

# **CADRE REVIEW REQUIRES CONSIDERING HARSH REALITIES**

**BY**

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## **General**

The army is in the process of carrying out its cadre review for officers after a gap of 35 years. As per government orders, the same is to be scheduled every 5 years. Immense water has flowed under the bridge during the gap between the reviews. Internal concepts and promotional procedures are still based on the era of seventies, disgruntlement and anger within the officer community is on the rise, parochialism and favouritism is the order of the day, those being side lined for promotion is increasing by the year and operational commitments are on the increase. The MS branch is almost unable to manage its officer cadre.

Officers from the services, who wear the same uniform and work as tirelessly are side lined only because they wear a different lanyard, while those from supporting arms who have been at the forefront of all operations post 1971, feel they are second class citizens. The army has failed to realize that any future war, especially in mountainous terrain, where it is most likely to occur, would be one of logistics and degradation of objectives, as Kargil proved. Anti-terrorist operations involve officers from the entire spectrum, but when it comes to dues, many branches feel they have been short sighted.

Disillusionment and anger also flows from large numbers of supersessions at every level and lack of realistic vacancies. Pyramidal structure would have supersessions, however it can be offset by innovative means and financial packages. Assured promotions, without privileges can be considered to continue keeping the officer community motivated. A fallout of disillusionment is increased medical categories, either due to perceived failures or anger against the system.

## **Desired Scope of the Review**

Thus, the cadre review needs to look at the existing structures, methodology of promotions, enhancing vacancies, rightsizing the officer cadre thus creating a family of officers who have a hope for the future within the service. However, to be able to do this, it needs to accept harsh internal realities which have harmed the system over the years.

It is known across the board that in a pyramidal structure, the smaller the permanent cadre, the better are chances of promotion and accordingly, higher the morale. Every youngster who joins the academy and graduates has hopes and dreams for his future. By side lining majority at the first opportunity results in an increased disgruntled officer cadre, which should not be the aim. Hence the intention should be to create a structure which would be a modified pyramid.

#### Right size the officer cadre

Shortfalls exist mainly at the junior level, which is where it hurts the army the maximum. The fact that this shortfall can only be made up by enhancement of the support cadre, is well established. However, unless made lucrative in monetary terms or by providing alternate opportunities it would never attract the desired calibre. Banking on side stepping into CAPFs would never occur as none would desire an influx of army officers who have completed their service, as it could impact their internal promotional prospects. Hence shortfalls would continue. The bulging middle level cadre is an aspect which the army needs to reconsider.

Thus, the need to right size. The army must only cater to its core responsibilities removing from its cadre, organizations which can be manned by veterans or the support cadre, post their contractual service. A few prominent organizations, whose responsibilities can be shelved are discussed below, there would be many more.

The National Cadet Corps is the first organization which needs to be reorganized. This was also part of the Shekatkar committee recommendations. The army should only provide staff at the apex level, thus maintaining control. At lower levels it should be staffed by the retired/support cadre who reside close by. They could be employed akin to ECHS clinics where local staff is hired for management of the clinics.

The other organizations where serving officer strengths could be considered for removal are mundane appointments in DRDO, Ordnance Factories and DGQA (Director General Quality Assurance). These could be given to the support cadre and they become a permanent part of these organizations, removing them from the army's strength and hence pension bill. There would be many more inhouse organizations which could also face a similar axe.

## **Management of the officer cadre**

### **Appointments**

The next archaic rules are those which govern appointments and promotions. Appointments are linked to promotions. Denying operational appointments at the junior level to officers from the services is a flow from the seventies. In the current environment junior officers from the services have more operational experience than officers of most arms and supporting arms, less the infantry.

All service officers undergo a compulsory two-year tenure with an operational infantry unit and a similar one with the RR or AR subsequently, as compared to possibly only one done by officers of other arms. By considering them for operational appointments at the junior level would open doors for select capable officers from the services contributing at higher levels in the years ahead, rather than being side lined only because of they were commissioned into a service years ago.

It would provide a level playing field for those are capable, talented and possess merit. It would also change the working ethos of the army and to some extent mitigate the anger within the services community.

### **Promotions**

Promotions for the officer cadre beyond the colonel's level are based on two structures, meant to run parallel but are anything but that. The two structures for senior promotions are general cadre and non-general cadre. The general cadre implies fighting arms and some selected from supporting arms. All others form part of the non-general cadre. Vacancies are accordingly allotted and tilted towards the general cadre, based on its larger strength.

The term fighting arms is presently derelict and has no relevance. Post 1971 all operations involving the army, whether it be Siachen, Kargil or duels along the LoC have only witnessed the participation of the infantry, artillery and engineers. The armoured and mechanised infantry, considered as fighting arms, have been missing. Hence, the term needs to be re-considered and those that form a part of it re-constituted.

The overall intention must be to provide a level playing field. Tilting the balance towards a limited segment of the army creates disgruntlement and anger within the system. The cadre review should consider changing the rules established post 1971 and take a more realistic approach.

## **Comparison with Group A services**

Realistically army officers being 'commissioned officers' are a notch above all Group A services. However, by pushing forth letters of unacceptable equivalence and enhancing their own promotional avenues by the bureaucracy, this aspect has gained prominence. Salt has been added to the wounds by the grant of Non-Functional Upgradation to these services, further enhancing their status. The army, having a pyramidal structure, with limited vacancies would always be at a disadvantage. This issue has been in the limelight in recent times with the cadre review of the AFHQ-CS cadre approved.

While it may be difficult to completely close the gap, however options exist for its reduction.

## **Recommendations**

The army must first decide on its cadre strength, by considering the removal of all non-military organizations to which it contributes. This would determine a reduced middle level cadre. This decided then it would need to move on a two-front approach. Firstly, it should open pre-mature retirements for those who desire it and secondly offer permanent secondment to those PSUs, DGQA and DRDO organizations to which it provides officers. This secondment in the long term would be for the support cadre, who finish their contractual service.

NCC must be reorganized on the lines of the Shekatkar committee reforms and the involvement of the serving reduced.

It should also consider reduction of ranks, to bring them at par with the civilian cadre and alongside it enhancement of salary akin to their model. Simultaneously should be upgradation of appointments. Upto the early eighties the CO of a unit was a Lt Col, which was subsequently upgraded. There was an initial uneasiness, but which settled with time. The same can be considered now.

With upgraded appointments, there would be an increase in vacancies. Officers missing their selection board at the Colonel's level should be considered by a separate board for staff and be promoted accordingly. This staff cadre should also be considered for promotion to maybe one or two more levels. This could result in a modified pyramid. This will be an incentive as also a motivating factor for the officer cadre, majority of whom are side lined at an early age.

Most importantly, the cadre review should consider creating a level playing field for all arms and services, wherein the deserving rise on merit, rather than because of the lanyard that they wear. The archaic rules of the seventies need to be revisited with the realities of the present as also promotion and appointment policies reconsidered.

### **Conclusion**

The cadre review should aim to create an army which is a team and operates in cohesion where the functioning of each arm and service is recognized and appreciated. It should possess at its disposal only those organizations which are essential and reduce its strength to manageable levels.

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