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Theaterization Concept of Indian Armed Forces – Implications for the Region and Beyond



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ABSTRACT

1. The "theater of war" is the collective term for the areas on land, at sea, and in the air where war is fought. During World War II, when war took place in several countries and on multiple continents, the idea of theaterization was first developed. Presently several countries have adopted the theaterization of military operations, with the US, USSR, and China being the most famous.
2. The core of theaterization entails the structured reorganization of military forces into geographically defined theatre commands. Each command is tasked with overseeing operations within its designated area, consolidating resources, command structures, and operational planning. This strategic approach enables the armed forces to enhance their collective capabilities and effectively address diverse security threats across land, sea, and air, as well as in emerging domains like cyber and space.
3. Moreover, theaterization goes beyond structural reorganization by promoting a culture of jointness and interoperability throughout the armed forces. Through joint training exercises, collaborative doctrine development, and integrated command structures, theaterization aims to dismantle traditional service-centric divisions and foster a cohesive approach to warfare.
4. India is undertaking a major reform by restructuring its armed forces into Integrated Theater Commands (ITCs). This is a significant challenge as the Army, Navy, and Air Force have traditionally operated with distinct training and limited joint experience. However, the Lok Sabha's passage of the Inter-Services Organizations (Command, Control & Discipline) Bill in August 2023 laid the groundwork for theaterization. Additionally, the creation of the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) position and establishment of Directorate of Military Affairs (DMA) strengthens leadership and aims to ensure a smooth transition to the new structure.
5. This paper will delve into the Indian Armed Forces' adaptation to the ITCs initiative. It will dissect the challenges encountered during implementation, such as potential resistance to change in entrenched service cultures and the need to develop new joint combat doctrines. The analysis will then explore the anticipated impact envisioned by Indian leadership, including improved inter-service coordination, faster decision-making, and a more streamlined military structure. This analysis will culminate in a detailed examination of the specific challenges posed by India's theaterization strategy, particularly regional and beyond. It will then comprehensively explore the effect of Indian ITCs on region and beyond and potential courses of action the Pakistani Navy can employ, to effectively address these concerns.

INTRODUCTION

1. In most countries, defense forces, including the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, are each led by their respective officers. Additionally, a senior officer from one of these branches oversees all services, holding titles that vary by nation, such as Chief of Defense Staff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), Chief of Staff (COS), or Chief of Staff Committee (COSC). In some countries, this senior officer wields substantial authority over all branches of the military, while in others, the role is largely ceremonial. The notion of theater command also arose as the military theater changed and the need for military forces to be more coordinated became clear. In some countries like Pakistan, China & India, etc., armies have traditionally been the strongest military force, and the continental approach dominated their strategy. However, developed nations like the US, UK, and France recognized the growing importance of maritime domains much earlier and shifted focus to maritime strategies and empowered their navies. This shift reflects the increasing economic reliance on seafaring trade routes and the strategic value of controlling key maritime chokepoints.

2. The traditional military structure, with separate Army, Navy, and Air Force branches, served well in past conflicts with well-defined battlefields. However, the complexities of modern warfare, expanding land, sea, air, and even cyberspace demand a more unified approach. This is where the theater command concept comes into play. It transcends the limitations of siloed branches by establishing unified commands for specific geographical regions. These commands are led by a single officer, strategically chosen from any branch, and staffed with personnel from all forces. This fosters a collaborative environment, breaking down communication barriers and enabling seamless planning and resource allocation. In essence, theater commands transform individual branches into a cohesive fighting force, ensuring a more agile and effective response to the multifaceted threats of the modern battlefield.

3. Although the idea originated in the First World War, it gained significant traction in the Second World War when conflicts were fought across continents. Today, almost all major countries like the US, Russia, China, France, and the UK work on a theatre command. The US pioneered this approach, currently operating seven geographic and four functional commands. Russia established five theatre commands in 2008, and China also established five geographic commands in 2016. Recognizing these advantages, India is also undertaking reforms to integrate its forces under unified leadership (Samvarda World Staff, n.d.).

4. India, buoyed by its ever-growing economy and international stature duly supported by its huge power potential, is positioning itself for a larger regional and global role. Now, more than ever before, India is primarily relating itself with China as a competitor and as a threat. Pakistan is also factored in but essentially in a two-front scenario. Otherwise, it feels quite confident to be able to handle Pakistan with its existing command and control structures. Much that we may dislike it, theaterization of Indian military appears to be a rational choice for a country of this size, faced with real or perceived threats to its regional and global ambitions. Also, its history of conflicts especially with China weighs quite heavily on her psychology (Lt Gen Muhammad Asif, 2024).

5. Adopting a new concept for theatre command in the Indian Defense Forces is a huge challenge. The first CDS Gen Bapin Rawat was appointed on 24 December 2019, who initiated the process of theaterization, but unfortunately died in a helicopter accident on 8 Dec 2021 which made the process slow. It took nine months for the next CDS to be nominated. Finally, retired Lt Gen Anil Chohan was promoted and appointed as CDS on 30 September 2022(Nigam Sharma, 2024).

6. India's military modernization, strategic expansion in the Indian Ocean, and maritime interests in the Western Pacific and Eastern Atlantic Ocean have sparked a complex web of reactions. The decision to implement theatre commands, restructuring forces for unified regional operations, sends mixed signals to the region as well as global. On the one hand, it signifies India's aspirations for a more prominent role on the world stage. However, this coincides with a period of strained relations with some neighbors, raising concerns about potential assertiveness. This expansion is particularly evident in the Indian Navy's growing footprint. The establishment of military bases in Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, and berthing rights at Duqm port in Oman, etc., highlight India's desire for a strategic presence across the Indian Ocean. This vital waterway is a global economic artery, encompassing 38 littoral states, it witnesses nearly 100,000 ships traversing its waters annually. Furthermore, the Indian Ocean holds immense strategic significance. It carries 30% of the world's containerized cargo and serves as a critical source of energy, with over 40% of global crude oil and half of the world's proven gas reserves originating from or transiting the region (TALMIZ AHMAD, 2024).

7. However, India's actions shouldn't be viewed solely through the lens of regional competition. The Indo-US relationship has witnessed significant improvement in recent years. Agreements typically reserved for close allies have been signed, and the designation of India as a Net Security Provider within the US Indo-Pacific Strategy 2022 suggests a potential counterbalance to China's growing influence. India's strategic ambitions, therefore, can be interpreted to secure its interests in this critical economic and geopolitical zone. Navigating these complex dynamics will be crucial as India carves its path on the world stage. Furthermore, if India were to take control of choke points like the Straits of Hormuz, Bab el Mandab, and Malacca; it would be disastrous for economically dependent nations like China, Japan, South Korea, and Europe.

8. The introduction of the Agniveer recruitment system in 2022, coupled with the theaterization process, is poised to fundamentally transform the structure, composition, and size of India's armed forces in unprecedented ways. Some influential Indian veteran and think tank groups are also voicing their reservations about this new concept. They feel that without a major global or regional expeditionary role, theatre command shall be a waste of time and resources. They do not anticipate India having a significant global role akin to that of the US. At the regional level also, the Sri Lankan expeditionary adventure close to home was a bad dream for the Indian Armed Forces. Hence, they are advising against any extra-territorial role and changes in the command-and-control structures(Lt Gen Muhammad Asif, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing content analysis to examine primary and secondary data sources. These sources included books, e-books, research papers, opinion pieces, websites, and online journals. Additionally, the study reviewed insights from military professionals, relevant national and international documents, and peer-reviewed publications by scholars to gather a wide range of previous evaluations and perspectives. An internal expert session was also conducted as part of the analysis methodology to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations, such as governance reforms for Pakistan. Overall, this methodology indicates that the research is comprehensive, incorporating diverse sources and expert viewpoints to develop a nuanced understanding of the subject.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

I used the US and China theater command model. In my opinion, the US model is relevant at this stage, information about China is harder to get by than it is for the US. Therefore, I discussed the US model when it became necessary to give examples/comparisons, etc., In my point of view, India is planning to have a similar model as that of the US which covers the entire world, theaterization of the Indian armed forces is the first step, and it can be expanded worldwide in the future. Indian maritime ambitions spread over the Indian Ocean, the western part of the Pacific Ocean, and part of the eastern Atlantic Ocean. India's military is undergoing a significant transformation with the ongoing implementation of theatre commands. While the concept is new and details are still emerging, I have leveraged open-source information and interviews with distinguished retired defense officers Lt Gen Muhammad Asif HI (M) (Retd) and Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah HI(M) (Retd). My sincere gratitude for their insights) to provide valuable analysis within the available resources. Despite limitations in available resources. The report also utilizes alternative research methods to deliver a well-rounded analysis of the Indian defense forces, and theaterization of commands, particularly its implications for the region and beyond

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THEATRE COMMAND – INDIA

1.1 Background

a. The nature of warfare has undergone a radical transformation in recent decades. Rapid advancements in technology, coupled with evolving doctrines and organizational concepts, have placed a premium on integrated and joint operations. Major militaries around the world have recognized this shift, implementing unified structures to optimize their defense capabilities.

b. World War II planted seeds for a crucial transformation in the US defense establishment which enhanced the rise of jointness among the military services. The war's global nature forced unprecedented cooperation between the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Fighting on multiple fronts in Europe, the Pacific, and beyond necessitated a level of inter-service collaboration that hadn't existed before. This wartime necessity paved the way for future reforms that would create a more unified military command structure. The establishment of the Unified Combatant Commands (UCCs) spanned over seven decades, from 1947 to 2019. This incremental rollout reflects a deliberate and evolutionary process, not a revolutionary one.(Inamete, 2022).

