



**Delhi Policy Group**

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



# DPG POLICY BRIEF

## Institution of the Chief of Defence Staff: Evaluating the First Year

### *Author*

Anil Ahuja

Volume VI, Issue 1

JANUARY 1, 2021



**Delhi Policy Group**

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

## DPG Policy Brief Vol. VI, Issue 1

January 1, 2021

### ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

### Author

**Lt. Gen. Anil Ahuja (Retd.), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM & Bar**, Senior Adjunct Fellow for Defence Policy, Delhi Policy Group

*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### Cover Photographs:

*Gen. Bipin Rawat, Chief of Defence Staff, assuming office on December 31, 2019.*

*Source: HQ IDS Twitter*

© 2021 by the Delhi Policy Group

### Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)

**Institution of the Chief of Defence Staff:  
Evaluating the First Year**

By  
Anil Ahuja

**Contents**

Background.....	1
Role and Responsibilities.....	2
Implementation of Proposed Reforms.....	3
DMA: A Drag on the Functioning of CDS .....	4
Recommendations for making the Office of CDS Effective.....	6

## Institution of the Chief of Defence Staff: Evaluating the First Year

by  
Anil Ahuja

### Background

A year ago, on December 24, 2019 the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), accorded approval for creation of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). This was amongst the most significant reforms in India's higher defence structure since independence. A surprise supplement to this new post was the creation of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) as the fifth vertical in the Indian Ministry of Defence (MoD), others being the Department of Defence (DOD), Department of Defence Production (DDP), Department of Defence Research and Development (DRDO) and Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare (DESW). This mode of integration of the services with the Ministry of Defence was perceived as an added bonus by most defence watchers. General Bipin Rawat took over this coveted appointment on January 1, 2020.



Gen. Bipin Rawat, Chief of Defence Staff, assuming office on December 31, 2019.

Source: HQ IDS Twitter



A formal notification reallocating work and staff between the Department of Defence (DOD) and the newly created Department of Military Affairs (DMA) was issued on January 9, 2020 – an exhaustive 29-page document<sup>1</sup>.

### Role and Responsibilities

According to the CCS notification of December 24, 2020<sup>2</sup> the remit of the DMA includes the three services with their Headquarters (the Army, the Navy, the Air Force) and the tri-service HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS); the Territorial Army; works related to all services; and all revenue expenditure (all procurements less Capital acquisitions).

The CDS was designated as the “Principal Military Adviser to the Raksha Mantri (RM)”. The three service chiefs, however, would continue to advise the RM on matters exclusively concerning their respective services. The CDS does not exercise any military command, including over the three service chiefs, with whom he is the first amongst the equals. The nature of this functional relationship has been evident during the continuing Ladakh stand-off with China, with the respective Service Chiefs remaining in the lead role in matters related to the deployment of their respective service.



Chief of Defence Staff with COAS, CNS and CAS (Source: Business Standard)

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Defence, DoD Note: F. No 38(1)/2020-D(O&M) dated 09 January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet approves creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff in the rank of four-star General Press Information Bureau, Government of India. December 24, 2019.  
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1597425>

In his role as the “Permanent Chairman COSC”, the CDS is administering tri-service organisations and exercising command over Cyber and Space Agencies and the Special Operations Division. He is also the military adviser to the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA). Like other Service Chiefs, the CDS is a member of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by the RM and of the Defence Planning Committee (DPC) chaired by the NSA.

The government has mandated the CDS to bring optimisation, within three years, in the spheres of joint operations; communications; training; and logistics. He has also been tasked to streamline the entire perspective planning process for defence acquisitions, with emphasis on indigenisation. Towards that end, he is required to assign inter-service priority to Capital acquisition proposals, based on multi-domain operational requirements and the anticipated defence budget.

The expectation is that these measures would enable the Armed Forces to implement a coordinated defence doctrine, foster jointmanship, optimise resource utilisation and lay the foundation for the establishment of Joint/Theatre Commands over a period of time (which has not been stipulated specifically).

