



All for one, one for all?

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Highlights

- Each service of the military extolling its own importance is not helping India to study the changing character of war
- There has been much discussion in the media recently on the integrated military theatre commands.
- Most of the opposition to such a restructuring has been led by Air Force officers, including former Chief of Air Staff S. Krishnaswamy, who have voiced the view that the creation of integrated commands would seriously hamper the effective application of air power, particularly because of the limited resources available with the Air Force.

Integrated military theatre commands Issues

- There is justification in the argument that moving ahead towards integrated commands without any **meaningful restructuring** in the higher defence organisation is premature.
 - The initial steps should have been an integration of the Ministry of Defence and the appointment of a Chief of the Defence Staff.
 - This would have put in place structures and practices that would encourage a jointness among the three services and perhaps pave the way in future towards integrated organisations.
- What is more debatable is their somewhat simplistic view on the **character of future wars**.
 - The Army and the Navy challenge this assertion with their opinions on the importance of land and sea power.
 - The real problem lies in the fact that all three services have their own vision of how future conflicts could unfold and the primacy of their own arm in winning wars.
- The start point is therefore a common understanding between the services on **the nature and character of wars** that India could fight in the future.
 - According to Carl von Clausewitz, the nature of war does not change, it is the character of war that undergoes transformation.
 - The enduring elements of the nature of war are its violent character, a clash of wills between two opponents, and political primacy.
 - There is no war without these elements.
- The character of war, on the other hand, is related to **how a war will be fought**.
 - This depends on our military capabilities, economy, technology, political considerations, civil-military relations, and the opponent's aim and strategy.
 - Political purpose will decide the start and termination of wars, and the manner in which they will be fought.

- The services have made their operational plans based on a proactive **(cold start) strategy**, with the assumption that the war will be short and swift.
 - Maximum combat power is to be harnessed and applied across the border in a series of strikes that will rapidly degrade the military potential of the enemy.
 - The weakness with this strategy is that it seldom takes political objectives into consideration.
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Three examples

The Kargil conflict broke out in 1999.

- The Pakistan Army had clearly committed an act of war by occupying territory on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC).
- While the complete military was poised to strike Pakistan by land, sea and air, the political leadership decided to restrict the conflict to only the Kargil sector and to our own side of the LoC.
- Only a small fraction of the Indian Army was applied while the Air Force was restricted to bombing posts that had been occupied by Pakistan Army soldiers.
- Despite this, Kargil was a resounding political, diplomatic and military victory.

The next crisis emerged from the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001.

- Operation Parakram was launched and the Indian Army mobilised for an impending war against Pakistan.
- The Army remained deployed along the borders for almost one year.
- Even the Kaluchak attack in Jammu and Kashmir in May 2002, in which 34, including soldiers, women and children, were killed, did not trigger an all-out conflict.
- As the Army returned to its barracks in December 2002, questions were raised whether the military had mobilised without the political leadership having clearly spelled out its objectives and whether this attempted show of force had actually proved counterproductive.

The Mumbai attack in November 2008 was the biggest terror strike launched from Pakistan.

- There was outrage in the country and calls for retaliation against Pakistan.
- Apart from emphasising the need to synergise political and military objectives, another major lesson from these examples is that the importance of a military force lies in its utility to achieve the national aims, and not in the numbers of divisions, ships and aircraft squadrons.
- The dominance of America's military power has not resulted in the achievement of its political objectives in Afghanistan.

Imagining the future

We must also debate the character of future wars.

- A number of questions need to be answered.
- What will be the contours of a war between nuclear armed adversaries, and how

- will victory be defined if we want to remain below the nuclear threshold?
- As our offensive columns enter the Punjab province of Pakistan, what is the sort of conflict that they will face?
 - Will it merely be a pitting of two armies against each other or a hybrid conflict also involving the local population, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists, and criminal elements?

How will China achieve its political objectives through armed conflict?

- Will it be by a massive application of force across the Himalayan watershed or by exploiting its advantages in information warfare, technology and ballistic missile capability?
- What will be the psychological impact of long-range missiles slamming into population centres and killing people who would never have imagined themselves to be a part of the conflict?
- Will this be the real clash of wills rather than actions along the border?

It is necessary for the three services to sit together and find realistic answers.

- We must be prepared for a whole range of options from non-contact warfare to a full-scale war.
- Our ability to generate 11,000 sorties in an exercise or launch three strike corps into Pakistan are visible displays of our combat potential but may not translate into the best utilisation of force for all contingencies.

Conclusion

It is only after these discussions crystallise that we will be able to arrive at a common understanding of how future wars could possibly play out and the kind of joint structures that are required to best fight this conflict. We may not get everything right but each service extolling its own importance is not helping our ability to prepare for the future.

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