c. Although the US was the first to introduce theatre commands, its influence spans the entire globe. The other nations, such as China, Russia, France etc. using theater/joint commands are confined to their own borders. There have also been challenges faced by these countries while implementing theatre commands.

d. The secret to winning any future conflict is to fight wars in a seamless, integrated manner. To guarantee jointness, a military must implement extensive organizational and operational reforms. Every major military in the world has implemented unified structures to maximize their capacity for fighting wars. Nevertheless, while confronting several challenges to both its internal and external security, India has been discussing the matter for far too long without taking any concrete action(Brig Ranjit Singh, 2016a).

e. The Kargil War exposed critical weaknesses in India's tri-service coordination. Political restrictions on using airpower and a lack of consensus between the Army and Air Force Chiefs at the outset hampered the eviction of Pakistani mujahideen across the LOC in Mushkoh, Kargil, and Batalik. This disunity highlighted the need for improved communication and a unified military approach(Janjua, 2023).

f. After the Kargil War in 1999, the Kargil Review Committee and a Group of Ministers (GoM) in 2001, led by Shri K. Subrahmanyam, recognized the necessity for a thorough review of India's national security framework to improve defense decision-making. They recommended a comprehensive study and potential reorganization of the connections between the Ministry of Defense

and Service Headquarters. Additionally, they proposed the establishment of a Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) position. These reforms were intended to streamline the higher-level defense organization (Chief of Defense Staff A Historic Reform in Higher Defense Organization, 2021).

g. The process of implementation of the recommendations by GoM was very slow, due to a lack of political will or resistance by the Services Chiefs. The matter was again taken up by Prime Minister Modi and constituted a high-level committee under Lt General D B Shekatkar (Retd) in 2015. The mandate of the Committee was 'to suggest measures to enhance combat capability and rebalance defense expenditure of the armed forces. The committee examined how the defense forces could be made more modern, lean, and cohesive. The committee submitted its report in December 2016. The report has never been made public because it is in the defense sphere and making the recommendations public might not be in the interest of national security. The creation of integrated theatre commands and the position of CDS to improve command and control addresses critical needs identified by committees. (Shekatkar Committee, 2020)

h. The June 2020 Galwan Valley clash exposed the harsh realities of high-altitude warfare, revealing critical gaps in theaterization preparedness. While the incident highlighted the imperative for a more integrated military response, the subsequent deployment of over 50,000 troops and heavy weaponry along the Chinese border stretched resources thin, impeding the rapid development and implementation of theaterization plans(Baruah, 2023).

i. Former Chief of the Army Staff, General Bipin Rawat was appointed as the country's first Chief of Defense Staff on 31st December 2019 (Chief of Defense Staff a Historic Reform in Higher Defense Organization, 2021). He was killed in a helicopter crash in December 2021; thereafter the post remained vacant for 9 months. Thereafter a retired Lt Gen Anil Chauhan was appointed as the CDS on 28 September 2022 marking a significant departure from tradition, raising mixed sentiments within the Indian Defense Forces. It represented the first instance of a retired officer assuming this pivotal role, prompting the government to issue a gazette notification amending the appointment regulations. The succession of General Bipin Rawat, who had a close rapport with Prime Minister Modi, by a retired officer sparked inquiries after a lengthy nine-month quest for his successor. This prolonged selection process, particularly amidst a pool of eligible serving officers, potentially stirred unease within the ranks of the Indian Defense Forces(Dinakar Peri, 2022).

j. Theaterization process creates a new challenge, such as how to discipline soldiers when they come from different branches (Army, Navy, Air Force) serving under one command. Currently, Army personnel are governed by the Army Act, 1950, IAF personnel by the Air Force Act, 1950, and Naval personnel by the Navy Act, 1957. A new bill proposes that the commander of this combined force can take disciplinary actions regardless of a soldier's original branch. This aims to streamline administration and improve cohesion within these new theatre commands(Baruah, 2023).

1.2 Agnipath Scheme

The Agnipath scheme is a new program for recruiting soldiers into the Indian armed forces. Agnipath recruits, called Agniveers, serve for four years only. Young Indians between 17.5 and 21 years old (extended to 23 for 2022 recruitment only) can apply. About 25 percent of these recruits will be offered positions as full-time soldiers for a longer service of 15 to 17 years, the remaining 75% will be retired, and will not be eligible for pension rather a lump sum amount will be offered. This is a significant departure from the traditional system of permanent enlistment. The first batch of recruits commenced training in 2022 at multiple establishments across the country. (Ajay Banerjee, 2022) The impact of Agnipath on theater commands is a complex issue. While faster exposure to a joint environment is a potential benefit, the lack of experience and leadership continuity could pose challenges. Since 75% will leave the service after 4 years their output will not be truly utilized due to the short time. Moreover, they may be treated as aliens by others and will not be beneficial in adopting the joint command concept.

1.3 Difference of Opinion in Defense Forces

a. As explained earlier, it is not as simple as it looks to go for theatre command. Each segment of defense forces has its pros and cons, which are discussed under (Iasgyan, 2022):

(1) The Army feels that it's time to abandon the "service-specific approach to operations in favor of a system that minimizes duplication and guarantees the best use of available resources."

(2) The Indian Air Force (IAF) emerged as a significant hurdle in the initial stages of theaterization. Soon after the process began under CDS General Bipin Rawat, the IAF expressed strong reservations. General Rawat's statement describing IAF's role as "supporting", further stoked tensions. Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria (retired) countered, emphasizing the Air Force's crucial role beyond mere support and the complexities of air power integration. The IAF's concerns extended beyond asset limitations (primarily aircraft) to issues of role definition, resource allocation, and the leadership structure of the proposed theatre commands (Sachdev, 2021). The Indian Air Force worries that theaterization will stretch them thin. They fear dividing their resources (fighter jets, refuellers) among new theatre commands will leave them with limited ability to conduct independent air missions. Additionally, the IAF is concerned about losing influence over future acquisitions, as theatre commanders may prioritize differently (Lt Gen Muhammad Asif, 2024). A report published by the Observer Research Foundation said that the IAF "has only 31 operational squadrons against a modest sanctioned strength of 42 and that would make it difficult for IAF to permanently station assets in a particular command with territorial boundaries".

(3) The Navy considers the current model of control by the Naval Headquarters ideally suited for its strategic role. The Navy has a strong foundation for joint operations due to its inherent structure and communication needs. However, successful joint warfare requires all branches to work together, and the Navy might need to adapt its focus depending on the specific operation. Theaterization is expected to elevate the Indian Navy's role, potentially leading to increased budgetary allocations within the defense spending plan.

(4) Another observation is that the concept will further narrow down promotion opportunities for General Officers. Presently there are 19 Commands (7 Army, 7 Airforce, 3 Navy) and 2 tri-service commands, all are headed by 3 stars Lt Generals, Vice Admiral, Air Marshal. Under new system (Brig Ranjit Singh, 2016b), only three commands headed by a 4 Star Officer (CDS, VCDS, Chiefs of Army, Navy, and Air Force). It is expected all three theatre commanders will be four-star and assisted by 3 Star Officers. Currently, all seven GOC-in-Cs (General Officers Commander in Chiefs) and Chief of Integrated Defense Staff, their seven COSs (Chief Officers), and their fourteen GOCCs (General Officers Commanding Corps) are Lieutenant Generals (Wikipedia, 2024a); the same is applicable for the Navy and Air Force. Under theatre command, some of the three-star posts mentioned above will be eliminated. This reduction in positions could lead to fewer opportunities for promotion to the rank of 3-star general/admiral/air marshal. This can be a concern for senior officers and might lead to dissatisfaction.

(5) Since resources from one theatre can be easily transferred to another, it is argued that India is not physically large enough to be split into several theatres. There are also underlying fears about the smaller services losing their autonomy and importance. These involve issues of operational command and control over assets. In addition, it has been mentioned that some aspects of the budget and money distribution must be resolved to facilitate the establishment of a smooth theatre command structure. The mismatch in the army, navy, and air force's current assets could be another problem.

(6) Experts say that the structure itself, that is, who reports to whom and how the chain of command operates is the main obstacle to merging the three services under the theatre command system.

CHAPTER 2

MAJOR COUNTRIES' THEATRE COMMANDS

The two countries following ITCs are the US and China, the other countries are using a modified version of joint command confined to their boundaries like Russia, France UK, etc. Before explaining Indian theatre commands, the US, and China theatre command systems has been discussed below:

2.1 The US Command System

a. The Unified Command Plan (UCP) outlines the missions, responsibilities, and geographic areas for combatant command leaders. This classified document, prepared by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), is reviewed every two years and may be revised based on recommendations to the President. There are currently 11 unified combatant commands in the Department of Defense – 4 functional and 7 geographic. Functional combatant commands operate worldwide, providing unique capabilities across geographic boundaries, while geographic combatant commands have a regional military focus within their defined areas of responsibility (Watson, 2019).