### **Implementation of Proposed Reforms**

The CDS and the newly created DMA have now been in existence for a year. It is incidental that in the very first year of the new institutional structure, the country is facing one of its biggest security challenges across its northern borders with China, together with intensified hostile activities along the western borders with Pakistan. Though the physical manifestation of the challenge is primarily along the land borders, its peripheral impact extends to the maritime and other asymmetric domains. Such an environment provides an early opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of this major defence reform, and to carry out a critical reappraisal of the new structure and the charter of duties assigned to it. It is also an opportunity for the pioneering incumbent to display his strategic and military acumen.

To defence watchers, however, the handling of the current military standoff along the borders seems no different from single service responses as experienced hitherto. The CDS is yet to articulate a defence strategy or evolve a multidomain concept of operations, nor is there any notable synergy of operations in the continental and maritime domains, augmented with joint activities in the fields of cyber, space and information warfare. Despite India's strategic partnerships and defence cooperation agreements with several countries, there has been no evident leveraging of these in any manner to

support our China push-back. Operational jointness and delivery of single-point military vision/advice is yet to become evident.

A significant responsibility assigned to the CDS was of promoting jointness in procurement, training and staffing through joint planning and integration of the requirements of the three services. A new Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP-2020) has been promulgated on October 01, 2020, well after the appointment of the CDS. Rather than strengthening the involvement of the services in coordinated acquisitions and capability development, the role of HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) in the vetting and decision-making process for Capital Acquisitions has been substantially diluted. Hitherto, a senior HQ IDS official (a three-star from any of the services) was at the core of perspective planning and capability development of all the three services and the Coast Guard. He provided the first level of comprehensive vetting of the acquisition proposals and maintained continuity in decision-making till the level of RM as the Secretary of the Defence Acquisition Council. The entire process has now been handed over to the Director-General Acquisition, with the CDS and his HQ IDS playing a nominal role. The pitfalls of this seemingly streamlined process, as perceived even by the services, are likely to become evident in days to come. There also seems to have been no refinement in the process to align the defence budget to prioritised acquisitions for the desired capability enhancement.

### **DMA: A Drag on the Functioning of CDS**

Ironically, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), which was originally considered a `bonus', seems overly weighed down by a preponderance of administrative, works and logistics responsibilities, with only some marginally relevant operational, training and establishment related responsibilities. To illustrate, some of the assigned responsibilities of the DMA include recruitment, terms and conditions of service, documentation, promotions, complaints, honours and awards, pay and allowances, ceremonials and welfare, buildings and works, interaction with Paramilitary forces, and the like. Although certain additional (civilian) officers and staff have been apportioned to the DMA from the Department of Defence (DoD) for these functions, in practice it has impinged upon the military-specific functioning of the HQ IDS, diverting two and three-star rank officers from the well honed HQ IDS organisation to administrative functions. It would also be pertinent to note that despite there being a CDS in place, the mandate for the "Defence of India and every part thereof including defence policy" still rests with the Defence Secretary heading the DoD. There is little surprise that despite a CDS being in harness, India continues with the unenviable practice of not carrying out periodic defence

reviews, publishing policy white papers or formulating the national defence strategy.

Since the appointment of the CDS, there have been some abrupt announcements regarding the formation of theatre commands and creation of Joint Air Defence, Maritime and Logistics Commands, erroneously considered as “low hanging fruits”. In fact, quite to the contrary, the creation for instance of an Air Defence Command entails detailed deliberations on inter-services communication, integration of multiple origin radars, early warning and command and control functions, weapon systems integration and the working out of detailed nuances of air defence, ranging from the tactical battlefield to national level air and ballistic missile defence. Similarly, geographic and the maritime commands merit much greater deliberations over considerations of the span of control, inter-service communication architecture and evolving an appropriate manning and staffing pattern to handle tri-service operational and logistic requirements. The creation of a pool of qualified personnel to man tri-service billets in theatre command HQs requires rigorous preparatory steps, including training and cross-service placement of suitable officers. This is not to suggest that these tri-service structures should not be evolved, but to emphasise that this needs to be done systematically, beginning with well-identified building-blocks which military professionals under the guidance of the CDS should set about creating.

