, unadulterated by the bureaucracy and their subjective inputs, essentially created to exercise control over the armed forces.

Chiefs of Staff Committee

The Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), though initially constituted in the early 1930s, was based on the British model which created a COSC in 1923. However, unlike the British model, the post of a Chief of the General Staff (CGS) was created at General Headquarters (HQ) (the precursor of Army HQ) who reported to the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C), who, in turn, reported only to the Viceroy. While the Navy and the nascent Air Force could also approach the C-in-C, *de-facto* it was the CGS who assumed authority over higher direction of the military.[5] This (sort of) single-point military adviser, to me, would be highly biased towards the Army (for good reason?) because of a fledging Navy and an Air Force just trying to find its wings. Post-independence, Maj Gen Lionel Ismay, Chief of Staff to Adm Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, was tasked to propose a suitable mechanism for higher defence management in India. While he suggested retaining the COSC system, it would not have the single-point reporting that existed earlier but rather it would comprise the Chiefs of the three Services with the seniormost serving member automatically assuming

the mantle of the "Chairman". This would imply that that the Chief of any Service could hold the appointment of Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, and it would not be any Service specific. The COSC was mandated with policy formulation in national security matters pertaining mainly to defence against external aggression and reported through the MoD only. It would follow political objectives, as directed, during war and resolve all inter-Service issues other than those that were contentious or necessitated MoD intervention.

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There are pros and cons to the functioning of the COSC and military and strategic pundits are at variance in regard to the effectiveness of the system. While a democratic consensus would logically provide the balanced view, its effectiveness and ability to keep the Services on the desired rails has been debatable. There are invariable pointers at the weak-kneed approach to the government in taking up military matters, or that certain Services' issues were scuttled because of partisan bias. For some strange reason, the public feels that a professional approach to a problem is never taken and the bureaucracy revels in the "divide and rule" situation arising.

But why is it that we cannot reach an acceptable consensus with no underpinnings or jealousy? Why cannot we accept the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee as "first among equals" and not "one among equals"? The deep-rooted hierarchical order that has persisted for generations and is flowing in our veins, is probably the reason for our egos and our unacceptability of a peer in a superior position. So would it be better to go in for the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) / Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) system, prevalent in many militaries? While many models of the role of CDS exist in other democracies, India's strategic environment and requirements

are different. While these models can serve as guidelines, the government has to bear in mind some determinants which would impinge on the role to be assumed by the CDS, namely: the strategic and defence expertise remains in the domain exclusively of the uniformed fraternity, despite the growing emergence of civilian experts in the academic field; India's land borders and threats are predominantly land-based and oriented; despite technological advances, India's defence requirements would be manpower intensive, based on the Indian Army; the Indian working ethos is hierarchical and does not admit the Western concept of "first among equals"; India's strategic weaknesses that have emerged in the wars since 1947 centre on lack of war preparedness, poor intelligence and the crippling process of defence procurements; and internal security threats are overtaking requirements of defence against armed aggression, entailing extensive use of the Indian Army during peace-time in internal security operations.[6]

The CDS Debate

In a bid to foster better jointmanship and integration, the uproar for a CDS (the answer to all ills?) took on major proportions. In fact, in the wake of the 1999 Kargil conflict and the abject failure of our intelligence system and lack of jointmanship, the government took a deep look at the malaise affecting the management of national security. A Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted as a fallout of the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) created four task forces to address the weaknesses highlighted by the KRC. The Arun Singh Committee, constituted to look into matters relating to the management of defence, recommended the creation of the post of a CDS, as the principle military adviser to the Government of India. A comprehensive proposal to integrate the Services and the Ministry of Defence was in conformity with such an appointment.

Without berating the details of the Arun Singh Committee report and those of the GoM, volumes on which have been written, suffice it to say that a serious move to achieve integration in the Ministry of Defence was

made. But trust the bureaucrats not to cede what they consider their rightful position and ensure that the (excessive) civilian control over the military is not diluted: the basic idea of integrating the Ministry of Defence and having the military and civil bureaucrats functioning side by side / together in the offices and departments, fell by the wayside. While the armed forces gallantly created the HQ of the Integrated Defence Staff, set up its charter and put up its proposals, turf wars among the three Services (liberally fuelled by the bureaucracy) ensured that it never grew the teeth that it was designed to have. The denial of the appointment of the CDS by the government and the fear amongst the Chiefs of the three Services of the likely unseating of their position as combatant commanders, just added a few more nails to the coffin. Why can't India get its act together to formalise its higher defence organisation in the interest of national security? Is there a genuine focus in defining our national security objectives? Is it possible to overcome our hierarchical attitudes and accept a "first among equals"?