(1) Geographic Combatant Commands

Table 4.1

S No	Command	Established and Area of Responsibility
1.	INDOPACOM	U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, was established in 1947. This vast region stretches from the west coast of the United States to the eastern border of India. It also covers a huge swathe from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the waters of Antarctica in the south
2.	EUCOM	U.S. European Command, Patch Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, was established in 1947. All of Europe, Large portions of Asia, including the Caucasus region, Russia, Greenland, Parts of the Middle East, The Arctic Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean
3.	SOUTHCOM	U.S. Southern Command, Miami, Florida, established in 1963. It covers Central America, all countries south of Mexico, South America, the Caribbean, all island nations and territories, excluding U.S. commonwealths and possessions. Adjacent waters: This encompasses the Caribbean Sea, and the

		Pacific and Atlantic Oceans bordering Central and South America.
4.	CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, Florida, was established in 1983. It covers the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. While the primary focus is on the Middle East and Central Asia, some parts of South Asia, particularly Pakistan.
5.	NORTHCOM	U.S. Northern Command, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, was established in 2002. The area includes Alaska, Canada, and Mexico.
6.	AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command, Kelley Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, was established in 2008. The area includes the entire continent of Africa.
7.	SPACECOM	U.S. Space Command, Schriever Air Force Base, Colorado, was established in 2019.

(2) Functional Combatant Commands

Table 4.2

S No	Command	Established and Functions
1	TRANSCOM	Transportation Command, Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, was established in 1942. It provides full-spectrum global mobility solutions for the U.S. military
2	STRATCOM	U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska, was established in 1947. Responsible for Strategic Deterrence, Nuclear Operations & Command, Global Strike, Missile Defense, Cyberspace Operations, Intelligence & Communications.
3	USSOCOM	US Special Operations Command was established in 1987. Its function is to train and equip Special Operations Forces (SOF), Provide SOF to Combatant Commanders, Support SOF Operations, Develop SOF Capabilities, and Overseeing Subordinate Commands.
4	CYBERCOM	U.S. Cyber Command, Fort Meade, Maryland, was established in 2008. Its role is to defend and secure U.S. interests in cyberspace. Defending DoD Networks, Supporting Combatant Commanders, National Security Collaboration, Planning

		and Execution of Cyberspace Operations, Developing Cyber Capabilities, and Cyber Force Development.
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Figure 5.1: US Command Structure (Wikipedia, 2024b)

b. The U.S. command structure stands out for its global scope. Unlike most militaries, it assigns combatant commanders responsibility for specific geographic areas and empowers them to conduct operations within those zones. Strategic control of certain weapons, however, may reside elsewhere. The recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya demonstrate this structure in action.

2.2 Chinese Military Commands Structure

a. The Chinese armed services have significantly restructured their command-and-control systems to match the demands of contemporary joint warfare as part of their growing ambition to become a global force. In 2016, the PLA abandoned its seven decades-old military regions, replacing them with five theatre commands in charge of territorial defense of the North, South, East, West, and Central regions as shown in Figure 5.2.

b. The ground, naval, and air forces were all under one integrated command system under the new arrangement. The theatre commands, in contrast to the former military regions, now concentrate on joint command of the forces and oversee all non-nuclear activities within their respective geographic areas. They no longer directly oversee the troops in each region, under the Central Military Commission's (CMC) guidance. The CMC oversees the overall administration of the military. Based on the assessment of threats at the borders, the theater commands are generally arranged.(Ziyu Zhang, 2021).

Table 4.3

S No	Commands	Area
1.	Northern Theatre Command	It is accountable for matters related to Russia, Korea, and Japan
2.	Western Theatre Command	It controls the largest geographical area, oversees the Xinjiang and Tibet autonomous territories as well as the border with India
3.	Central Theatre Command	Its headquarters located in Beijing stand out as an anomaly. Its duties include safeguarding the capital and providing support to the other theater commands
4.	Eastern Theatre Command	It is focused on Taiwan, Japan, and the East China Sea.
5.	Southern Theatre Command	The South China Sea and the Vietnam border, The Southern Theatre Command would probably be essential in helping the Eastern TC launch an amphibious assault on Taiwan.



Figure 5.2: Theater Command (Bommakanti, 2021)

CHAPTER 3

INDIA'S THEATRE COMMANDS: RESHAPING MILITARY STRUCTURE

3.1 Introduction

a. The Indian military traditionally operated with separate Army, Navy, and Air Force Commands. This structure, being effective in the past, struggles to meet the demands of the modern, complex security environment. Under this system, each Service Chief maintains command and operational control of their respective assets. This has resulted in an individual service approach to operational planning, hindering jointness and potentially hindering optimal utilization of resources. The lack of jointness is visible not only in operational planning but also in logistics, training, and communication systems. Inter-service coordination hampered rapid response and joint operations, while independent service structures led to resource inefficiencies. As security threats transcended borders and domains; India recognized the need for a more unified approach, paving the way for its ongoing theaterization reforms(Hooda, 2023a). After years of discussions, seminars, focus groups, and feedback from retired Flag, General, and Air Officers research, the Inter-Services Organization bill was presented to Indian Parliaments in 2023.

b. Let's examine the US Command system first, & then compare it to the system which the Indian Defense Forces will implement, before going into detail about the Indian Military. Within the United States military, each Unified Combatant Command (UCC) adheres to a command structure intended to promote cooperative operations. Usually, this structure consists of three officers:

(1) **Commander**. A four-star General or Admiral is responsible for overall command and decision-making.

(2) **Deputy Commander**. Often a three-star Lieutenant General or Vice Admiral, providing support and acting as commander in the absence of the primary leader. This position is typically filled by an officer from a different military service than the commander.

(3) **Chief of Staff**. Usually a two-star Major General or Rear Admiral, overseeing daily operations, and advising the commander and deputy commander. The Chief of Staff normally comes from a service not represented by the other two leaders.

c. This structure ensures diversity of experience and perspective at the highest levels of command. By limiting representation from any single service to a maximum of one high-ranking position, the UCCs promote a more joint-focused approach to planning and execution. This fosters stronger collaboration and interoperability between the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force.(Inamete, 2022)

3.2 Present Structure of Indian Armed Forces

a. Like Pakistan, India inherited a colonial system from the British Indian Army that was primarily focused on the land. India's armed forces currently operate under 19 commands. However, these commands are primarily single-service structures (17 in total) and 02 are joint commands, headed by different armed forces, designed for specific operational areas and geographical needs. Notably, none of these single-service commands share the same location, nor do their operational zones directly border each other. The organogram of existing commands of the Indian Armed Forces is shown in Figure 5.3 below and the Indian Armed Forces location in Figure 5.4 below (Brig Ranjit Singh, 2016c):

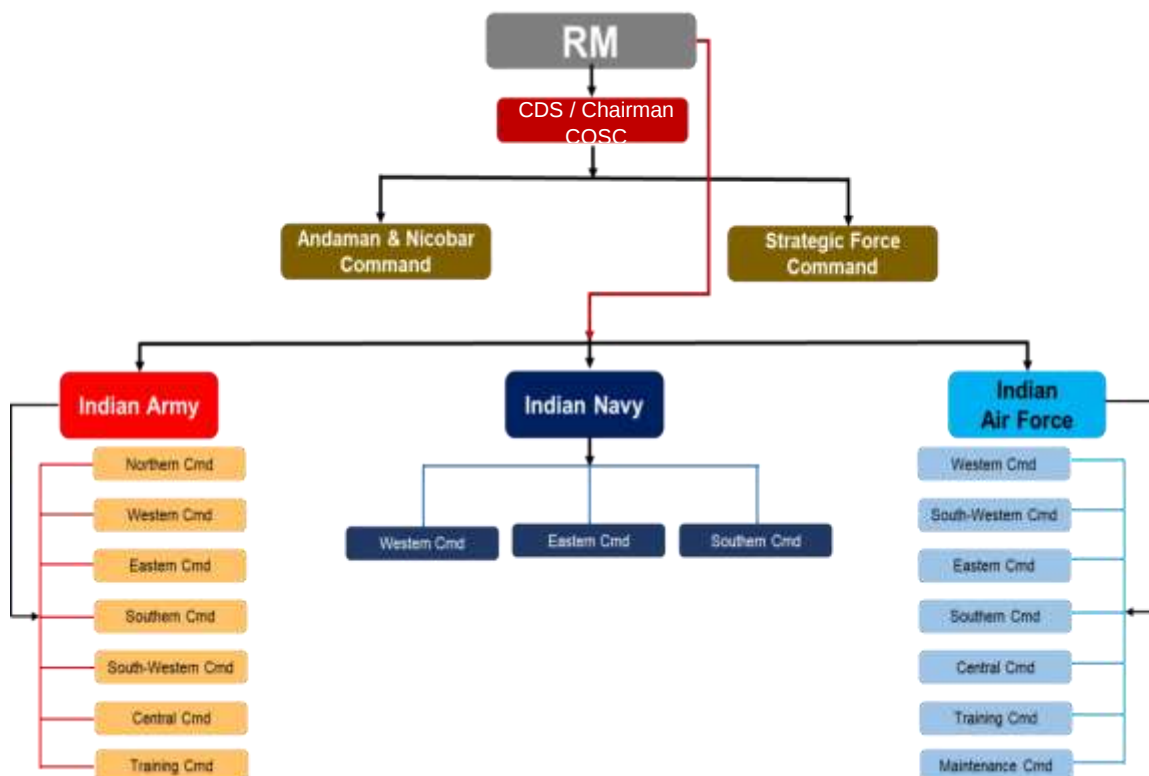


Figure 5.3: Organogram of Existing Commands of Indian Armed Forces

(1) The Army has seven operational commands Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western, Central, South-Western, Central Command, and Army Training Command (ARTRAC).

(2) The IAF has Seven operational commands Western, Eastern, Southern, South-western, Central, Training and Maintenance.

