



**Delhi Policy Group**

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



# DPG POLICY BRIEF

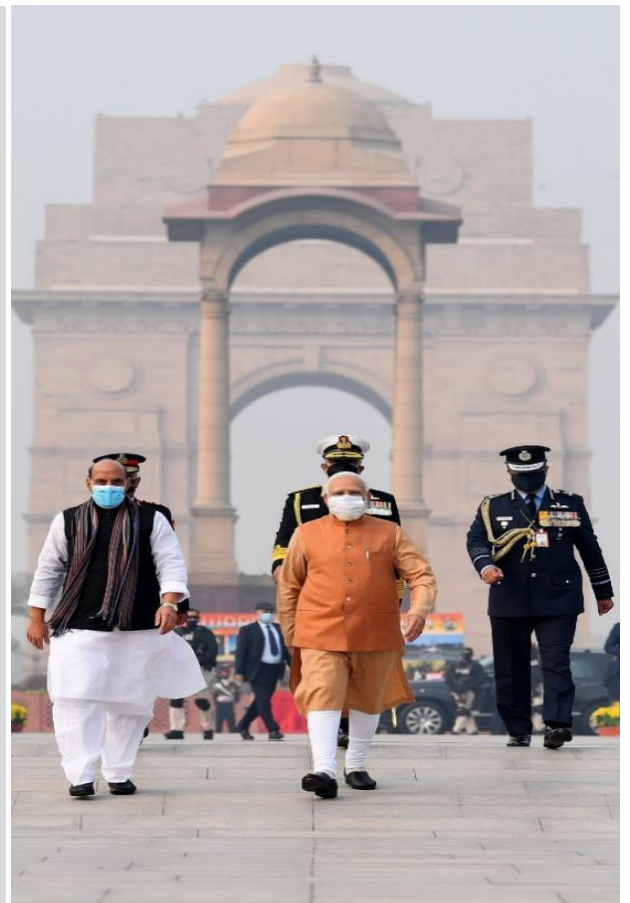
## The Institution of CDS Evolves

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**Delhi Policy Group**

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### Cover Photograph:

*PM Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and the three Chiefs of India's Armed Forces in "Missing Man Formation", paying tribute to late CDS General Bipin Rawat on Vijay Diwas, December 16, 2021.*

Source: [LatestLY](#)

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by  
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## Contents

Background.....	1
Highlights of the First Year.....	1
Achievements of the Second Year of the CDS Institution.....	2
Maintaining Momentum - Integrating Military Commands.....	4
Promoting Indigenisation.....	6
Steering Capability Development.....	7
Other Steps Towards Integration.....	8
Recommendations.....	9
Conclusion.....	9

## The Institution of CDS Evolves

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### Background

Two years ago, India implemented its most significant reform in the higher defence organisational structure, by appointing General Bipin Rawat as the first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), who assumed office on January 1, 2020.<sup>1</sup> A formal notification on reallocating work and staff between the Department of Defence (DoD) and the newly created Department of Military Affairs (DMA) under the CDS was issued on January 9, 2020.<sup>2</sup> This second-year review is a sequel to the first-year review carried out by this author in January, 2021.<sup>3</sup>

This review also comes close on the heels of a tragic helicopter crash on December 8, 2021, in which India lost its first CDS along with his wife and 11 other service personnel. This could be a serious setback to the momentum of reforms set into motion by General Rawat during his 23 month tenure. He successfully germinated the idea of transformation and integration of the Indian Armed Forces, which must continue under his successor.

### Highlights of the First Year<sup>4</sup>

In the very first year of the inception of CDS, India was confronted with its most serious security challenge in decades, from China's unilateral aggression in Eastern Ladakh. The handling of the standoff and its related manifestations was, however, no different from similar situations in the past. It highlighted the absence of a multi-domain concept of operations and lack of synergy across diverse verticals of land, maritime, cyber, space, and information warfare, to end the standoff.

