



INTEGRATED THEATRE COMMAND - GS III MAINS

Q. What is the significance of Integrated theatre commands? How can proposed theatre commands and headquarters help in achieving the objective of Integrated theatre commands? (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Theatre Commands Will Bolster Military Preparedness And War-Fighting: CDS*

What's in the news?

- The impending creation of integrated theatre commands will lay the foundation for catapulting the armed forces into the next orbit of military preparedness and war-fighting, while also setting the stage for the next generation of reforms, chief of defence staff General Anil Chauhan said.

Theaterization:

- It involves placing designated personnel units from all three services under a unified theater commander.

Significance:

- Each of the three services has its own culture and ethos. With the creation of the theatre commands, their personnel, assets, infrastructure, and logistics would be integrated.
- Thus, they can operate cohesively to attain defined military goals in specific theatres covering laid-down operational areas.

Integrated Theatre Commands:

- It is an ambitious defence reform aims to integrate the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force to operate jointly in specific adversary-based theatres with defined military goals during conflicts or wars.

Global Practice:

- All most major militaries in the world including USA, China and France have the theatre command set up.

Creation of DMA:

- The government initiated this reform in 2019 by creating the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and setting up the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) to oversee the transition.

Key Highlights from the Draft for Establishing Integrated Theatre Commands:

1. Mumbai as Tri-Service Station:

- There are plans to make Mumbai the first tri-service common defense station, and to set up additional joint logistics nodes across the country.



- This will boost integration in logistics needs, and streamline supply chains and inter-service postings of officers.

2. Commands & Headquarters:

The latest draft of the military envisions three adversary-based theater commands:

- Western theater command facing Pakistan, planned to be set up in Jaipur,
- Northern theater command facing China, planned to be set up in Lucknow.
- Maritime theater command for threats emanating from the Indian Ocean Region, it could be headquartered in Coimbatore.

3. Rationalization of Existing Service Commands:

- Currently, the Army and the IAF have seven commands each, while the Navy has three.
- In addition, there are two tri-service commands — the Andaman and Nicobar Command, and the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) as well as the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQIDS).

4. Transformation into Theatre Command Headquarters:

- After the creation of the theater commands, three command headquarters of the services are likely to be transformed into theatre command headquarters.
- The existing Andaman and Nicobar Command may be subsumed into one of the theatre commands (in the maritime theatre command, as per current plans), and the HQIDS will likely operate under the CDS.
- The SFC will continue to operate independently, as per the plan.

5. Command Leadership:

- The three theatre commands will be headed by three theatre commanders who would likely be of the rank of General or equivalent.

6. Organisational Hierarchy:

- According to current plans, the theater commanders will report to a National Defence Committee, which is likely to be headed by the Defence Minister.
- There are plans to appoint a Vice CDS and a Deputy CDS. The Vice CDS is likely to look after strategic planning, capability development, and procurement-related matters, and will likely be an officer of the rank of General or equivalent.
- The Deputy CDS will be responsible for operations, intelligence, and coordination of the allocation of assets among theatres. The Deputy CDS is likely to be a Lieutenant General or equivalent.
- The three service Chiefs would be responsible for raising, training, and sustaining the individual services.
- The three theatre commanders would be responsible for operations.

Significance of Integrated Theatre Command:



1. Effective Resource Utilization:

- The forces will be able to pool their resources efficiently, resulting in the optimum utilisation of platforms, weapon systems, and assets.

2. Greater Integration among Armed Forces Personnel:

- The Act will empower the Heads of ISOs and pave the way for expeditious disposal of cases, avoid multiple proceedings and will be a step towards greater integration & jointness among the Armed Forces personnel.

3. Simpler & Efficient Communication:

- With a unified command structure, the communication processes could be simpler and more efficient as multiple levels of clearances across hierarchies and geographies are needed to corroborate plans and strategies.
- Currently, India's multiple military commands are all located in different geographical areas. This, at times, causes communication hindrances during joint operations and exercises.

4. Rationalization of the Command Structure:

- The present command structure in the Indian military is pretty uneven.
- The Indian Army has seven commands, while a much smaller Indian Air Force has a similar number and the Indian Navy has three commands. This structure will be rationalized under the theatre command concept.

Challenges to the Theatre Commands:

1. Educational Bedrock:

- In terms of preparing the educational bedrock for military personnel to serve in theatre commands, India seems to be lagging behind.

2. National Security Strategy (NSS):

- Many retired military professionals have criticised implementing theatre commands without having a coherent National Security Strategy (NSS).
- Essentially arguing that the theatre commands will not have a clear blueprint and policy objective to work towards without an NSS.

3. Inter-Service Competition:

- The intense focus of each service on its own assets and influence can hinder the creation of synergy among the services.

4. Perception of Army Dominance:

- Concerns are arising over the integration of the commands that may perpetuate the perceived dominance of the army and provide it with greater operational control.

5. Limited Experience:



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- With limited experience of integrated theatre commands, its implementation and adjustments in India is a serious challenge.

6. Infrastructure and Logistics:

- Coordinating and synchronizing the infrastructure and logistics requirements across different services could be complex and resource-intensive.

Way Forward:

1. Institutional & Ideational Changes:

- As India moves towards implementing its biggest military overhaul, which could undoubtedly be a force multiplier, a few institutional and ideational changes will have to be incorporated to find the correct balance in such a transformation.

2. Reworking on Curriculum:

- The curriculum at staff colleges and war colleges can be reworked to provide officers with the knowledge and transferable skills to serve at the headquarters of corresponding services.

The establishment of theater commands, aimed at optimizing resource utilization and fostering greater integration among armed forces personnel, underscores a strategic shift towards a more cohesive and synchronized defense framework.