(3) The Navy has three commands Western, Eastern, and Southern.

(4) In addition, there are 2 tri-service commands:

(a) Strategic Forces Command (SFC). It was created on 4 January 2003. The SFC, sometimes called Strategic Nuclear

Command, forms part of India's Nuclear Command Authority (NCA), which is responsible for command-and-control decisions regarding India's nuclear weapons program. SFC is responsible for the management and administration of the country's tactical and strategic nuclear weapons stockpile(Ravi, 2024).

(b) Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) The ANC is indeed the first and only tri-service theatre command in India, created in 2001 to safeguard India's strategic interests in Southeast Asia and the Strait of Malacca by increasing rapid deployment of military assets in the islands. It is commanded by a three-star officer from Navy, under whom officers and men from all three services (Navy, Air Force, Army) work.

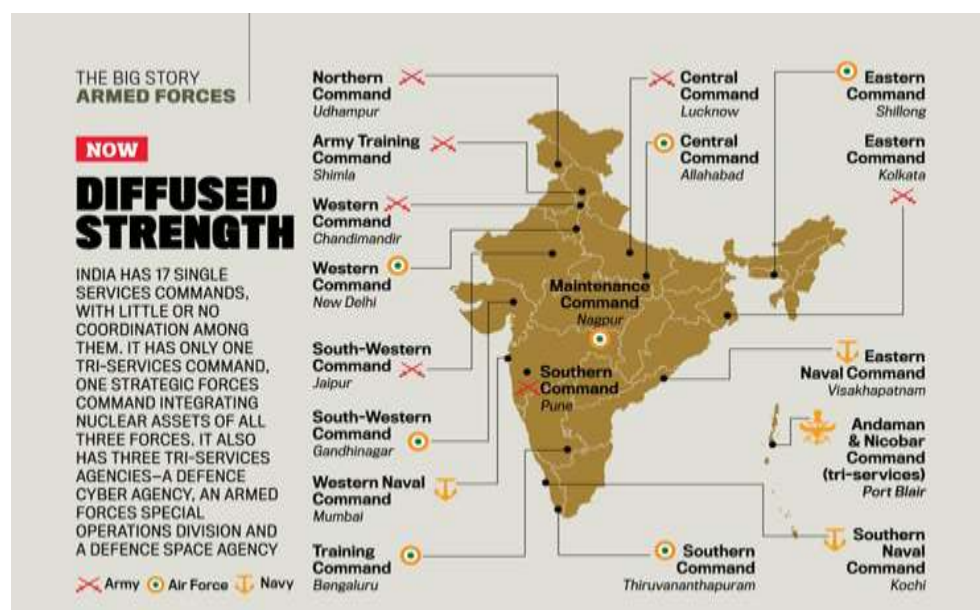


Figure 5.4: Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) (Unnithan, 2020)

- b. CDS, Indian Army, Navy, and Airforce is headed by a 4-star rank military officer.
- c. Presently Chairman, Chief of Staff Committee (COSC) is the highest-ranking military position in the armed forces. The senior officer among the Arm, Navy, and Air Force takes over. After the appointment of CDS, he is acting as COSC, it is expected that the COSC post will be abolished.
- d. Currently, the responsibility to deal with Pakistan delegates to four Army commands, two Air Force Commands, and one Naval Command. Similarly, three Army Commands and three Air Force Commands deal with the Chinese threat (No Title, n.d.)(Rana, 2015).
- e. If a full-scale battle with China breaks out, at least seven commands will be engaged in both offensive and defensive operations. However, only the Western Theatre Command of China will be facing Indian soldiers. One cannot

overstate the benefits of having a unified and integrated army when waging a battle.(Iasgyan, 2022)

3.3 Need for Integrated Theatre Commands

Indian military strategists realized that more inter-service coordination was required following the Kargil War. Modernization, not speed, is the main objective. The efficacy of the system is given precedence by Indian planners over expediency in its deployment. Jointness among the forces is fostered by first actions such as appointing the Chief of Defense Staff, creating the Department of Military Affairs in the Ministry of Defense under CDS, and facilitating inter-service officer transfers. India is also taking advantage of the lessons learned from other countries that have adopted theater commands. Theater commands provide a structure for coordinated operations, coordinated planning, and efficient resource distribution. The armed forces' operating capacity and battle readiness are eventually improved by this arrangement. Given these benefits, Indian defense strategists are aggressively working to implement:

- a. Integrated theatre commands break down service silos. Army, Navy, and Air Force work under a single commander, fostering seamless coordination and maximizing the impact of combined operations. Joint planning and execution become the norm, leading to greater efficiency.
- b. Theatre commands are geographically defined, allowing for specialized strategies and responses. Western Theatre Command, for example, would focus on challenges specific to that region, optimizing resource allocation and threat mitigation.
- c. Pooling resources across services eliminates duplication and waste. Theatre commands ensure optimal utilization of personnel, equipment, and logistics, maximizing operational capabilities while achieving economies of scale.
- d. A single commander streamlines decision-making. Gone are the days of coordination delays between multiple commands. Theatre commands empower swift responses to emerging threats and timely execution of military operations.

3.4 Inter-Services Organization (ISO) Command, Control & Discipline) Bill – 2023

- a. After 24 Years of Kargil War, the ISO bill was finally approved by Lok Sabha on 04 August 2023 and the Rajya Sabha, on August 08, 2023(Ministry of Defense India, n.d.)(1 Bill No. 62 of 2023 *THE INTER-SERVICES ORGANISATIONS (COMMAND, CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE) BILL, 2023*, 2023). The salient features are as follows:

(1) The 'ISO Bill- 2023' shall apply to all personnel of the regular Army, Navy, and Air Force, and persons of other forces as notified by the Central Government, who are serving in or attached to an Inter-Services Organization.

(2) This Bill empowers the Commander-in-Chief, Officer-in-Command, or any other officer specially empowered on this behalf by the Central Government with all the disciplinary and administrative powers in respect of personnel serving in or attached to their Inter-Services Organizations for the maintenance of discipline and proper discharge of their duties, irrespective of the service to which they belong to.

(3) The Commander-in-Chief or the Officer-in-Command means General Officer/Flag Officer/Air Officer who has been appointed as Commander-in-Chief of Officer-in-Command an Inter-Services Organization.

(4) To maintain Command and Control in the absence of the Commander-in-Chief or the Officer-in-Command, the officiating incumbent, or the officer on whom the command devolves in the absence of a C-in-C or Oi/C, will also be empowered to initiate all disciplinary or administrative actions over the service personnel, appointed, deputed, posted, or attached to an Inter-Services Organization.

(5) The Bill also empowers the Commanding Officer of an Inter-Services Organization to initiate all disciplinary or administrative actions over the personnel appointed, deputed, posted, or attached to that Inter-Services Organization. For this Act, Commanding Officer means the officer in actual command of the unit, ship, or establishment.

(6) The Bill empowers the Central Government to constitute an Inter-Services Organization.

b. The 'ISO Bill-2023' serves as an enabling act, without altering the existing Service Acts, Rules, or Regulations that have been proven effective and upheld by judicial scrutiny for over six decades. Service personnel assigned to or serving in an Inter-Services Organization will remain governed by their respective Service Acts. The bill empowers the Heads of Inter-Services Organizations to exercise all disciplinary and administrative powers according to the existing Service Acts, Rules, and Regulations, regardless of the service branch to which the personnel belong.

3.5 Integration of Defense Forces - The Department of Military Affairs (DMA)

a. The DMA, designed on 01 Jan 2020, is working to raise the culture of theaterization. Cross-postings are the order of the day. The idea is to combine units of all three services in a single theatre under a common commander to

enhance operational efficiency. The overarching principle is that work related to Military Affairs is to be done only by the 'Department of Military Affairs', while the Department of Defense will deal with issues to the defense of the country, including defense policy.

b. Officers from the three-armed Forces have also been appointed to the Department of Military Affairs. These include one Additional Secretary, three Joint Secretaries, and several Directors/Deputy Secretaries. In addition, to providing Subject Matter Expertise.

c. The DMA looked at the logistics arrangement of the armed forces and developed a common logistics policy for services to enhance all supply functions such as planning, procurement, inventory maintenance, distribution, disposal, and documentation. A pilot project based on the establishment of three Joint Logistic Nodes at Mumbai, Guwahati, and Port Blair has been rolled off. More than 270 logistic installations of the Indian Army have been closed or scaled down. A holistic review of the training methodology is also underway to modernize, integrate, and rationalize training, to also ensure optimal utilization of infrastructure and resources(Chief of Defense Staff a Historic Reform in Higher Defense Organization, 2021).

3.6 Other Countries Command Structure - Theatre Command

a. The Countries utilizing theatre commands share some key characteristics. These structures aim to establish a unified command responsible for the operational deployment of joint forces. While the leadership and planning staff for these commands are permanent, the allocation of forces remains dynamic. Individual service headquarters (Army, Navy, Air Force) assign specific units based on a collaborative assessment (joint appreciation) of the anticipated threat. Before discussing the Indian Maritime Theatre Command, let's briefly look at the model of the US, Australia, and the UK.

b. **United States of America.** The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff serves as the principal military adviser to the President and is responsible for seeking advice from other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and Combatant Commanders. When presenting his recommendations, he includes a range of advice and opinions gathered, as well as any individual comments from other JCS members. According to the DOD Reorganization Act, the Secretaries of the Military Departments are tasked with assigning all forces to combatant commands, except those designated for the duties of the Services. These duties include recruiting, organizing, supplying, equipping, training, servicing, mobilizing, demobilizing, administering, and maintaining their respective forces. The chain of command to combatant commands goes from the President to the Secretary of Defense and then directly to the commander of the combatant command. While the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff can relay communications from the President and Secretary of Defense to the combatant commanders, he does not have direct military command authority over any combatant forces. The Act also delegates certain functions and responsibilities previously held by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Chairman of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff(US Military, 2024), the organogram as shown in figure 5.5 below.

