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# Shaping the Military Instrument

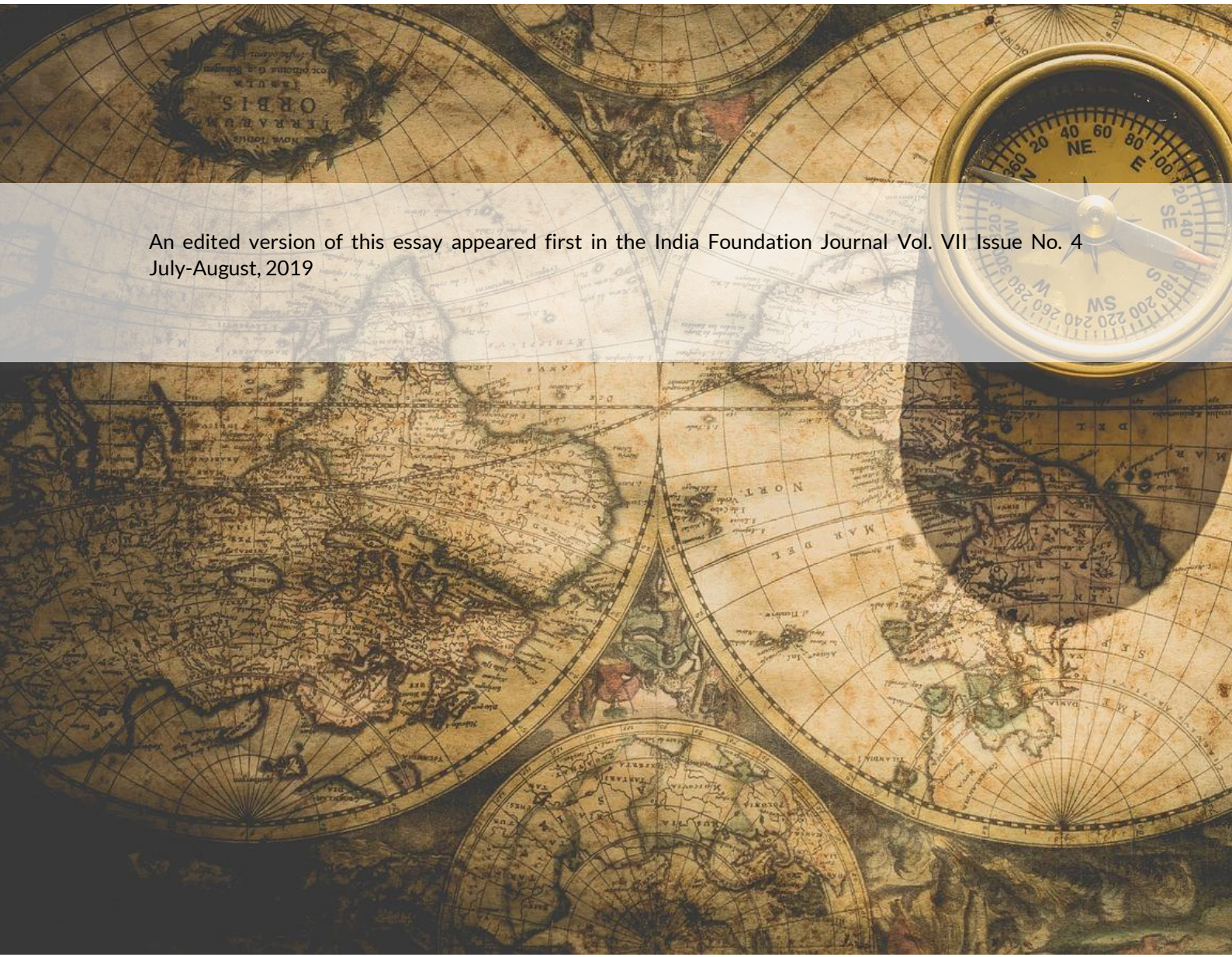
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*By Lt Gen (Dr) Prakash Menon*

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## Introduction

Unity in diversity provides utmost strength for India's national developmental process. But diversity also begets divergent perspectives that shelter narrow interests and are naturally resistant to higher purposes. Diversity is substantially anchored in identity whereas unity seeks to derive a common identity from the 'thali' of national identity. This 'thali' does not seek to demolish specific identities but instead attempts to merge them into a bigger mass for a larger purpose. The 'thali' process seeks integration wherein the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. India's ultimate strength will largely depend on the degree of success it achieves in creating integrated institutions across all levels of government and society.