The creation of a CDS raises a couple of issues. Firstly, will the creation necessitate restructuring / reorganising and setting up an integrated system down to the field formations, thereby making the CDS the primary war-fighter, with Theatre Commands reporting directly to him? This would follow the American model and will effectively reduce the Services Chiefs to non-combatant staff appointment roles. Secondly, can we have a model wherein the Services Chiefs retain their combatant appointments and the CDS remains not only the single-point adviser to the government but also oversees the operational efficacy of suitable functional commands such as the Strategic Forces Command, Andaman and Nicobar Command, (proposed) Special Forces Command, (proposed) Aerospace Command, (proposed) Integrated Logistics Command, etc ? To my mind, the latter is a workable solution, which, while retaining the war-fighting and administrative capabilities of each commander, also provides for sharing of resources for better command and control. This is not a compromise solution.

It is the planning process which needs transformation to work towards an integrated approach to achievement of mission objectives.

Theatre Command: To Be or Not to Be?

"Success" begets followers and believers. The success of the American and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) theatre forces in operations in the Gulf War and in Kosovo has created a horde of people who are convinced that the answer to a successful joint operation is the creation of an integrated Theatre Command in a unified environment. There is no denying this fact. It can hardly be contested. But what one would like to point out is that these operations have not taken place against adversaries with contiguous land borders stretching 1,000 or more kilometres. India is beset with irregular and/or sub-conventional conflicts across a wide spectrum. The entire spectrum is, and has been, land-centric with an additional critical strategic maritime threat emanating from (as yet) the Arabian Sea. Onto this scenario, we introduce a system of Theatre Commands. The purpose of a Theatre Command is to enhance synergy among the three Services to achieve military/national security objectives, quickly and in the most effective manner and with minimum casualties. But synergy is achieved with the understanding of a common cause and a deep understanding of each other's effectiveness, strengths and limitations. Creation of new structures cannot predicate synergy but can facilitate (forcible?) cooperation. What it cannot do is eradicate deep-rooted mindsets, like "Army is the senior Service" and "Appointments must be based on a quota / ratio…" A few years ago, the College of Defence Management (CDM) was tasked by HQ IDS to undertake a study on the creation of Theatre Commands. The extensive study, unfortunately, pre-supposed that the idea of Theatre Command was a "given" and proceeded to carve out the country under suitable theatres, which (no guessing) had a preponderance of land (read

Army)-centric theatres, with the coastal areas dominated (naturally) by the Navy. There was no consideration given to the Air Force employment philosophy, but rather to the creation of battle groups within the theatre with dedicated ground attack squadrons of fighter aeroplanes (under the command?) supporting the theatre. Would that be the right utilisation of an Air Force with state-of-the-art platforms capable of conducting parallel warfare? How does one cater to high value assets (in limited numbers always) like the Flight Refuelling Aircraft (FRA), the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), the heavy-lift strategic transport aircraft like the C-17 and the IL-76 in a theatre environment when these assets, per force, have to be centrally controlled? An SU-30 on a training mission (as an example) takes off from Pune, refuels in-flight, strikes a simulated target in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, picks out targets of opportunity amongst the shipping in the Bay of Bengal, does another in-flight refuelling, strikes a primary assigned target at Pokhran, engages simulated enemy air in aerial combat and lands at Halwara (Ludhiana) for crew rest. Is this a platform to be dedicated to a battle group in a theatre, to progress the ground war?

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Out of Country Contingencies

India's area of interest, as espoused by our Prime Minister, stretches from the north Asiatic plains to the Indian Ocean and from the Gulf of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca. Depending on the geo-political situation and our foreign policy leanings at that time, we could be called upon to address some out of country issues using our armed forces. This is a contingency situation and we must be geared to undertake such tasks at short notice. This would entail the creation of an Integrated Task Force under a dedicated Task Force Commander, who would commandeer forces

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from all the Services. These situations, or likely ones, must be identified and suitable measures taken to address them in a professional manner, keeping in mind the objectives laid down by the government. In these circumstances, the air element is dedicated to the Task Force Commander.