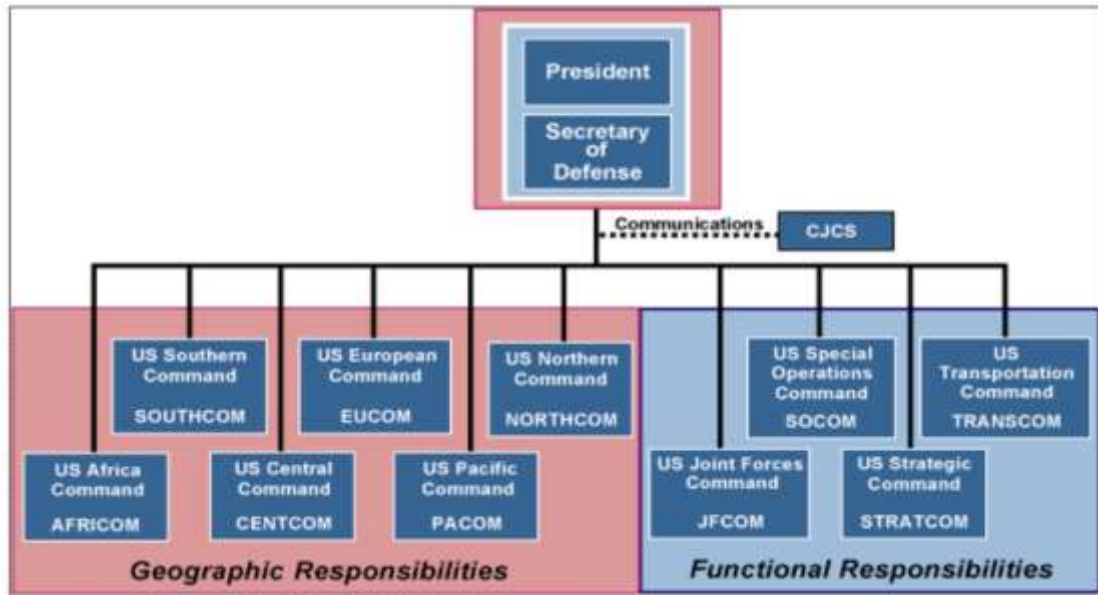


Figure 5.5: Function and responsibilities US Commands

c. **Australia**. In Australia, all commands are under VCDS (Vice Chief of Defense Staff), and he reports to Chief of Defense Staff, as shown in figure 5.6 below:

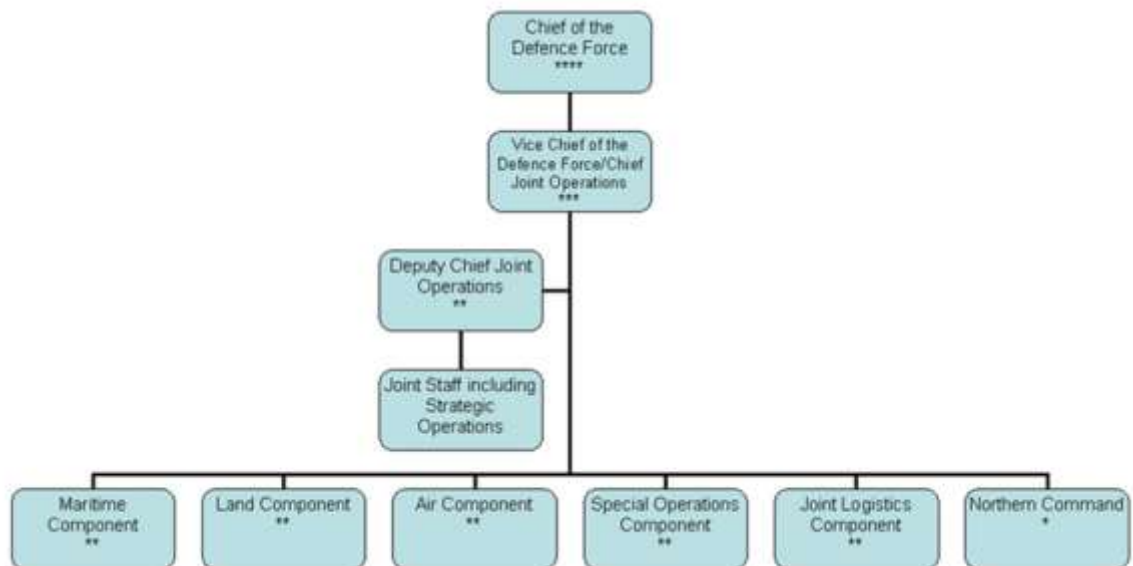


Figure 5.6: Australian Model (Trade, 2008)

d. **United Kingdom**. In the UK, the CDS is the professional head of the armed forces and the Principal Adviser to the Government, which is generally in line with the US and Australia. The CDS is the principal service advisor to the HM Government, and he commands and coordinates the activities of the three Services through the three single service commanders. These single-

service commanders exercise command of their single services through their respective headquarters. The three single services, Royal Navy, Army, and Royal Air Force are the fundamental elements of Defense. The single Service Chiefs of Staff (The First Sea Lord/Chief of the Naval Staff, the Chief of the General Staff, and the Chief of the Air Staff) are the professional heads of their respective services. However, the complex inter-service nature of the majority of modern military operations, where military, air, and naval support must be coordinated, has led to the establishment of a Permanent Tri-Service Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) (Forces, 2023). The structure is shown in Figure 5.7 below.

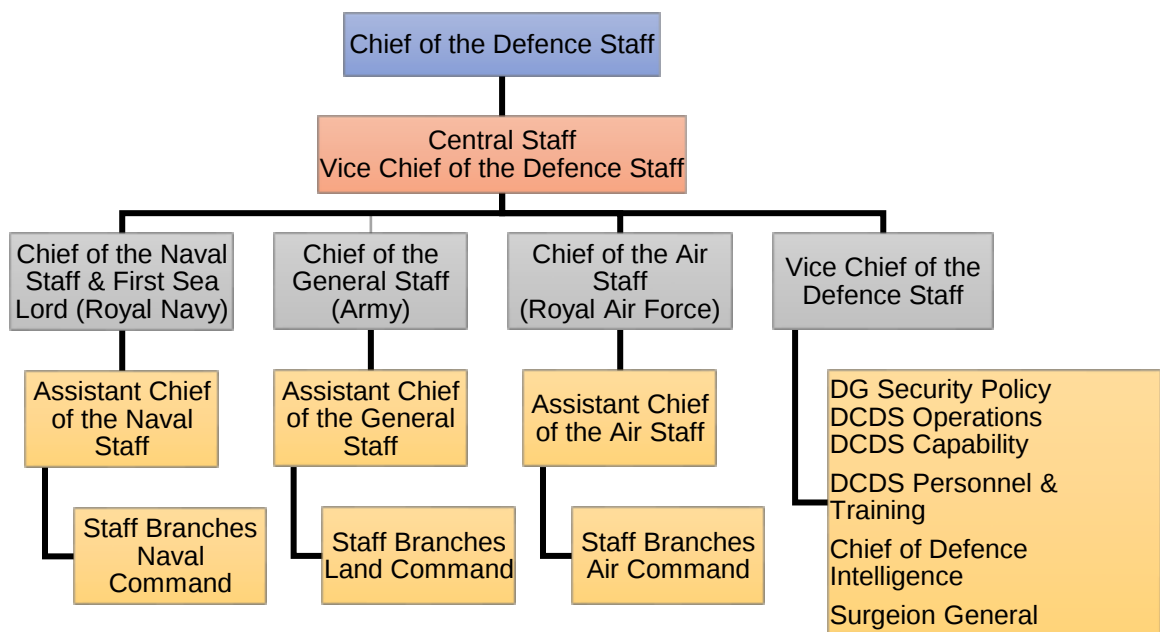


Figure 4.7: UK Model (Forces, 2023)

e. **CHINA.** The theatre commander reports directly to the Central Military Commission, led by President Xi Jinping, establishing a direct chain of command between the theatre and the head of state. This relationship is notably close, with President Xi Jinping actively involved in military affairs, as evidenced by his hands-on approach during the ongoing Sino-Indian standoff in Eastern Ladakh. Much like the U.S. system, each theatre is allocated resources to effectively execute its designated tasks, ensuring a streamlined and responsive military structure. (LT GEN P R SHANKAR (R), 2020).