Achieving optimum integration in shaping an effective military instrument remains a work in progress. This, despite the fact that twenty years ago, the deficiencies of integration were highlighted by the Kargil conflict and triggered wide ranging reforms in the national security and higher defence management structure. This paper attempts to focus on the twin issues of civil military relations and the higher defence management.

## Civil Military Relations

Civil Military Relations (CMR) in democracies are naturally encumbered by forces that create tensions in the relationship. At one end there is a perpetual fear of a military takeover to the other end when limited resources are perceived as being spent on an institution that mostly enjoys the fruits of peace. CMR is also enacted in different domains. In the governmental domain, different segments of the Central / State governments at various levels interact with counterparts in the military. The most important relationship is the one between the apex political and military leadership.

In the societal domain, the CMR relationship is a product of perceptions of one another. At the national level, the state of relationship could vary considerably depending on geographic location. Societies where the military has been engaged for a long time in internal security like Kashmir and states in the North East would have a relatively negative outlook. However, in the rest of the country, by and large the society views the military positively as the ultimate defenders of the State. In the recent past, primarily due to pressure of expanding population and space limitations, some degree of tensions in CMR has been experienced. It is an issue that will continue to propagate and requires to be handled deftly by the apex political and military leadership.



The main area of concern in CMR is the inability of political and military institutions to harmonise their understanding of each other's requirements and thereby shape the military instrument that meets the demands of national security. This deficiency is the core issue. This is unfortunate as the central purpose of having good CMR is to optimise the efficiency of the military instrument.

The problem is not the lack of sufficient political guidance to the military but the fact that developing such guidance requires a sustained dialogue between the political and military leadership. Such a dialogue is a victim of the lack of appreciation of the other. Politicians lack understanding of the dynamics of military power. In India, they are mostly advised by a bureaucracy whose expertise lies in the knowledge of rules, regulations and procedures. Political sensitivity to defence scams has also ensured that bureaucratic processes have captured political decision making and procedures are privileged over outcomes.

On the other hand, the military leadership's grasp of political dynamics is weakened by a professional education system that keeps understanding of politics at an arm's length. What little educational exposure is provided at the Brigadier and equivalent level is too little and too late. Members of the higher military leadership are exposed to political nuances only towards the end of their careers and is left to learn everything on the job. Perhaps this deficiency is related to a closely held institutional ethos of being apolitical. This is of course a misinterpretation. Because apolitical nature is about institutional loyalty to the Constitution rather than to the party in power. Understanding politics is imperative for the military professional as the military is an instrument of politics. Military actions through threats or applications of force have to be carried out to achieve strategic and tactical effects that support the achievement of political objectives. The need to translate effects of military actions into political outcomes demands an understanding of politics that extends beyond merely reading the surface currents of political forces at play. Modern conflicts are inherently people centric that demands of the military leadership, an understanding of political forces at play. There is need to understand the difference between being apolitical player and grasping political forces at play.

A natural element that makes interactions between the political and military leadership challenging is the natural proclivity of politicians, the short-term nature of their outlook. Quick returns are what ignites their enthusiasm and interest with less regard for longer term. But the shaping of the military instrument is a long-term affair which provides little dividend in the contemporary world. Military planning even when provided reasonable guidance is fraught with deep uncertainty which makes it difficult to explain to the

politicians the quest of varying types of military assets. The politico-military dialogue is asymmetric in time, perspective, and understanding the other view point.