Another important element noted in the first year review was the apparent dilution of the role of the CDS and the HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) under

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<sup>1</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>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Defence, DoD Note: F. No 38(1)/2020-D(O&M) dated 09 January 2020

<sup>3</sup> Ahuja Anil. Institution of the Chief of Defence Staff: Evaluating the First Year. Delhi Policy Group (DPG) Policy Brief, Vol VI Issue I of January 1, 2021.  
[https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/institution-of-the-chief-of-defence-staff-evaluating-the-first-year-2145.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/institution-of-the-chief-of-defence-staff-evaluating-the-first-year-2145.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

him, in the critical process of capital acquisitions and integrated capability development. This resulted in the erosion of the role of Services Capital Acquisition Categorisation Committees, which are the feeders to the Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC). HQ IDS had also been divested of the responsibility of providing a serving three star military officer as the Secretary of the DAC. This norm was invariably followed till the promulgation of the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020<sup>5</sup>. Since then, the entire acquisitions process is being managed by the Department of Defence (DoD), with the Director-General Acquisition and the Defence Secretary being the main functionaries,<sup>6</sup> a situation reportedly lamented by the late CDS. The persisting drawbacks of the revised arrangement become evident from what was highlighted by India Today in its December 27, 2021 edition: "Rawat tried hard but failed to wrest military hardware buys away from the Department of Defence".<sup>7</sup>

It also emerged that the DMA, which was originally perceived as a "bonus", was in fact becoming a drag on the functioning of the CDS given its heavy administrative charter, thereby impinging upon the military function of the CDS. This led to an anomaly: "The astonishing sweep of his (CDS) powers meant he could be debating where to site the theatre command in one meeting and arguing for lining the lift lobbies of military housing with Kadappa stone instead of marble in the next".<sup>8</sup> For doing justice to the defence planning of the nation, the CDS can surely be relieved of such routine administrative responsibilities which can remain in the realm of the bureaucracy.

In this review a year ago, we had flagged announcements regarding the creation of joint Air Defence, Maritime and Logistics Commands, without outlining a well-considered road map. We had recommended unburdening the CDS and DMA of some administrative responsibilities; greater emphasis on defence and national security-related functions; better deliberation and formalising of the process of integration and jointness; and developing integrated doctrinal concepts.

## Achievements of the Second Year of the CDS Institution

Highlights of the charter assigned to the CDS and the achievements in the 23 months of General Rawat's tenure are summarised in the table below.

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<sup>5</sup> Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020.

[https://www.mod.gov.in/sites/default/files/DAP2030new\\_0.pdf](https://www.mod.gov.in/sites/default/files/DAP2030new_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Op. Cit. Ahuja Anil. Page 4

<sup>7</sup> Unnithan Sandeep. Gen Bipin Rawat's Unfinished Agenda. December 18, 2021. India Today. December 27, 2021 edition.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

SL. No.	Charter/Responsibility Assigned <sup>9</sup>	Achievement
a	Promoting jointness amongst services for <b>optimal utilisation of resources</b> and enhancing operational effectiveness, <b>including through the establishment of Joint/theatre commands.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiated deliberations for initial raising of three theatre commands, viz, Western, Eastern and Maritime; and the Air Defence Command.</li> <li>Study groups created for implementation, whose reports were expected by end December 2021. Likely presentation to the government by April 2022 with possible promulgation in Aug 2022 and complete raising by 2023<sup>10</sup>.</li> <li>Despite these steps, individual service reservations persist<sup>11</sup></li> <li>For resource optimisation, Joint logistic nodes have been created at Port Blair, Chennai, Mumbai and Guwahati<sup>12</sup>.</li> </ul>
b	Promoting use of indigenous equipment by the services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three negative import lists (positive indigenisation lists) encompassing 560 items promulgated in 2020-21<sup>13</sup>. These items have been banned for imports.</li> <li>As a <b>course correction</b>, however, in December 2021, emergency imports of items on the negative list were permitted for reasons of operational necessity or considerations of soldiers' personal safety<sup>14</sup>.</li> </ul>
c	Implement Five-Year Defence Capital Acquisition Plan (DCAP), and Two-Year roll-on Annual Acquisition Plans (AAP), as a follow up of Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP).	While the Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) remains in place, the process of formulation of ICDP has been initiated. Challenge of visualising the future battlefield and what the services force structure should look like in 2030 and beyond persists.
d	Inter-Service Prioritisation for Capital Acquisition, <b>based on the anticipated budget.</b>	

<sup>9</sup> Cabinet approves creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff in the rank of four star General. Posted On: 24 DEC 2019 5:44PM by PIB Delhi.