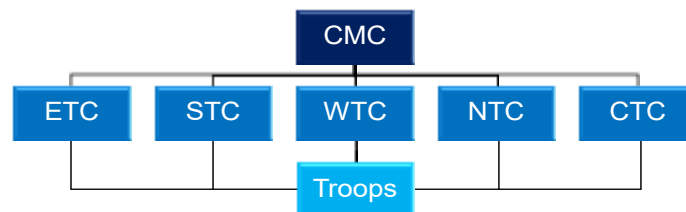


Figure 5.8: Operational Command Structure of PLA (LT GEN P R SHANKAR (R), 2020)

3.7 Proposed Structure of Indian Theatre Commands

a. India is adopting a different strategy than the US and China, which base their theater commands on the area of action. India's theater commands follow the "One Border One Force" principle, which guarantees targeted and effective control. The planned theatre commands in India will oversee a vast and diverse geographical expanse. The land borders with China and Pakistan alone stretch for over 3,000 kilometers. It's important to note that the complexities of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh create some variations in actual border lengths compared to demarcated lines. Adding to this challenge, India boasts a long coastline of approximately 7,518 kilometers. This maritime expanse necessitates a strong naval presence across multiple regions. This description highlights the vastness of the area under potential theatre command while acknowledging the complexities of land borders. It also emphasizes the significance of the maritime domain (Hooda, 2023b).

b. The final structure of Indian Theatre Command is not finalized but expected to be functional in 2025 (Janjua, 2023). It would be obvious that the C-in-Cs of Theatre Commands like the Chiefs will have to be of four-star rank which will give the requisite authority to the theatre commander and provide options for how political control will be exercised over the theatre commander. It is also suggested that the Vice Chief of the Defense Staff (VCDS) is also a four-star Officer (Pradip R. Sagar, 2024). All Deputy Theatre Commanders and several Component Commanders will have to be three-star ranked. Most functional Commands will be of three-star rank (Menon, 2020) (Hooda, 2023a). The Indian Army, Navy, and Airforce will continue to be headed by Four-Star Officers. It means the Indian Military will have 8 Four-star Generals/Admirals/Air Chief Marshals. A Theatre Command will be big enough to be able to exercise the power with maximum flexibility. Below is the organogram structure of Indian Theatre Commands and the proposed Theatre Command Structure is depicted below in Figure 5.9 (Masud Ahmad Khan, n.d.):

(1) Western Theatre Command (WTC) Jaipur– Pakistan Specific.

The northern Indian state of Rajasthan's capital, Jaipur (350 KM from Pakistan), will host the first integrated theatre command. The Western Theatre Command area of responsibility spans from Indira Col on Salto Ridge in the Siachen Glacier to Gujarat (Pradip R. Sagar, 2024). The combined theatre command to confront Pakistan will be headquartered at the army's Southwestern Command in Jaipur. In this theatre, there are aspects of the Northern command as well as the Western, Southern, and Southwestern commands. (Anil Ahuja & Arun Sehgal, 2021). The proposed structure is shown in figure 5.10 below, whereas the precise number of Indian Army, Air Force, and Navy members has not yet been disclosed. It is expected that a small portion of the navy will be attached, which may be transferred to Maritime Theatre Command in the event of war to avoid friendly units firing friendly units.

(2) Northern Theatre Command (NTC) Lucknow – China Specific

To confront China along the borders of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), LOC with Pakistan, and LAC with China (450 kilometers from LAC), the second integrated command will be headquartered in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh. The Northern Theatre Command will cover the entire 3,488 kilometers of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), India's de facto border with China, starting from the Himalayan heights of Ladakh and extending to Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh (Pradip R. Sagar, 2024). The Eastern Command, Central Command, and a portion of the Northern Command may be proposed to be included in this theatre. The theatre commands of Jaipur and Lucknow will split some aspects of the Northern command, the structure is shown in Figure 5.11 below, the final number of Army, Airforce, and Navy has not been revealed, due to the terrain of this command naval units may not be attached.

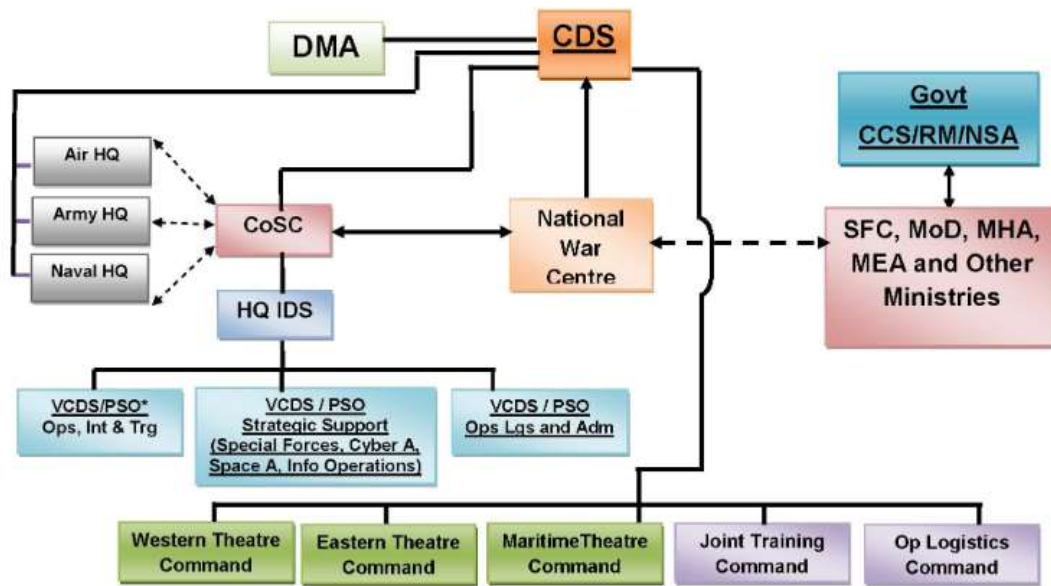
(3) Maritime Theatre Command (MTC) - Thiruvananthapuram

The third integrated theatre command will be the Maritime Command based in Thiruvananthapuram (Staff Reporter, 2024), Kerala, to look at the strategic interests of the country in the wider Indo-Pacific region apart from the 7516 km coastline, the structure is shown in Figure 5.12 below. It is expected that MTC will also be established quickly as the Navy is already organized to act independently. India wants to project the Indian Navy as a global force patrolling the Indian Ocean, South China Sea, and with ambitions for the Pacific and Atlantic (Commodore Sanjay J Singh, 2015a). The MTC boasts a formidable fleet, elite amphibious brigades for island defense, and seamless collaboration with the army and air force. Although specifics are still being worked out, it is anticipated that certain naval forces will be sent to Western Commands and the distribution of naval units may be split up. It will be commanded by a naval officer and Army and Airforce units will be minimal.

(4) Functional Command

Two functional commands, viz. Joint Training Command and Operational Logistics Command, have been proposed to meet the operational needs of the Theatre Commands, considering that other service-specific needs of raise, train, and sustain would be met by the respective re-modeled Service HQs.

CDS, RE-MODELLED HQ IDS AND THEATRE COMMANDS

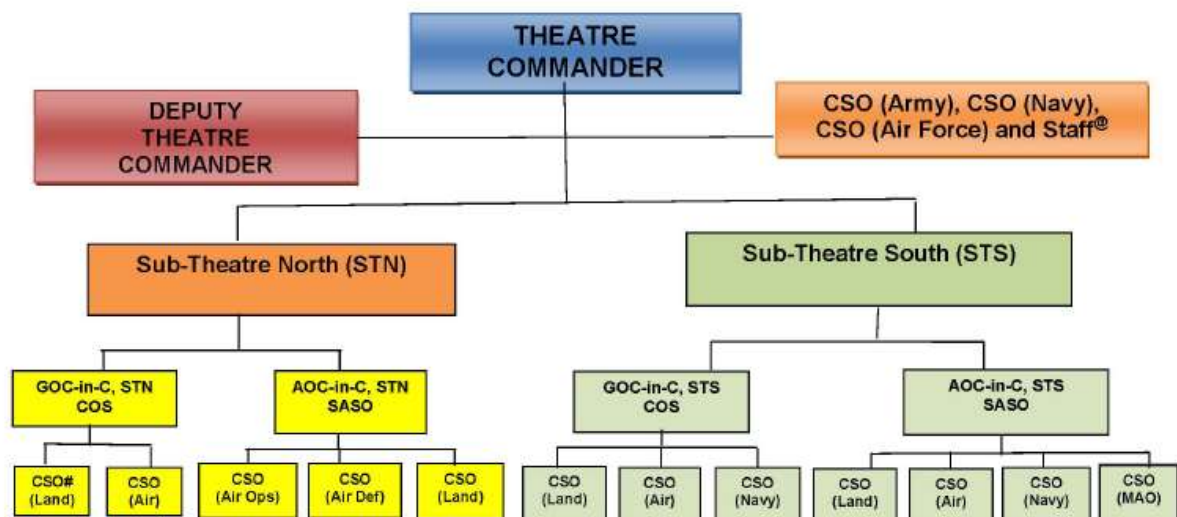


Notes

1. CDS to be Permanent Chairman of CoSC with full Operational and Administrative control over entire Armed Forces.
 2. CISC could also be the Secretary, DMA.
 3. CDS/ CoSC to exercise control over Theatre Commands.
 4. Service HQ to only be responsible for Raise, Train & Sustain.
 5. Aspects of Operations, Intelligence, Strategic Support, Training & Op Logistics to be controlled and coordinated by remodelled HQ IDS.
- * VCDS/PSO – Vice Chief of Defence Staff/ Principal Staff Officer

Figure 5.9: Proposed CDS Command Structure(Major General BK Sharma, AVSM & Major General RS Yadav, 2022)

WESTERN THEATRE COMMAND



@ - All Commanders to have Operations, Intelligence and Operational Logistics Staff supporting them which should further have separate or combined staff for Strategy, Plans, Intelligence Surveillance and Recce (ISR), Information Warfare and Communication, Combat Support, Joint Training and Logistics.
(# CSO – Chief Staff Officer)