The lack of a politico-military dialogue affects the long-term planning and resource allocation the most. But the silver lining in CMR is the national ability to deal with the short-term crises. In the recent past, the Uri, Doklam and Balakot inter alia provides sufficient proof of successful civil military cooperation. The area of concern is what matters for the unknown future.

The only solution is an institutionalised dialogue in perpetuity and hosted through mechanisms supported by institutional memories and human capital. Post Kargil this problem was identified and therefore a host of new agencies and institutions were created to deal with it. So, the natural question to ask is why is there no document that provides guidance for shaping the military instrument?

## Human Capital Problem

The answer is not that we lack the institutions but that we lack the institutional capacity which inheres ultimately on the quality of the human capital that populates institutional structures. The National Security Council (NSC), the apex political structure that needs to oversee and approve the National Security Doctrine and Strategy has failed to do so. This failure is a reflection of political will and the weakness in institutional support systems like the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), National Security Advisory Board and Strategic Policy Group (SPG).

It is not the case that supporting institutions have not evolved a National Security Doctrine or Strategy. They have however, failed to gain political approval. The need for such a document was acknowledged when a Defence Planning Committee under the NSA was tasked to evolve a National Security Strategy in early 2018. However, the exclusion of the Cabinet Secretary and the Home Secretary from the committee and the anchoring of the committee in the Headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) makes the committee unsuitable for this task which requires a holistic consideration beyond the realm of defence which is only a subset of national security though an important one. The NSCS is best suited for such a task.

There is also a case for first evolving a National Security Doctrine before a National Security Strategy. The doctrine's first approach will provide political clarity in terms of direction and broad approaches to the complex geopolitical situations. The doctrine would have a longer life span while strategy keeps adjusting to the varying dynamics of forces at play. The creation of both these

documents not only requires the best minds but must also have the support of high calibre domain specialists<sup>2</sup>. The problem here is the inability of the system to induct such specialists into the institutional structure. Instead the dominant presence is of personnel from the civil services cadre who being generalists have to learn on the job. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) and several other ministries are similarly afflicted. The GOM had recommended that a study be carried out to create a cadre of specialists that will rotate within the ministries/departments dealing with national security like NSCS, MOD, MHA, MEA and Intelligence agencies. But the study opined that due to cadre management issues such an arrangement was not feasible. The domain specialisation problem endures and in terms of CMR, the MOD best characterises the issue.

## Staying Apart - MOD vs Armed Services

Despite the GOM highlighting the need for integration of some elements of the military in the MOD, there has been only cosmetic changes and over the twenty years since Kargil, the relationship between the military and the bureaucracy has gone from bad to worse. The MOD has with rare exceptions in mechanisms like the Defence Acquisition Cell and some others, continued to populate itself with a generalist civil services cadre that mostly are experts in processes but lack subject expertise. The solution to the issue is the integration of the military into the MOD and doing away with the notion of subordinate offices. This GOM approved change has not been implemented and instead a mere change of nomenclature to 'Integrated Headquarters of MOD' has in reality retained the status quo. Moreover, bureaucratic resistance and the non-implementation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) are both major contributing factors.

The GOM had recommended that in order to remove the impression that the Armed Forces Headquarters do not participate in policy formulation and are outside the apex government structure, they should be renamed 'Integrated Headquarters of the MOD'. Therefore the Transaction of Business Rules and standing orders should be appropriately amended.<sup>3</sup> This recommendation in implementation morphed into a structure that preserved the original character of the MOD but still kept uniformed personnel out. Creation of the Defence Acquisition Council with some uniformed personnel as 'technical managers' was touted as integration.

