

## Appointment of CDS will boost India's national security and power projection capabilities

### Synopsis

CDS will be a stepping stone to remaking how India aggregates its manpower, deploys its firepower, allocates its funds and prioritises its long-term security goals.



While the entrenched tradition of bureaucratic stasis and pettiness will not vanish overnight, Modi's momentous decision to form the CDS is a welcome top-down blow to vested interests.

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s Independence Day announcement to create a [Chief of Defence Staff \(CDS\)](#) for improving coordination among the [army](#), [navy](#) and air force is a historic boost to India's national security and power projection capabilities. It is a long-due reform of higher military management in the larger national interest, and a forward-looking step for India to keep abreast of international trends in defence modernisation.

The idea of CDS had been mooted decades ago in India, but it was stymied by bureaucracy and narrow, self-interested objections of stakeholders. Anxieties of individual service chiefs about losing turfs to their peers, and cussedness of civilian officials who feared transfer of influence to a single "Super General" had

held India back. While the entrenched tradition of bureaucratic stasis and pettiness will not vanish overnight, Modi's momentous decision to form the CDS is a welcome topdown blow to vested interests.

The advantages of a CDS are myriad. For India's military to be more effective in combat and in deterring dynamic enemies, its forces must integrate and enmesh.

Inter-service rivalries over weapons acquisitions, budgets, deployment of hardware and tactics, and claims of relative credit for battlefield achievements have cost many countries, including India, dearly in both war and peacetime.

For example, infighting between India's army and the air force during the 1999 Kargil war on attack helicopters and what role each wing should play in repelling Pakistani intruders caused critical delays that prolonged India's eventual victory.

Residual tensions between the army's Aviation Corps and the air force, and between the navy and the army over the meagre budgets allocated to the former, have dented India's readiness to be competitive amid the advent of global military doctrines like "AirLand Battle" and "Air-Sea Battle".

As Modi said, in today's changed world and altered landscape of warfare, India cannot afford to think in fragmented ways. His reference was to how established powers around the planet have recognised the inadequacy of separate service commands and operational planning, and undertaken structural efforts towards fusion.

The US reworked its military command structure in 1986 by granting centralised power to its Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and forging interoperability, wherein each geographically organised command catering to a specific region of the world would include a mix of ground, naval, marine, air and special operations personnel.

China's revolution in military affairs (RMA) concept has benefited from President Xi Jinping's aggressive push to enhance "jointness" among the wings of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In 2016, Xi appointed China's first ever Chief of the

Joint Staff and scrapped the outmoded system of officers of land, air and naval branches reporting to their respective headquarters. Instead, he bundled them together under geographical theatre commands aimed at designated countries and threats. For example, China's western command headquartered in Chengdu has an operational focus on India, Central Asia and Islamist terrorism.

Xi was inspired by the American model and it is evident that Modi has learnt from the Chinese model of reorganisation through top-down political will. The anomaly of India's fragmented eastern commands of the army, navy and air force located far apart from each other in Kolkata, Visakhapatnam and Shillong respectively vis-à-vis a sharp and singular western command of China is glaring.

Now that CDS is a reality, Modi must plough ahead and pursue joint theatre commands. Individual branches of our military do have their own distinct subidentities, sources of pride and philosophical characteristics. The task ahead is to retain those specialised attributes and affinities while bringing about a cultural and attitudinal shift in all the wings and civilian paraphernalia to serve the unified goal of securing India and carrying it to great power status.

CDS should be a stepping stone to remaking how India aggregates its manpower, deploys its firepower, allocates its funds, and prioritises its longterm security goals. Thanks to Modi, the door to transformation is open.

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