Figure 5.10: Proposed WTC (Major General BK Sharma, AVSM & Major General RS Yadav, 2022)

Northern Theatre Command

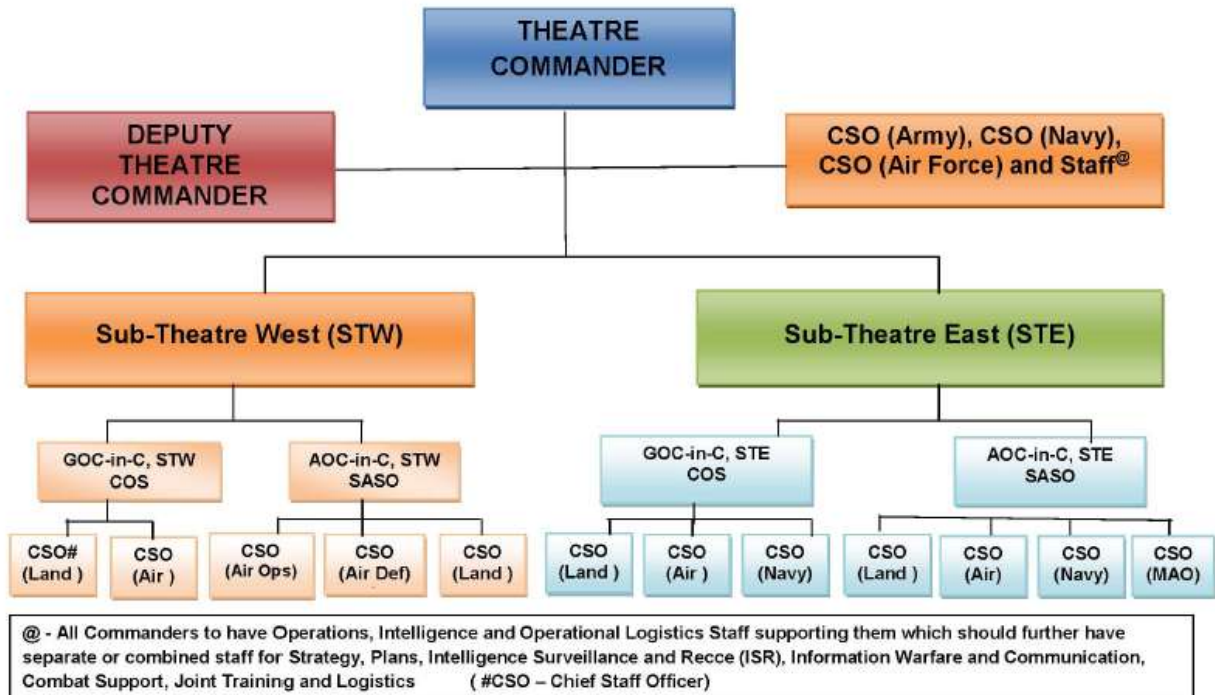
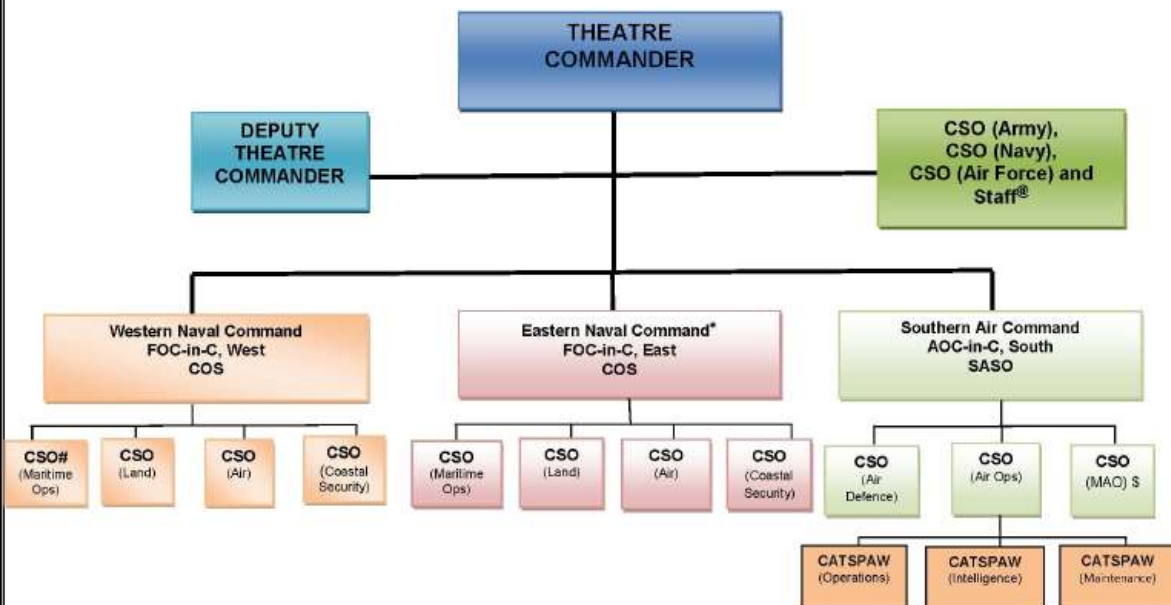


Figure 5.11: Proposed NTC. (Major General BK Sharma, AVSM & Major General RS Yadav, 2022)

MARITIME THEATRE COMMAND



* ANC (Andaman & Nicobar Command) to be placed under Eastern Naval Command (may make independent later post capability enhancement) .

@ - All Commanders to have Operations, Intelligence and Operational Logistics Staff supporting them which should further have separate or combined staff for Strategy, Plans, Intelligence Surveillance and Recce (ISR), Information Warfare and Communication, Combat Support, Joint Training and Logistics. (# - CSO : Chief Staff Officer ; \$ - MAO : Maritime Air Operations)

Figure 5.12: Proposed MTC (Major General BK Sharma, AVSM & Major General RS Yadav, 2022)

3.8 Functioning of CDS and Theatre Command

a. The CDS India position was established to enhance tri-service effectiveness, coordination, and overall integration of the Indian armed forces' combat capabilities. The government changed the Army, Navy, and Air Force service rules to make retired Service Chiefs and three-star officers eligible for consideration for the nation's top military position. The retired officer's age should not have exceeded 62 years at the time of appointment. To improve the functioning of Theatre Command, the CDS would be seated in the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) new office or headquarters. The role of CDS is appended below (Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) India- History, His Roles, and Responsibilities, & Significance, 2024):

(1) **Principal Military Advisor.** As a principal military advisor, CDS will act as a single-point advisor to the defense minister on matters of tri-services with an enhanced role in strategic decision-making.

(2) **Head of the Department of Military Affairs.** At the Defence policy-making level, CDS will lead the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), which raises him to the secretary level. In this capacity, CDS will serve as a bridge between the civilian and military leadership and will look after policy-level matters. CDS is also responsible for the promotion of jointness in procurement, training, and staffing for the services. Facilitation of restructuring of Military Commands for optimal utilization of resources, and promotion of the use of indigenous of equipment is also mandate of DMA (MoD, 2022).

(3) **Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.** At the military strategy level, CDS will act as permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee which includes the three service chiefs, as shown in figure 5.13.



Figure 5.13: DMA working (MoD, 2022)

(4) **Role of Services Chief.** Presently, the CDS does not exercise any operational control over military forces; however, with the establishment of theatre commands and the theatre commanders

reporting to the CDS this might change; however, these details are yet to be finalized. With the creation of the theatre commands, it is often stated that the role of the service chiefs would transition to only “raise, train, and sustain,” which is like the US model. This is sometimes taken to mean that they would be entirely outside the operational decision-making cycle. Additionally, if promotions, postings, and disciplinary matters of the three services fall under the CDS, as proposed by certain circles, it will give the CDS extensive influence over the Services’ Chiefs(Hooda, 2023a).

(5) It's possible that the CDS is overburdened with work. In his capacity as Secretary DMA, the CDS is also in charge of issues relating to labor planning, compensation, training, management of staff, works, and procurement except for capital acquisitions. The CDS's principal duty as an operational commander can be compromised by these demands for attention. The Defense Secretary could take back some of the DMA responsibilities that were taken out of the Department of Defense's purview in 2019 to lessen the administrative burden on the CDS (Hooda, 2023a).

b. The following is in the proposed process of implementation:

(1) The command of the Western and Eastern theatre will be rotated between the Army and Air Force, while the Maritime command will remain with the Navy, their location is shown in Figure 5.14.

(2) In the United States, theatre commanders report to the Secretary of Defense rather than the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Chairman. The Central Military Commission (CMC) is the entity to whom the theatre commanders in China report. In India, theater commanders will directly report to the CDS, instead of Services Chiefs.(Usman Haider, 2023a).

(3) The commander of an integrated theatre is not answerable to individual Services and has the autonomy to equip, train, and exercise his command to transform it into a cohesive fighting force capable of achieving assigned targets. This approach is a departure from the current model followed by the military in India, where service-specific commands are in place. The Indian Army, Navy, and the Air Force have their own separate commands across the country.

(4) The theater commands are being created based on the notion of One Border One Force. They will be geography- and border-specific, with three to be created, two will be land-based and one will be focused on maritime boundaries(Usman Haider, 2023a).

