

DECIPHERING THE CDS

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Defence related developments

At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, it must be said that the creation of a Department of Military Affairs (DMA), with a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) at its head, on New Year's Day 2020, was the most significant development in the national security domain since Independence. First mooted in 2001, by a Group of Ministers (GoM), in the aftermath of the Kargil conflict, successive administrations — NDA and UPA — have baulked at the creation of CDS. The Modi government, having jettisoned the doctrine of “strategic restraint”, in its first term, deserves full credit for initiating a long-overdue process of national security reform, whose first “green shoots” are the CDS and DMA.

It is, therefore, a pity that the dissonance of nation-wide protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act and impending [National Register of Citizens](#) has served to diffuse focus on this issue of vital security importance and evoked personality-related controversies.

In the latter context, it needs to be borne in mind that selection of important office-holders — civil and military — remains the prerogative of the government in power. While numerous factors, including seniority, may have their place, it is “acceptability” of the individual, to the government, that adds weight to his “merit” and tilts the balance. Since all selections are, ultimately, made on merit, no individual needs to feel beholden to the government. The military ethos requires that he retains his professional independence and upholds his oath of allegiance to the Constitution.

From the ongoing public debate and discussion it is obvious that not everyone is clear about the need, importance and implications of many of the measures enumerated in the Government of India (GoI) press release regarding CDS. As a participant in the GoM process of 1999 and a member of the 2011 Naresh Chandra Committee on security, this writer will attempt to highlight some areas which are likely to have a far-reaching impact on India's security scenario.

First, since 1947 the three service HQs designated as “Attached Offices” of the DoD, have remained “outliers” vis-à-vis the MoD and GoI. The service chiefs, lacking recognition/standing in the GoI Business Rules, are heard politely by the raksha mantri (RM), who then turns to the defence secretary for advice. Communication between SHQ and DoD takes place largely through the medium of files.

With creation of the DMA, headed by CDS, the military will, for the first time, be admitted into the central edifice of the GoI and become a participant in policy-making. Designation of the CDS as Principal Military Adviser (PMA) to RM will enable unhindered access to MoD, accelerating the process of decision-making and accord of approvals. To ensure adequate availability of expertise, civilians will need to be inducted into DMA and military personnel into DoD. This will require the CDS to vigorously pursue enabling amendments to GoI Business Rules and the Central Staffing Scheme.

Second, a key military body, the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), has, for decades, been dysfunctional because its chairmanship is held by one of the three chiefs on a part-time, rotational basis. Historically, the chairman COSC has lacked the authority as well as capacity and inclination to tackle tri-service issues of substance. With the CDS now being designated “permanent chairman COSC”, he will be able to devote undivided attention to the administration of tri-service organisations and take measures to engender “jointness” amongst three services. In the approaching era of dwindling defence budgets, a crucial function of CDS will be “prioritising” the capital acquisition proposals (or “wish-lists”) of individual services. He will have

to ensure that the “defence rupee” is spent judiciously; on warfare-capabilities considered vital for national military power, and not on pandering to service demands.

Third, the chairman COSC is, notionally, a key functionary in the nuclear command chain, but given his rather uncertain status, there was ambiguity about his role in this critical domain. However, this ambiguity has been eliminated with the designation of CDS as PMA to the Nuclear Command Authority. Since the CDS will also administer the Strategic Forces Command, this measure will go a long way in enhancing the credibility of our nuclear deterrent. Given the differing interpretations of India’s nuclear doctrine voiced by Gol functionaries from time to time, the CDS would do well to initiate an early review of the doctrine.

Fourth, the mandate of the DMA includes facilitation of “jointness in operations” through establishment of joint/theatre commands. Although a successful template for joint operations was created in the Andaman & Nicobar Command (at the mouth of the Malacca Strait), 19 years ago, lack of political direction and indifference of the COSC has led to stasis. While contemplating creation of integrated theatres, it must be borne in mind that this will imply operational control of forces devolving from the chiefs to theatre commanders. At the same time, theatre commands would need staff with the knowledge and experience to deploy land, maritime and air forces. Given the disruptive impact of each of these measures, they would best be implemented by the CDS, in a phased manner.

Fifth, the designation of CDS, a four-star general in the pay-grade of cabinet secretary, as head of DMA, may create issues of equivalences, since the other four departments of MoD are headed by secretary-rank officers. One alternative would be to delegate the financial and administrative powers of CDS to his 3-star chief of staff (deputy) and designate him as secretary DMA. The other alternative would be to emulate the British and bring the defence secretary on par with the chiefs and CDS.

Finally, a reminder is in order that the essence of jointness lies in the fact that the appointment of CDS (it is not a rank) is tenable by 4-star officers of all three services. Ironically, the new rank badge created for CDS, seems designed only for army uniforms and an admiral or air chief marshal may not be able to wear it. An error or a “Freudian slip”?

The writer is a retired chief of naval staff

END

Downloaded from crackIAS.com

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com