



CENJOWS

WHERE IS JOINTNESS IN ARMY RIGHTSIZING?

BY

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The army's top commanders met last week seeking to evaluate four studies which had been conducted by senior officers on right sizing the army, reducing redundant layers and working towards meeting the aspirations of the officer fraternity, who are most impacted by the pyramidal structure. A press release issued post the conference stated that the recommended changes would be implemented in a phased manner.

The army spokesperson stated, 'The phases will comprise requisite refinements of the studies to make them pragmatic for implementation. It has also been decided that all operational aspects of the studies will be validated through test-bedding them in exercises.' He added, 'The focus of the studies was holistic integration to enhance operational and functional efficiency, optimize budget expenditure, facilitate force modernization and address aspirations of both officers and soldiers.'

The army chief has justified the exercise stating that though the army is meant to conduct a cadre review every five years, the same has not been done for 35 years. The thought behind changing organizational structures has been induction of enhanced technology enabling better shaping of the battlefield alongside weapons with enhanced ranges, including artillery and missiles. Further all future wars would be fought in a nuclear backdrop, hence would necessitate a change in modus operandi.

The armed forces lack modernization in their higher defence structure, which remains a pre-requisite for future warfare, for multiple reasons. Firstly, is the resistance within. While the present army and naval chiefs support the establishment of unified commands, the air force is against it. Its reason, though illogical considering the flexibility of air power assets, is the shortfall of air assets preventing permanent allocation of resources to commands.

It is quite possible that in the future, other service chiefs would also oppose the same. After all, no service chief desires to be degraded from 'force employer' to 'force provider' once unified commands are established.

The second and more important is the creation of the 'Defence Planning Committee (DPC)' headed by the NSA. With service chiefs being a part of the committee and the HQ IDS providing secretarial support, the NSA assumes the appointment of a de facto CDS. Without a CDS in place, theatre commands would be meaningless, as there would be no single point authority to which it would be responsible. Thus, with this one move, announced with the intention of forming a body for speeding defence modernization, the government has closed all doors for restructuring higher defence organizations.

Thus, the services would be compelled to plan for future operations in independent silo's, thus fighting future wars, with the organization of the last, albeit with better weaponry. All plans for procurement of weapons and modernization would now be routed through the DPC. Future weapon systems being procured would now also have a political character, as the NSC and PMO would evaluate which nation now requires a diplomatic boost or procurement from, to enable resetting ties.

This acceptance of operating in independent silos by the services was evident when the army undertook its force restructuring programme. Nowhere was there a mention that restructuring would enhance jointness and bring about better utilization of the three services warfighting capabilities. Nowhere was a mention that the cadre review for officers would not offset the delicate inter-services balance in tri-service institutions or that other services have been consulted.

Each service chief in his address to students of institutions of higher learning on the modalities of future warfare mentions jointness as a paramount prerequisite for success but ignores the same when his service is undergoing a transformation. Similarly, while mentioning joint operations, the services differ vastly on their perception of future wars and the role of their own and other services.

The air force opines coercion as the possible strategy of China. It considers China would employ its missiles and airpower targeting key locations, with minimum likelihood of ground operations, or if land warfare is conducted, then in limited regions. The army considers land war as essential if the adversary seeks a favourable decision, despite employment of any other element of power. The navy, other than coordinating timings for operations considers its actions in an isolated sphere.

The government also appears to have bought the concept of keeping the services apart without a serious thought to restructuring higher defence organizations. It continues to be guided by the bureaucratic suggestions of the threat of a coup, in case all military power is in the hands of one individual. It has already allocated the presently existing tri-service commands to specific services as a permanent allocation, removing the concept of tri-service. The navy would permanently command the ANC while the Air force the SFC.

The three new joint service organizations recently sanctioned by the government, defence space agency, defence cyber agency and special operations directorate, are also likely to go in the same direction. They would be joint in name but be the responsibility of separate services, rather than in rotation. Space may remain with air force, special operations with army and cyber with the navy.

In such an atmosphere it should dwell on service chiefs that if the government is unconcerned about restructuring higher management of defence, they as a body should seek to enhance joint warfighting capabilities, at least at their levels. The army restructuring should have factored this into its study as also announced the same as one of its major aims. If the largest service adopts a 'me only' approach, then the other two would only follow suit.

Only raising jointness is discussions, lectures and seeking excuses to ignore the same by stating that it should commence from the bottoms up would never enhance joint capabilities. Only pushing it as a part of modernization and restructuring would. With exercises to validate the new concept still to be conducted, it is never too late to make amends. The forthcoming exercises should be joint in nature and content. Unless the top hierarchy is serious, jointmanship would only remain on paper and lecterns.

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