A Proposal

We must view jointmanship from a more holistic angle. In the national security construct, we should be able to identify target systems, both static and dynamic, that would need engagement, decide on the degree of damage/destruction desirable, identify the best weapon system capable for such engagement and task the concerned Service accordingly. In other words, it is the planning process which needs transformation to work towards an integrated approach to achievement of mission objectives. Within this, an effects-based approach, by design, integrates the various elements of national power. Through deliberations and mission analysis, we could identify the core competencies of each Service to maximise the application of combat power. Only a professional approach and a mindset to accept "turf intervention" will assure us a level of jointness and/or integration. There is a need to shed our inhibitions and partisan beliefs for effective cohesion and increased synergy.

Conclusion

The rapidity of technological advances has altered the way wars will be fought, today and in the future. The horrible wars of attrition, World War I and World War II, are a grim reminder of the waste of human and material resources to achieve end results. A quantum shift in the conduct of war-fighting was demonstrated during the Gulf War of 1991.

It brought to the fore the fact that wars will be technology intensive and will be dominated by networked systems as well as by joint and integrated operations. The speed of battle was demonstrably high, emphasising that manoeuvre warfare was necessary to attack the enemy before he was able to consolidate. It is evident that 'smart' weapons with high precision capability used against strategic targets and centres of gravity, such as command and control nodes and war-waging machinery, can paralyse and incapacitate an enemy, without having to fight a war of attrition.

Notwithstanding the fact that the bureaucracy negated the very essence of an integrated working order which would have contributed in the overall context of jointmanship, the creation of HQ IDS has been a move in the right direction.

Another significant development in modern-day warfare is the fact that air power will play a dominant role in any military operation. Surface operations, both land and sea, would be extremely vulnerable without air cover. Of course, we will require the proverbial "boots on the ground" to hoist the flag but those boots may not be able to turn the tide at the strategic level. The determining factor that will cause capitulation will (in almost all cases) predominantly be air power. AVM Tiwary, in an article titled "Jointmanship in the Military" has succinctly brought out that "air and space power will have the maximum impact in all the domains of warfare and will be the first to be used. Thereafter, the sequence and amount of utilisation of the other Services would be a function of the prevailing situation and the concerned medium".

The synergy afforded by joint warfare cannot be doubted. A time-tested formula for success, it is the manner in which it is planned and executed that will guarantee success. However, for this success, the fundamental requirement is to respect the functional specialisation of each Service and its professional advice. There is a crying need to undertake

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joint planning from the "first page". For starters, may be, we can modify the Army exercises in the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) where "air" is brought in as the last issue and treated with scant respect, in the conduct and outcome of the exercise. May be this quote from an unknown author will (dispassionately) put the record straight, "In this new construct (of warfare), the traditional roles of ground and air power are reversed – making ground the supporting element and air now the decisive force."

The move to restructure the management of higher defence has been a welcome one. Notwithstanding the fact that the bureaucracy negated the very essence of an integrated working order which would have contributed in the overall context of jointmanship, the creation of HQ IDS has been a move in the right direction. The organisation has done a stellar job and it is felt that the Services must institute a system wherein it is mandatory for an officer to do a "joint" tenure to be considered for promotion to the rank of Colonel (and equivalent ranks in the other Services) and once more before he is promoted to the rank of Major General/Lieutenant General (Service governed). In the opinion of this author, the appointment of a CDS/JCS is justified and viable as long as we, as a people, can overcome hierarchical prejudices and accept a "first among equals". Since a war-fighter feels insulted if his combatant abilities are not utilised, the proposed model of the Services Chiefs retaining their combatant roles and the CDS / JCS also enjoying a combatant role at the strategic level, while being the single-point military adviser to the government (sorely needed), is considered viable. It is hoped that the Naresh Chandra Committee set

up in July 2011 to revisit the defence reforms process will be able to highlight the shortfalls and make some strong recommendations for a progressive model.

The creation of Theatre Commands needs to be viewed more holistically in the backdrop of our national policy and diplomatic overtures. It is also necessary to view the need for such creation in the defence construct of the physical alignment with hostile neighbours and the likely nature of conflict that may accrue. An analysis of the battle space virtually anywhere in the world today reveals that it has become time sensitive and is progressively becoming time critical, given the nature of threat. The fact that the effective zone of the modern battle-space is expanding exponentially and, conversely, the time dimension is being dramatically compressed, does not conform to the theatre battles likely to be fought in a compact and defined Theatre Command. Diluting resources by distributing scarce assets will not only impinge on the effectiveness of the "force in being" but also dilute the deterrence value and allow the aggressor to make forays with impunity into our territories. Mutual understanding and evolving realistic joint planning techniques will probably be more effective than demolishing long-standing and time-tested structures/edifices, and attempting to create new ones.

Notes

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