The simplistic rationale of reducing 17 service-specific command HQs to a fewer joint commands is far too naïve to guide such an enormous national exercise. A detailed concept would need to be evolved, war-gamed, test bedded and finally introduced incrementally. The onus of working out the revised time frame for these transformative changes and apprising the national leadership rests with the CDS. This, however, remains at best a work in progress. In practice, with the absence of a meaningful defence and security related charter of DMA, the attention span of the CDS and his staff seems to be focussed on issues related to terms and conditions of service, enhancement of ages of retirement, issues related to pensions etc. These measures again seem to have been initiated without detailed deliberations and consultations, creating resentment amongst serving and veteran soldiers, that too at a juncture of a major national security challenge. This pattern of actions suggests a misdirected focus of the office of the CDS on the administrative role of the DMA.



## Recommendations for making the Office of CDS effective

The limited experience of the first year of the functioning of the CDS and the DMA suggests that the subjects delegated to both should be more related to defence policy formulation and capability accretion rather than procedural matters like service conditions and personnel issues. These should span the spectrum of developing a national defence strategy in the short to medium time frame; developing joint doctrines and concepts; augmenting intelligence and surveillance as well as communications interoperability; enhancing defence partnerships and developing interoperability with strategic partners, and the like. At the General Staff level, the DMA must focus on matters such as the acquisition of munitions, WWR (war wastage reserves of arms, ammunition and equipment), joint military exercises and training, military assistance to neighbouring countries, creation of border infrastructure, and coordination of asymmetric warfare.

The guiding principle must be that the charter of the DMA should not be such that its administrative functions become preponderant, leaving little time for the CDS to work on strategy, render well-considered military advice to the national leadership, and provide conceptual and doctrinal direction to the armed forces to meet future threats and challenges. This is an inescapable imperative given the reality of our nation facing multi-domain, two-front threats.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh meeting CDS General Bipin Rawat at South Block  
(Photo/ANI)

Given these considerations, the primary expectations of the CDS should include the following:

- Review of the overall security environment and threat perception across multiple domains. This should form the basis of force structuring and capability development of the three Services, rather than the legacy of sole reliance on the RM's Operational Directive.
- Support formalisation of a National Security Strategy (NSS) and evolve a corresponding National Defence Strategy (NDS) to serve as the framework for defence planning and budget allocation. In fact, this must be an overriding priority.
- Reform the process of perspective planning for Capital acquisitions, revamp the acquisition organisation and streamline the procurement process. The changes brought about in the DAP-2020 (released on October 01, 2020) resulting in the exclusion of the Policy Planning and Force Structuring Branch of the HQ IDS from the acquisition process till it reaches the DAC should be reviewed.
- Consolidate existing tri-service organisations and structures (HQ IDS, ANC, SFC, Cyber Agency, Space Agency, Special Operations Division, tri-service training establishments).
- Promote "Jointness": integrated tri-service surveillance and communication networks; joint operations; training; logistics, including transport repair and maintenance; optimum utilisation of available infrastructure with the three services.
- Prepare a detailed roadmap for the creation of joint commands and theaterisation and field it for a testbed evaluation.
- Perspective planning and roadmap for international defence cooperation, including defence acquisitions on strategic considerations.
- Reorganise the DMA with a revised charter to function under the VCDS/CISC and streamline relationships with other departments of MoD, the DRDO and three services.
- Develop an integrated concept of conventional warfare, strategic deterrence and warfare in asymmetric domains. This should include an approach to grey-zone threats.

It is well appreciated that the office of the CDS is still at a nascent stage and is still evolving. The success of this bold reform will lie in our ability to periodically review the organisational structure and make amends as appropriate to the Indian defence and security environment. The HQ IDS has matured over nearly two decades and is today in a position to render solid support to the CDS. The DMA requires constant critical scrutiny to do the same.

\*\*\*



**Delhi Policy Group**  
Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road  
New Delhi - 110003  
India

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)