Nearly a decade later, the Naresh Chandra Committee too accepted the need to integrate but its recommendation was feeble in terms of the reform proposed. It recommended that there should be a system of cross posting between civilian and uniformed personnel in mutually identified posts in the MOD and Service Headquarters. But it added that for the initial five years it should be restricted to

Director level posts. However, this recommendation was never implemented like most of the other recommendations. Non-implementation keeps the issue alive and worse the normative state of relations between the civilian bureaucracy and the armed forces headquarters has been described as 'Us vs Them'. Issues of equivalence and status between Civil and Military have remained unaddressed for several decades and is now worsened by the social media which has created a sense of victimhood among some sections of the military. Such a state of relationship is impacting India's defence preparations and is begging for attention and reform. What should be done?

## Integration

The answer as they say has been blowing in the pages of the GOM report. Integration means that civilian and military identities are merged wherever required and there are several areas where they have to be separated. Essentially, integration should be based on functional principles. Defence acquisition and veteran's welfare could be integrated while personnel matters like promotions and postings need not be. But a critical change required is the creation of a Military department that consists of the CDS assisted by those elements that supports the function of using military expertise in the fields like defence acquisitions and deciding the allocation of budgets to different services. Essentially those elements of IDS required for the CDS function should be moved from IDS to the Military department. There is even a case for the department of Ex Service Welfare to be placed under the Military Department because of the organic relationship between serving personnel and veterans for all serving personnel are future veterans. This will require an amendment in the Allocation of Business rules in the First and Second Schedule.

The CDS as per GOM will perform the following functions -:

- To Provide Single-Point Military Advice to the Government
- To Administer the Strategic Forces
- To Enhance the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Planning Process Through Intra and Inter-Service prioritisation
- To Ensure the Required "Jointness" in the Armed Forces.

The GOM had recommended that the Defence Secretary function as the 'Principal Defence Adviser' and be responsible to the Defence Minister for the following: -

- Policy Advice.  
Supervising the Department of Defence.
- Coordinating the functioning of all departments in the Ministry.
- Coordinating the finalisation of the complete
- MoD Long Term Defence Perspective Plan (LTDPP), 5 year Plan, and the annual budget for approval by the Defence Minister.
- Advising the Defence Minister on all matters relating to Parliament, Central Government and State Governments, in addition to advice generated by individual departments, and
- Coordinating all matters relating to personnel policies, terms and conditions of service, foreign postings and the like, with cadre controlling authorities in the MoD and with the Department of Personnel and Training (DoP&T) when required.

The GOM had specially commented on the relationship between the Defence Secretary and CDS – “The Defence Secretary will function as “Principal Defence Adviser” to the Defence Minister in a manner similar to the role to be performed by the CDS as the “Principal Military Adviser” and both will enjoy an equivalent status in terms of their working relationship as distinct from the Warrant of Precedence. Similarly, the Defence Secretary must enjoy an equivalent status vis-a-vis the Chiefs of Staff, in so far as their functional relationship is concerned. Meetings convened by the Defence Secretary on issues concerning him shall be attended by the CDS as necessary and vice versa. The Chiefs of Staff will also attend the meetings convened by the Defence Secretary, if required and vice versa. The purpose of this arrangement is to ensure that the aspect of Warrant of Precedence does not vitiate the working environment of the Ministry”.

If there is to be any meaningful integration between the MoD and Service Headquarters, the institution of the CDS as visualised by the GOM is an imperative first step that must also be accompanied with a series of structural reforms like Military Department and Integrated Theatre Commands.

Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) which was also not instituted but de facto exists as the Chief of the Integrated Staff (CISC). However, the GOM had visualised that creation of CDS and integration with MOD cannot be the golden key to resolve the manifold problems of integration. Integration will also be problematic if issues of equivalence between Civil and Military posts/ranks are unresolved.

The pressing need for a CDS due to India becoming a nuclear power was also stated in the GOM which also recommended the establishment of a Strategic Forces Command to manage all strategic forces. Notably the CDS was to exercise

administrative control and be the channel of control between the Government and the Strategic Forces Commander. Without the CDS and the Chairman COSC being rotational and some even having a tenure of a month or two coupled with the prime responsibility of being Chief of a Service, the required oversight of the strategic forces has been weak. But what requires reform is the erroneous assumption that any Service Chief performing the Chairman COSC function during a conventional war or crisis will be able to devote enough time and attention to be providing advice and updates on the strategic situation to the Prime Minister and on deployment and employment of strategic forces. So apart for reasons mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that a CDS is also vital for improving India's nuclear decision making structure. Another critical task of the CDS is to ensure Jointness of the Armed Forces.