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1597425>

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. Unnithan Sandeep.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Snehesh. IAF is not just a support arm, says new Air chief Chaudhari, as he backs joint ops. The Print. October 5, 2021. <https://theprint.in/defence/iaf-is-not-just-a-support-arm-says-new-air-chief-chaudhari-as-he-backs-joint-ops/745586/>

<sup>12</sup> Op. Cit. India Today

<sup>13</sup> MoD's big push to Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative; Import embargo on 101 items beyond given timelines to boost indigenisation of defence production. Posted On: 09 AUG 2020 4:59PM by PIB Delhi. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1644570>

Defence Ministry notifies second negative import list. The Hindu. May 31, 2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/defence-ministry-notifies-second-negative-import-list/article34690749.ece>

Thapar Vishal. India Puts 351 Components On Negative List For Defence Imports. Business World. December 29, 2021. <http://www.businessworld.in/article/India-Puts-351-Components-On-Negative-List-For-Defence-Imports/29-12-2021-416211/>

<sup>14</sup> Pubby Manu. Negative import list: MoD exempts emergency items. The Economic Times. December 01, 2021. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/negative-import-list-mod-exempts-emergency-items/articleshow/88037161.cms?from=mdr>

It needs to be recognised that surrounded by a largely status quo environment, General Rawat, with his dogged determination, was able to provide defence transformation a much needed momentum. This progress needs to be carried forward with a thoroughly considered, process-driven approach, while keeping all stakeholders on board.

## Maintaining Momentum - Integrating Military Commands

The most noticeable reform set into motion under the watch of the former CDS is the ongoing process of creating Integrated Theatre Commands. A timeline of the commands being formalised by August 2022, and operationalised by March-April 2023, is being cited in some quarters. The overall rationale seems to be the "optimal utilisation of resources" by reorganising 17 disparate single service commands into five integrated commands. This is being propagated as a panacea for the lack of tri-service integration.

A clear distinction needs to be made between this being either an exercise in '**optimisation of resources**' or in '**enhancing operational effectiveness**' of the armed forces. The preference for the latter would help give greater focus to the organisational structure of the proposed integrated commands. This aspect has already been examined in the DPG Policy Brief "A Process-led Approach Towards Integrated Military Commands".<sup>15</sup>

The real problem is not of mere 'numbers' (5/17), but relates to the current 'system' of functioning. The prevailing 'single-service perception' based and compartmentalised planning is detrimental to operational efficiency. Each service makes its plans based on its own interpretation of the loosely defined National Security and National Defence Policy. In the absence of political direction from the CCS, each service interprets its role and asset employment according to its own doctrinal thinking. Moreover, there is no authority at the theatre (Command) or the apex level to institutionally coordinate inter-service plans, reconciling perceptions and expectations. This basic drawback is further accentuated by the absence of a common intelligence picture, paucity of adequate resources, inadequate inter-service communications and information networks, non-availability of commanders and staff trained in joint services duties, and the like. Questions also remain about the optimum span of control (geographically and in the number of formations/troops) of a

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<sup>15</sup> Ahuja Anil and Sahgal Arun. A Process led Approach Towards Integrated Military Commands. DPG Policy Brief, Vol VI, Issue 22. July 24, 2021.  
[https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/a-process-led-approach-towards-integrated-military-commands-2773.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/a-process-led-approach-towards-integrated-military-commands-2773.pdf)

theatre commander. These issues are fundamental to planning theatre commands.

Major militaries like those of the US and neighbouring China having gone in for theatre commands, but their structure is not without its shortcomings. A recent CSIS paper, "Bad Idea: Geographic Combatant Commands",<sup>16</sup> refers to this organisational construct as a 'bad idea that is ripe for replacement'. The rationale put forth in this paper is premised on the idea that it would be naïve to think that conflicts would remain confined to a particular geographic space ( which is all the more applicable in the compact Indian geographic construct), with continued commitment of a large number of troops on missions that may not be a strategic priority, thereby contributing to the over-militarisation of US foreign policy. By no means is it being suggested that the US rationale is entirely applicable in the Indian context, impacting our regional policy. However, a rethink in the US after 76 years of experience of functioning with seven geographic theatre commands (raised under President Truman in December 1946) does suggest the need for taking a 'pause' for a deeper analysis, before we take a plunge.

As suggested in the DPG brief already cited,<sup>17</sup> in considering the many options available for creating theatre commands, the preferred approach would be "phased evolution of jointness, creating theatre and functional commands, building upon processes and resources incrementally". Considering the paucity of building blocks available, the process would need to be spaced over a three-to-five year period. The first phase of initial integration, visualised to be completed by 2024-25, should aim at evolving the construct of the future battlefield environment, formulating integrated operational plans including cross-domain contingencies, arriving at optimum size and structure of forces required for each domain, inter-domain prioritised acquisitions for identified threat mitigation, honing of inter-service connectivity, creation of a trained manpower pool and formalising the intricacies of the command and control structures. This phase would set the stage for the next phase of midterm integration whose contours would be informed by the initial experience. This may entail the creation of an overarching integrated operational HQ, modifying organisational structures (of Commands, Corps, divisions, brigades) and modifying channels of command and control.

