



Role of the Chief of Defence Staff

For Prelims: CDS, Theatre Command.

For Mains: Significance of CDS, Rethink of CDS Reforms.

Why in News?

The Government is reassessing the concept of post of [Chief of Defence Staff \(CDS\)](#) as well as the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and is **looking to streamline the setup**.

- The CDS is a **four-star General/Officer** who acts as the Principal Military Advisor to the Defence Minister on all tri-services (Army, Navy and Indian Air Force) matters.

What is the Role of the Chief of Defence Staff?

- CDS acts as **the permanent Chairman of the [Chiefs of Staff Committee](#)** which will also have three service chiefs as members.
 - His core function will be to foster greater operational synergy between the three service branches of the Indian military and keep inter-service frictions to a minimum.
- He also **head the newly created Department of Military Affairs (DMA)** in the Ministry of Defence.
 - The CDS will be the **single-point military adviser to the Defence Minister on matters involving all three services** and the service chiefs will be obliged to confine their counsel to issues pertaining to their respective services.
 - As the head of DMA, CDS is vested with the authority in prioritising inter-service procurement decisions as Permanent Chairman-Chiefs of Staff Committee.
- The CDS is also **vested with the authority to provide directives to the three chiefs**.
 - However, he does not enjoy any command authority over any of the forces.
- CDS is **first among equals, he enjoys the rank of Secretary within the DoD** (Department of Defence) and his powers will be confined to only the revenue budget.
- He will also perform an advisory role in the [Nuclear Command Authority \(NCA\)](#).

What is the Significance of CDS?

- **Synergy between Armed forces and Government:** CDS' role is not simply about tri-service cooperation, it is equally about fostering better cooperation between the Ministry of Defense bureaucracy and the Armed services.
 - Since 1947, there are three Service Headquarters (SHQ) designated as "Attached Offices" of the Department of Defense (DoD).
 - Due to this, communication between SHQ and DoD takes place largely through the medium of files.
 - With the creation of CDS as Principal Military Adviser (PMA) to Defense Minister, the process of decision-making will be accelerated.
- **Jointness in operations:** The Chiefs of Staff Committee-COSC (predecessor of CDS), has been

dysfunctional because its chairmanship is held by one of the three chiefs on a part-time rotational basis.

- Historically, the chairman COSC lacked the authority as well as capacity and inclination to tackle tri-service issues of substance.
- With the CDS now being designated as “permanent chairman of COSC”, he will be able to devote undivided attention to the administration of tri-service organisations.
- **Operationalisation of [Theatre Command](#)**: Creation of DMA will facilitate the operationalisation of joint/theatre command.
 - Although a successful template for joint operations was created in the [Andaman & Nicobar Command](#), the lack of political direction and indifference of the COSC has led to inactivity of this joint command.
 - 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.
- **CDS as a key functionary in the nuclear command chain** will also administer the [Strategic Forces Command](#).
 - This measure will go a long way in enhancing the credibility of India's nuclear deterrent.
 - The CDS would also initiate an early review of [India's Nuclear Doctrine](#).
- **In the approaching era of dwindling defence budgets**, a crucial function of CDS will be “prioritising” the capital acquisition proposals of individual services.
 - CDS 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.

Why Rethink the Role of CDS?

- It is experienced that the **appointment of a CDS in itself wasn't enough** and there are several issues with respect to roles and responsibilities, issues of equivalence among others.
- There is also a **dichotomy in the roles and responsibilities** with the several hats worn by the CDS and also overlap in responsibilities between the DMA and DoD.
- There is also a **rethink on the ambitious timelines set for the creation of [Theatre Commands](#)** and also the number of commands and their envisaged format.

What has been the progress on Theatre commands?

- An ambitious agenda was set for the first **CDS to reorganize the Indian armed forces into integrated theatre commands**, which would be the biggest reorganization of the military in 75 years and fundamentally change the way the three services operate together.
- Extensive studies were carried out by the Vice Chiefs of three Services on the theatre commands — land-based Western and Eastern theatre commands, maritime theatre command and an integrated air defence command had stated that the **Army's Northern Command would be left out of the ambit for now** and integrated at a later stage.
- However, **differences continue to remain on certain aspects with the Air Force having some reservations with regard to the air defence command** and the naming and rotation of the theatre commands among others.
- Additional studies were ordered, **which are currently underway but the overall process has stalled in the absence of a CDS** and continued differences.

Way Forward

- There is a need to have a CDS with operational powers who will after due legislative changes have theatre commanders report to him while the Service Chiefs will look after the raise, train and sustain functions of respective Services.
- The creation of CDS will not be a panacea, therefore India needs to carry out thorough reforms to upgrade its armed forces so that it can meet the security challenges of 21st-century.

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