

## **BUREAUCRATIC-MILITARY DIVIDE**

**BY**

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The latest in the list of issues enhancing the divide between the bureaucracy and the military and impacting the status of the armed forces is the sanctioning of additional vacancies and improving promotional prospects of the AFHQ-CS (Armed Forces HQ Civil Service) in their cadre review. The cabinet had sanctioned additional posts of seven new Principal Directors (four are already existing) and thirty-six new directors for the AFHQ-CS, to be created in service HQs and not the MoD.

The AFHQ-CS was created as an internal group B secretariat support cadre for the armed forces HQs. Hence additional vacancies allocated in service HQs should have been considered after their approval as they remain the most affected. However, this was not done. There are almost 100 surplus AFHQ-CS cadre officers already existing in service HQs. Additional vacancies will result in creating a 300% surplus cadre, an immense financial drain to the nation.

It was certified in the cadre review that the restructuring does not incur any increase in strength, however the restructuring is based on an enhanced strength of almost 600, which is its present strength. To further justify the review, non-existent posts have been shown as surrendered.

The reason given in the review was acute stagnation, whereas the reality is that their promotions are even faster than the IAS/IPS/IFS, armed forces lagging far behind. As per government orders, post lying vacant for two years cannot be filled, without approval, yet the same have been included in available vacancies, without taking prior approval of the MoF. All rules have been bypassed to have this cadre review pushed. Other rules, including 'ad hoc' and 'in-situ' promotions, which do not exist in the rules of AFHQ-CS, have been implemented on a regular basis.

Immense water has flowed under the bridge since the cadre came into being in 1968. The world over, the mantra is amalgamation of the armed forces into the defence ministry for better functioning and faster decision making. In India it is the reverse. Stumbling blocks are being placed between the force HQs, which are meant to act, and the MoD which is supposed to issue guidelines and policy.

The MoS defence, Subash Bhamre, in a presentation to the PM on functioning of the MoD, in matters related to Make in India stated, “The reason for delays are myriad, ranging from multiple and diffused structures with no single point accountability, multiple decision heads, duplication of processes, avoidable redundant layers, delayed comments, delayed decisions and delayed executions.”

He added, ‘There is the evident lack of synergy between the stakeholders that is among the various departments of the MoD. The departments appear to be working in independent silos driven by policy and procedures.’ Creating additional illegal posts would only enhance stumbling pillars.

India is possibly the only country where decision-making and coordination on national security has still to come of age. Military decisions are made by those who neither seek to give the armed forces their due and lack even basic military knowledge. None who are in the precincts of the MoD have ever worn a uniform, faced a bullet, aware of problems faced by the soldier nor are seriously concerned about his welfare.

They only seek the perks and benefits including facilities which the appointment offers including vehicles and canteen facilities. They have also begun moving for appointments within the Armed Forces Tribunal, which is specifically meant to resolve cases related to the armed forces, without possibly even being aware of the charter of duties and the rules and regulations which govern military service.

The army HQs in a letter to multiple government departments including the MoD on the issue of additional vacancies to the AFHQ-CS cadre stated, “Creation of these unwanted/surplus posts is not only a violation of PMOs directive on ‘minimum government and maximum governance’ but also a drain on public funds and a recurring loss to the state.” As per the army, the MoD justified these additional vacancies by surrendering 44 posts of cleaning staff.

The cleaning staff posts were neither part of the AFHQ-CS cadre, nor do they exist, as the task has been outsourced to a private agency. Clearly additional vacancies created were based on half-truths, which surprisingly was pushed through the cabinet by tweaking rules and regulations. It appears that the Department of Personnel and Training (DOPT) under the PMO, handling the case, was either unaware or taken into confidence.

In India, decisions within the MoD, which would impact the functioning of the armed forces, are never discussed with service chiefs before being

projected. The final decision is thrust down their throats, forcing them to project their displeasure subsequently, as has happened in this case. In the government all functioning is strictly as per hierarchy, hence the more the layers, the greater the delay, as each would seek to exert their own brand of delay and justice.

The MoD in response to queries on this issue made a small statement commenting that the financial impact was 'not much'. This proved that the cadre restructuring of AFHQ-CS was juggled, even though it was not justified. Immediately post the cadre review, postings to appointments within service HQs was issued. These were turned down strongly by the chiefs, only increasing the ongoing tussle for supremacy between multiple cadres existing within the MoD.

Instead of creating a 300% surplus cadre for a non-functional entity (AFHQ-CS), which should have been disbanded decades ago, the aim should have been a steady replacement of the cadre by serving and at lower levels by veterans. This would have changed the work ethos and character of the MoD. Instead of amalgamating the MoD with service HQs, this move will ensure that amalgamation is pushed away.

The government must re-examine the case, check the veracity of claims put forth in the cadre review and then take a final decision. In case the claims are wrong and unjustified, as claimed by the army, then those responsible for pushing the case must be taken to task. It should look towards amalgamating service HQs and MoD, reduce friction between the bureaucracy and the uniformed, rather than adding layers in functioning, increasing battle for appointments and enhance stumbling pillars.

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