

New frontiers

The advancement of technology has led to new domains of warfare being opened to the militaries world over. Space and cyber warfare are two such domains where most modern militaries have focused on. The US pushed the Iranian nuclear programme back by use of the Stuxnet virus, while Russian and Chinese governments have also been suspected of using tools of cyber warfare against other countries.

China has also demonstrated its capabilities of space warfare by shooting down a satellite, challenging the American prowess in that field. Equally pathbreaking has been the use of Special Forces in an independent role in global missions. All this had happened years ago, but Indian military neither had any domain expertise nor any dedicated agencies to work in these areas.

Five years ago, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, comprising of three military chiefs had asked the government for establishing three new military commands in these domains - cyber, space and special operations. These commands were proposed to be raised tri-service commands, modelled on the Andaman and Nicobar Command, thereby also enhancing jointness among the three defence services. After going through multiple rounds of deliberations and discussions at the defence ministry, including a change of government, the proposal was finally approved in July this year.

The proposal, however, had been diluted in a major way. Instead of commands, which are headed by Lt Generals, cyber and space would be agencies - and special operations a division - to be headed by Major Generals. In keeping with the motto of promoting integration and jointness among services, these would however still be tri-service organisations. It is a matter of time before the formal governmental sanction leads to creation of these new agencies.

Although there is merit in the argument that this marks a beginning in these fields of warfare, there is a fear that creating of agencies - and not commands - may lead to these domains not getting adequate importance, thereby defeating their very purpose.

While there is a likelihood that these agencies would eventually be upgraded to commands, this points to a bigger problem in higher defence organisation: The lack of a single point military commander or advisor. India still doesn't have a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or a Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (PC-COSC), who would have then overseen these joint agencies and given them due importance. The creation of a CDS or PC-COSC has been delayed for too long; any further delay will only prevent India from leveraging its military power effectively.

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