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<sup>16</sup> Todd Harrison, "Bad Idea: Geographic Combatant Commands," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 17, 2021, last modified December 17, 2021, <https://defense360.csis.org/bad-idea-geographic-combatant-commands/>.

<sup>17</sup> Op. Cit. Ahuja Anil and Sahgal Arun.



## Promoting Indigenisation

Another significant achievement in the second year of the CDS institution has been the thrust given to indigenisation. This initiative has been driven jointly by the CDS led HQ IDS, the three services, and other verticals of the Ministry of Defence, i.e., the Department of Defence (DoD), Department of Defence Production (DDP) and the DRDO. The most noticeable aspect of this had been the promulgation of two 'Negative Import (Positive Indigenisation) lists' comprising 209 items, **weapon systems and platforms**, which were banned for imports over a staggered timeline. Yet another negative list of 351 **sub-systems and components** has been announced on December 29, 2021,<sup>18</sup> that will not be allowed to be imported under a staggered timeline beginning December 2022. The Raksha Mantri (Defence Minister) recently indicated that the items in this list may reach over 1000 within this decade,<sup>19</sup> suggesting a greater thrust to self-reliance and indigenous procurements. Alongside, efforts are also underway to enhance defence exports, including through the active involvement of Defence Attaches. An ambitious export target of Rs 35,000 Crores (\$ 5 billion approximately) in aerospace goods and services has been set for the year 2024-25.<sup>20</sup>

While the momentum is creditable, these reforms also need to be carried forward with due diligence. It appears that the negative lists promulgated may have been prepared based on unverified assurances of the status of development and production of some of these items in the country. It is perhaps for this reason that within months of the lists being issued, the government has, very recently, set up an empowered 'Defence Indigenisation Committee' under the CDS, to oversee the implementation of these lists. The committee will be empowered to allow exceptions for import if there is an

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<sup>18</sup> MoD notifies positive indigenisation list of sub-systems/assemblies/ sub-assemblies/components to achieve self-reliance in defence & minimise imports by DPSUs. Posted On: 29 DEC 2021 1:11PM by PIB Delhi.  
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1786022>.

<sup>19</sup> Armed Forces modernisation and creating an 'Aatmanirbhar' defence industry to deal with present & future security threats is our focus: RM Focusses on 'Make in India, Make for India and Make for the world'. Posted On: 18 DEC 2021 4:25PM by PIB Delhi.  
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1783013>.

<sup>20</sup> Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh attends MSME Conclave organised by Ministry of Defence & SIDM

Exhorts MSMEs to invest more in R&D and develop new technologies for the country's security & progress. Posted On: 04 DEC 2021 1:33PM by PIB Delhi.  
<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1777975>.

immediate operational requirement or if the safety of soldiers is at stake due to 'inadequate indigenous product'.<sup>21</sup>

To streamline the process, the defence industry needs to be given an idea of the likely pattern of threat manifestation. The office of the CDS (HQ IDS) is best placed to define the contours of the future battlefield. Based on this, the defence industry, and the private industry in particular, would need to be counselled to invest in technologies and platforms relevant to the future battlefields, rather than explore prospects in the perceived 'space' created by the negative lists, in conventional weapon platforms. In the absence of this guidance, they may be unable to invest in equipment that has market relevance, domestically or internationally. Also, in identifying areas of indigenisation, there is a need to strike the right balance between maintaining constant operational readiness (avoiding temporary capability voids) and allowing time to promote indigenisation as well as to consider the economies of scale. The office of the CDS is best placed to carry out this critical analysis. This aspect and other relevant defence reforms have been analysed in the DPG Policy Brief "Indian Defence: From Policies to Capabilities".<sup>22</sup>

## Steering Capability Development

The most significant charter of the CDS which often does not attract public attention is that of capability development of the armed forces. In his role as the 'Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC)', the CDS is responsible for assigning inter-se prioritisation to acquisition proposals, based on the anticipated budget.<sup>23</sup> He is also responsible for implementing the five-year Defence Capital Acquisition Plans (DCAP) and Annual Acquisition Plans (AAP). The basic premise of prioritising capital acquisitions on the basis of the anticipated budget is flawed for two reasons. One, the absence of an overarching defence strategy and visualised contours of the future battlefield; and two, because in the prevailing system, the defence budget is merely 'apportioned' out of the overall planned central government expenditure,

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<sup>21</sup> Peri Dinkar. MoD makes exemption for import of items notified in 'Positive Indigenisation Lists' The Hindu. December 2, 2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mod-makes-exemption-for-import-of-items-notified-in-positive-indigenisation-lists/article37813923.ece>.