## Jointness

While integration alluded to thus far is between the Civil and Military components, the arena of Jointness in essence is about synergizing the various components of the military. All of the components utilise these geographies of Land, Sea, Air, Space and Cyber<sup>5</sup>. All of the components utilize these geographies to varying degrees while being primarily dedicated to one. This heady functional mix has made achieving Jointness a formidable challenge for the military. The major reform needed is one of structural re-engineering.

While the CDS and VCDS will resolve the major inadequacies of the extant Chief of Staff Committee system, the CDS will have to be politically mandated to carry out the necessary structural reforms. The most important structural reform is the establishing of Integrated Theatre Commands (ITC). Modern conflicts require coordinated application of military power and presently each service has its own Commands that are not even geographically co-located. There is a total of 14 service specific operational Commands and two integrated Commands.

Contemporary battle space environment consists of a diverse constellation of elements that could include elements of the three services within a common geographic boundary. If the conflict zone involves Gujrat and its adjacent areas, planning and execution will have to be coordinated from an integrated headquarters and existing operational structures are inadequate for the task. So, both at the highest level of Services Headquarters and the Theatre level there is a need for integrated Joint Services Headquarters and ITC. This issue has been debated ad nauseum and implementation is long overdue.

Even the integration of training and logistics institutions have been halted after some small steps were taken following the GOM. Integration of these institutions



especially training has become the victim of service parochialism. Difficulty to reform cannot be overcome without the oversight and push has to come from the CDS who is expected to have a military perspective rather than one that weighed down by an individual service outlook.

There should be no doubt that structural integration will be extremely difficult to implement if left to the uniformed fraternity. The political leadership must therefore mandate these changes and get it implemented through the CDS. The onus for reform must shift from the military and bureaucracy to the political leadership. There is need for political will and definitely no requirement to appoint a committee. We know what needs to be done but so far we have not been able to get it done.

## Conclusion

Any substantial improvement in civil military relations and higher defence management structures would have to involve restructuring that privileges integration as the cardinal principle. The military instrument is unique and involves violence as the currency of power. Normatively, the political leadership have to depend on military advice that involves continuous interaction for creating the military instrument that is suitably shaped to fulfill potential political objectives and also applying it when required.

Amongst the plethora of defence reforms that demands attention, the integration of the MOD and the three Services coupled with creation of ITC are the objectives that the present government must prioritise. Without doubt it will have to start with a CDS. In due course, an Indian Model of ITS with theatre commanders reporting to the CDS would have to be evolved with the role of the Chiefs being restricted to procurement, administration and training of their respective services. This is a humungous task that needs an enlightened and visionary political leadership.

The newly elected government must focus on the major changes and not tinker with the edges. Resistance to reform is the natural proclivity of entrenched interests. The military instrument is the ultimate guardian of the state and its effectiveness should not be allowed to be sacrificed at the altar of narrow and parochial institutional interests both Civil and Military. Nation first should be the bugle call and nothing less will suffice.

## REFERENCES

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1. *The Indian Thali is a traditional style that serves a wholesome meal in a single plate/ banana leaf. It preserves the individual identity of the dishes but is easily amenable to mixing to create a wide variety of tastes suited to the palette of the individual.*
2. *This issue is being addressed by the government but is still in early stages of implementation.*
3. *Para 6.14 Group of Ministers Report.*  
<https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/GoM%20Report%20on%20National%20Security.pdf>
4. *ibid para 6.27*
5. *Strictly Cyber pertains to the Electro-Magnetic Spectrum. But is definitely a separate medium which for the purposes of understanding is given a geographic equivalence.*