

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

RESTRUCTURING OF THE ARMY HAS BEEN LONG OVERDUE

BY

MAJ GEN HARSHA KAKAR (RETD)

The Indian army's organization structure has remained unchanged since Independence. It has continued to follow the Command, Corps, Division and Brigade model. Its training pamphlets mention that the Division is the basic fighting formation. There has been no change in its organization structure despite changes in almost everything, equipment profile, technology, communications, mobility, nuclear warfare, concept of operations etc. In some instances, the division is only an administrative entity wherein its subordinate brigades are allocated under different formations for operations.

India is possibly the only nation which has nuclear armed adversaries on both borders

claiming Indian territory, while India seeks no territory across. The army needs to be prepared for a vast spectrum of conflict ranging from sub conventional warfare to a nuclear conflagration. On one front it plans a counter offensive, while on the other it has a defensive strategy with a limited offensive content. Offensive operations in a nuclear environment entail a different force structure and strategy than presently existing.

Hence, the next war, which India faces would be vastly different than any of the earlier ones it has been involved in. Its present organization structure is based on the last war, while it plans for the next. It thus needs to reorganize. Change, unless driven top down, would never occur.

Implementing the appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or converting to the theatre command concept for effective jointness can only occur on government directives. In India, the government hesitates to either appoint a CDS or convert to theatre commands, possibly fearing excess power in one individual or because of service specific objections. Thus, any restructuring would need to be service specific and pushed from the top.

The constant threat of nuclear retaliation by Pak has led to the creation of the cold start doctrine, which has been a major source of concern to them. There would have been changes in concept of operations on other fronts and terrain, which possibly remain away from public domain. Hence, each type of terrain and nature of threat would entail specifically tailored organizations for best accomplishment of the task.

Simultaneously, as time passed, branches only increased in every HQ, commencing from Army HQs

downwards to divisions, adding officers and support staff at each level, which with improving technology should have been in the reverse. Many branches are duplicated, some have expanded beyond their mandate, while others have been ignored.

It is therefore time for the army hierarchy to take the bull by the horns and evaluate the best for the service. While working towards operational restructuring there would be a few imperatives which would have been specifically laid down.

The first is operational efficiency. Change should enhance the operational capability of the force, provide the force commander greater flexibility in his task alongside requisite wherewithal, based on its task. The force commander should not be looking backwards for support but forward for accomplishment of his mission.

Secondly, where possible, intermediate layers should be cast aside. The world today seeks to function with flatter layers in organization structures, rather than hierarchical structures, especially in an era of enhanced communications and availability of real time information. This enhances flexibility and creates space for ingenuity in operations. Additional layers are an impediment and impose caution. They were essential when communications means were sparse, flexibility was lacking in movement of reserves and range of fire support was limited. The present is vastly different.

The third imperative is to reduce the junior officer cadre in non-essential roles where feasible, thus freeing them for regimental duties, enhancing strength in units, which are the cutting edge of the army. The fourth is cutting costs of maintaining

additional HQs, where they can be done away with. Fifthly, it should lend itself towards enhancing jointness in operations, by being able to operate seamlessly with other services, if required. Finally, it should provide the higher commander with flexibility and the ability to change force ratios at crucial points of decision.

There would be administrative imperatives too, which would follow the operational imperatives. These would include reorganizing army HQs specifically, to merge branches where role and tasks overlap, perspective planning and weapons and equipment being an example. There is a need to push all branches which deal with issues common to all services under the IDS, veterans and NCC are examples.

A few are duplicated and could be closed, military training being prime as Army Training Command has the primary responsibility. Some branches need to be enhanced in the present day, public information and legal being examples. Reduction or merger of branches should also imply drastic reduction of the AFHQ support cadre, which could then be merged with other central support cadres.

Organizations like quality assurance have almost no role in the present environment as most manufacturers have been granted self-certification. This should be drastically brought down in strength or even closed where possible.

One of the primary aims of the restructuring is reduction of teeth to tail ratio, to enhance fighting capability. This is where the army invariably goes drastically wrong. It considers the same only from its uniformed cadre, which is incorrect and results in a lop-sided solution.

The tail does not end with the uniformed soldier but also includes all those who are paid from the defence budget, AFHQ Cadre, MES, redundant ordnance factories, border roads and defunct DRDO organizations, being prime. MES tasks can be easily outsourced as it has in recent times become more of a stumbling block to functioning, rather than a pillar of strength, as a visit to the IDES site would indicate.

The CPWD can construct roads anywhere, hence border roads can be reduced, except where essential. This could lead to a reduction in their HQ strength. Closing defunct ordnance factories and DRDO organizations would bring about increased savings to the government. This is the tail which should be reduced, not the uniformed tail, which continues to have an operational task.

Finally, there is also an added intention to reduce the gap in service between the army and other central services, as also enhance promotion prospects at all levels. If this entails reduction of a specific rank (Lt Cols and Brigadier are being considered for now), then it must be done with sound logic. However, it is essential that other services (Navy and Air Force) be taken on board, as it should not impact the delicate inter-service balance in tri-service institutions.

Therefore, the restructuring should not involve the army alone, as it would then only concentrate on its uniformed category but the MoD too, which is essential to handle the non-military strength of the tail, including the AFHQ support cadre. Unless done in tandem and commenced with the broad approval of the Defence Minister, it would only be partially effective.

The uniformed would be restructured but the lakhs of non-uniformed employees, which impacts the defence budget, are part of the tail and are largely redundant, would remain untouched. Then financially, there would be no major impact on the defence budget.

An aspect which may have been ignored in the process, presently underway, is management of assets which would be made redundant by the restructuring. Considering it at this stage itself would avoid confusion once the process is underway.

Restructuring cannot be done at regular intervals. It is now being resorted to after decades. Thus, it should entail creating structures for the future than for the present. Finally, it should involve discussions across a wider spectrum, involving schools of instruction and formations, rather than just a few committees at the apex level as unless the complete organization is taken on board, it may not bring about the levels of acceptance and only become a push model.

Disclaimer: Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.