<sup>22</sup> Ahuja Anil. India's Defence: From Policies to Capabilities. DPG Policy Brief, Vol VI, Issue 18, July 1, 2021. [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/indias-defence-from-policies-to-capabilities-2536.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/indias-defence-from-policies-to-capabilities-2536.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Cabinet approves creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff in the rank of four star General.

without the rigour of working out the detailed requirements for threat mitigation and developing deterrence. Any prioritisation based merely on anticipated budget allocation in a sub-optimal acquisition environment, as it exists, would not lead to structured capability enhancement. **This complex linkage is at the root of the problems of capability development of the armed forces and is yet to be adequately understood.** Recommendations to remedy this system have been made by the author in earlier papers.<sup>24</sup>

The ability of the CDS to steer prioritisation of acquisitions has been further undermined by dilution in the role of HQ IDS in the acquisition process by shifting the entire DAC process to the DoD. This has already been amplified earlier in this brief.

### Other Steps Towards Integration

The focus of integration in the last two years has been on the creation of theatre commands and capability development. While these are important steps, there are other areas where integration can lead to cutting down the duplication of resources and lead to better understanding among the services of each other's perspectives.

A joint war fighting doctrine is absolutely essential to guide both the capability development for and the shape of integrated theatre commands. The absence of such a foundational document leads to individual services carrying out operational planning based on their own understanding of threats and the best way to overcome them. A joint doctrine would give clarity to the three services and the defence industry on the type of capabilities required to be developed.

The major weapon platforms of the army, navy and air force are different but there are some common systems. These include helicopters, air defence guns, certain types of missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles. The training on these systems could be combined, leading to standardisation and closing down duplicate training establishments. Joint training would also promote greater understanding among the other services.

Each service has its own stand-alone communications and information network. With the push towards integrated theatre commands, the complete

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<sup>24</sup> Ahuja Anil. "Budgeting for Defence: Beyond Mere 'Apportioning' of Resources". Pg 37. The India Foundation Journal, Sep-Oct 2018. <http://indiafoundation.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/September-October-2018-India-Foundation-Journal.pdf>

information architecture will have to be reconfigured. This thinking must start now.

## Recommendations

A substantial momentum has been accorded to the transformation of the armed forces in the second year of inception of the CDS institution. The issue has also been brought to the forefront of the nation's strategic thinking. There are, however, still some aspects that merit reiteration (emerging from our first-year review)<sup>25</sup> for deeper consideration:

- Need to review the overall charter of the CDS and DMA, including pruning down his administrative functions, to allow the CDS to focus attention to nuances of defence planning.
- Evolving a doctrinal framework of likely threat manifestation, across domains, as applicable to the mid-term period (2030-35). This should serve as the base document for planning capability development, budget allocation and development of the defence industrial base.
- A phased, process-driven approach to the integration of services, based on a vision document and a deliberated road map, which must be formulated under the guidance of the CDS.
- A detailed analysis of the process of theatreisation for enhancing operational efficiency, rather than merely for optimisation of numbers (5/17).
- Early reforms to the organisational structure and procedures for defence acquisitions. Services being the primary stakeholders need to be brought back into the acquisition chain at the final decision-making level.
- Developing a concept of multi-domain warfare and focusing on creating building blocks for integrated tri-service operations. Some aspects that must be included are: coordinated surveillance; intelligence collation, interpretation, and analysis; inter-services communications networks; joint training; logistics, optimum utilisation of infrastructure; cross-postings of personnel; and conduct of multi-domain exercises.

## Conclusion

The experience of the progress of implementation of defence reforms thus far, and the tragic loss of the serving CDS, suggest that notwithstanding the competence and commitment of the incumbent, there is a need for more institutionally driven reforms. These reforms need to be based on a sound

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<sup>25</sup> Ahuja Anil. Institution of the Chief of Defence Staff: Evaluating the First Year. Delhi Policy Group (DPG) Policy Brief, Vol VI Issue I of January 1, 2021.

doctrinal vision, a well-defined roadmap, and a clearly identified desired end-state. Together, these elements will ensure that military transformation acquires a momentum of its own and enjoys the unstinting support of all stakeholders.

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