

Theatre focused armed forces: Speed up please

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Paper - III
(Internal Security)

The creation of Theatre Commands (Theaterization) is being called the biggest military reform that India has seen till now. The plan is to have five unified or theatre commands, which will help in better planning and military response, and aim to have a unified approach to fighting any future war.

But, the entire process has been riddled with a visible lack of consensus amongst the three arms of the military forces. In light of the internal differences over the structure and scope of the theatre commands, a committee has been set up to resolve all issues.

The panel includes the Vice Chiefs of the three services, the Chief of Integrated Defence Staff to the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, and representatives Ministries such as Home Affairs, Finance, and Law.

What is a Theatre Command (TC)?

A theatre command is a military structure wherein all the assets of the army, air force and navy in a particular theatre of war are under the operational control of a three-star general.

In a TC, the logistic resources required to support his operations will also be placed at the disposal of the theatre commander.

As of now, the Services have to speak to each other in times of need and urgency to request their assets to conduct a particular operation.

These 'unified combat commands' are organized either on a geographical basis (with a defined mission in a specific 'area of responsibility' somewhere on the globe) or on a functional basis.

Existing commands in India : 19 commands exist as of now [14 geographic commands, 3 functional and 2 joint commands: the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) and Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC)]

Global examples : More than 32 countries in the world, including the US, Russia, and China, already have some form of theatre or joint command in place. China's Western Theatre Command covers India.

The US was the first country to come up with the theaterization concept. The US military's joint command is the outcome of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defence Reorganisation Act. It created the unified combatant commands which are headed by four-star generals or admirals. None of the US service chiefs exercise authority over the unified commands.

What is the need for theatre commands in India's defence?

Current Challenges : India's defence faces potential threats from Pakistan and China, necessitating a focused approach.

Operational Efficiency : Traditional separation of forces for land, air, and sea combat leads to inefficiencies.

Specific Theatres : Forces need to be strategically positioned—Jaipur for western threats, Lucknow for northern threats, and Combatore for maritime threats.

Resource Optimization : Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs) ensure better use of resources and improved readiness.

Evolving Warfare : Modern warfare demands quick, coordinated responses, which separate commands cannot effectively provide.

What progress has been made?

CDS Appointment : Nearly five years ago, India appointed its first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) to oversee defence reforms.

ITC Proposal : A concrete plan for Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs) has been reported, indicating progress in restructuring.

Leadership Roles : The proposed structure includes a vice-CDS for strategic planning and procurement, and a deputy CDS for operations and intelligence.

Operational Coordination : The three existing service chiefs will continue to lead their respective forces, while combat operations will be managed by top officers with a strategic view.

What should be done?

Implement ITCs : The shift to Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs) should be prioritized to enhance operational efficiency.

Strategic Leadership : Appoint a vice-CDS for strategic planning and procurement, and a deputy CDS for operations and intelligence.

Focus on Equipment Upgrades : Ensure continuous modernization of military equipment.

Avoid Reckless Moves : Transition cautiously to prevent exposing vulnerabilities.

Consensus on AI Use : Develop a consensus on the tolerance for AI-led strikes to minimize collateral damage.

Expected Question for Prelims

Que. Consider the following statements with reference to Defense Theater Command:

1. America was the first country to come up with the concept of theaterization.
2. Port Blair houses the first and only tri-service theater command of the Indian Armed Forces.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: What is meant by theater command? Discuss its need in India and the progress made so far.

Answer's Approach:

- ❖ Discuss theater command in the first part of the answer.
- ❖ In the second part, discuss its need in India and the progress made so far.
- ❖ Finally give a conclusion giving suggestions.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.