(5) India's planned Theatre Commands aim for a more integrated military structure. The Theatre Commander will be the central figure, responsible for unified planning and execution of operations. Each command will likely have a Deputy Theatre Commander, a three-star officer with the experience and authority of a current Chief of Staff. This

deputy will oversee crucial support functions like logistics, personnel, administration, and maintenance, ensuring smooth operation for the Theatre Commander. Component Commanders from the Army, Navy, and Air Force will fall under the Theatre Commander, retaining operational control of their specific service assets. Additionally, depending on mission needs, Component Commanders for specialized units like Special Forces or Internal Security could be integrated. This structure creates a clear chain of command while fostering collaboration between services for a more responsive and effective military (Menon, 2020).

(6) In a time of conflict, each Service Chief will use separate commands to oversee the activities of their various Services while working together.

(7) Given India's geographic features, the two theatres commands Northern and Maritime could have the largest ITC configurations.

(8) This system aims to put the resources of the three Services at the disposal of the theatre commander, considering the tasks assigned to him. This allows him the freedom to train his command to make it a cohesive fighting force capable of achieving its designated charter in the shortest possible timeframe.

(9) Integrated planning and coordinated application would be the exclusive purview of the Theatre Commander.(IAS, 2023)

(10) The military has recently cross posted 102 officers from one service to another to ensure they understand the workings of other services. These transfers are an important step in ensuring integration, and a clear indication of the needle moving towards integrated theatre commands (Sachdev, 2021)(Singh, 2023).

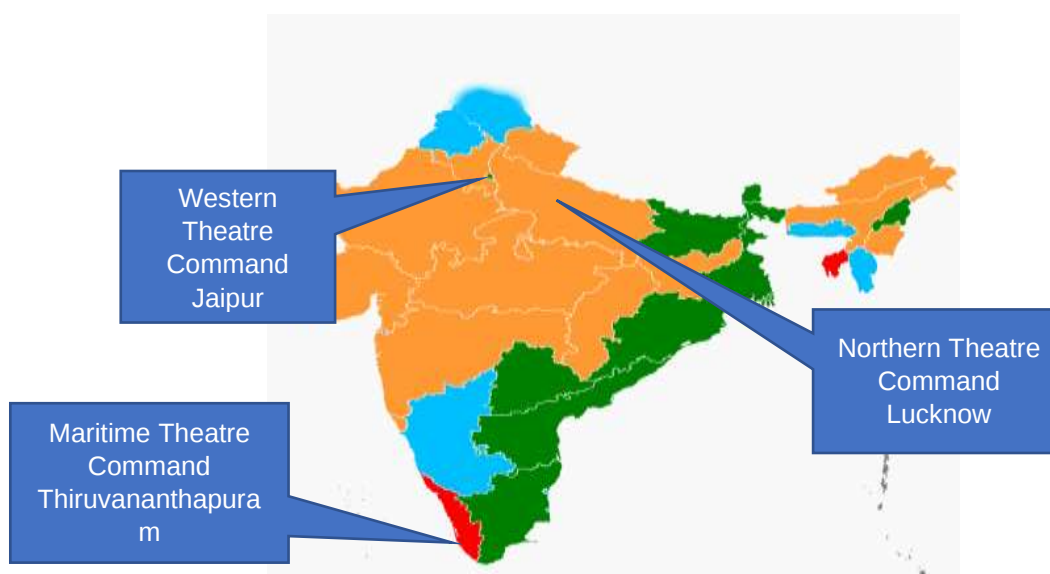


Figure 5.14: Proposed Indian Theatre Commands

CHAPTER 4

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF THEATERIZATION FOR THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES

4.1 Challenges Faced by Defense Forces in Integration

a. **Introduction.** Reorganizing current commands into unified commands would need extensive restructuring. It requires the Services to provide unwavering support and dedication, putting national interests ahead of personal interest, and having the political will to transform Indian armed forces to meet new and emerging threats. Theaterization of military commands is where advantages also have some disadvantages especially when talking in the context of a sub-continent mindset. The following are the challenges/advantages that may be accrued (Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah, 2024a):

b. **Challenges – Theaterization.** Despite the compelling theoretical advantages of theatre commands, significant hurdles remain before India can fully implement them. Overcoming institutional inertia and vested interests that prioritize the existing structure will be crucial for a successful transition. Before integration if we look at the size of the Indian armed forces:

- (1) The Indian Army, with over 1.4 million active personnel, is the 4th largest standing army globally ("2024 Military Strength Ranking," 2024).
- (2) The Indian Air Force is the 6th largest air force in the world, equipped with modern aircraft and advanced technology (Aircraft, n.d.).
- (3) The Indian Navy is the 7th largest navy in the world (Global Naval Powers Ranking (2024), 2024), with its vast coastline and maritime interests which covers not only Indian Ocean but Western Pacific and part of East Atlantic Ocean as well. Indian Navy maintains a formidable presence in the Indian Ocean region and established bases in Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, logistic agreement with Singapore, berthing rights at Oman etc. (Aditya Kanoi, 2023). It operates modern warships, nuclear and conventional submarines, aircraft carrier and aircraft, enabling it to project power and secure India's maritime boundaries.
- (4) The likely challenges faces are discussed below (Singh, 2023):
- (5) Compounding the challenges, India may lack the necessary foundation in military education to fully staff theatre commands. Modifying curricula at staff and war colleges to equip officers with joint service knowledge and adaptable skills for working in integrated headquarters is crucial. This long-term investment will ensure a future generation is prepared to lead in theatre commands.

(6) Many former military personnel have also expressed disapproval of the implementation of theatre commands in the absence of a well-thought-out National Security Strategy (NSS), basically, saying that in the absence of an NSS, the theatre commanders won't have a defined plan or policy goal to work towards.

(7) Essentially there are, some institutional and conceptual adjustments will need to be made to strike the right balance during India's largest military makeover which might be a force multiplier.

(8) The current military structure may not have a sufficient pool of officers with the specialized training and experience necessary to operate effectively in a joint environment within theatre commands.

(9) The existing training infrastructure might not be fully equipped to rapidly develop the requisite joint warfare expertise across all levels of command. This could be due to a lack of dedicated staff billets for joint training or limitations in curriculum development (Anil Auja, 2021).

(10) Salary and pension payments take up a large portion of the annual defense budget, and expenditures do not necessarily increase in proportion to the needs of the armed services (Iasgyan, 2022).

(11) The military resources that are currently divided among several centers of command will be combined into a single command headed by an operational commander who will oversee planning and executing the force's actions in a particular circumstance (Iasgyan, 2022).

(12) Further the budgetary allocations and the distribution of funds have also been pointed out as factors that need to be clearly worked out to enable the setting up of a seamless theatre command system. Another issue may be the existing mismatch between the assets of the Army, Navy, and Air Force (Iasgyan, 2022).

(13) Resource allocation under theatre commands presents a complex challenge. Dividing existing, potentially limited resources could strain combat effectiveness at the operational level. Duplicating resources for each theatre command would be fiscally unsustainable, especially during economic hardship (Remya, 2024).

(14) The Indian Air Force is worried that its resources are being dispersed too widely across the several theatre commands, and it has also been recommended that further clarification be sought on operational control issues (Iasgyan, 2022).

(15) Indian policymakers are recognizing that Theaterization is an evolving process, not a one-time event. In the US every two years, a ritual takes over the Pentagon. A mix of service priorities, Presidential prerogatives, defense ideas, and congressional intrigue combine in a

cauldron called the Unified Command Plan (UCP). Similarly, Russia initially established four Joint Strategic Commands, later adding a Northern Command to address emerging security concerns (Iasgyan, 2022).

(16) It is important to raise and develop the defense industry on a war footing. Without realizing that the homegrown defense sector is just as crucial to the modernization of the armed forces in India as the actual weaponry, it is a frequently disregarded part of the country's economy. Without a strong defense sector, no country has developed into a major power. India has an ambitious plan to make all defense products in India by 2047. (Anon n.d.-c).

(17) India's expertise in running integrated theatre commands is quite small. It is anticipated that some modifications and course corrections will be needed as these orders change. Early in the implementation process, there may be difficulties due to the learning curve and they must adjust to new structures and procedures. Implementing theatre commands presents a unique challenge in India's context. Each service (Army, Navy, Air Force) has a rich history and distinct culture, traditions, and operational philosophies. This strong sense of individual identity could lead to resistance towards a more integrated structure.

(18) India's new military organization is under a cloud of uncertainty. Within these collaborative teams, it's unclear who will be in charge. Who will the commanders of the Army, Navy, and Air Force report to—the new leaders or someone else? And in combat, who gets to make the decisions—these new commanders or the separate services? Making these new teams' function well depends on figuring this out.

(19) Each service – Army, Navy, Air Force – develops its theories of war based on factors like threat perception, historical battles, geographical considerations, and unique capabilities. Integrating these into a single "theory of victory" risks compromising the core strengths of each service if the underlying assumptions prove flawed. The key will be finding a balance that bridges doctrinal and structural differences while preserving the specialized strengths each service brings to the table.

(20) Each service keenly guards its own assets and endeavors for a greater share of the defense budget and influence. This might prove to be an obstacle in creating synergy among the services (IAS, 2023).

(21) To improve coordination between theatre commands, there is a need to update doctrine, standardize procedures, and conduct joint training exercises.

c. These limitations could hinder the effectiveness of theatre commands in the initial stages.

4.2 Strategic Imperative: Advancing Basic Integration for Enhanced Joint Operations

- a. Indian military theaterization is a complex process aimed at restructuring the armed forces for more effective regional command and control. In this context, the strategic imperative of advancing basic integration for enhanced joint operations means that, the process of integration must start from the basic integration of the three services. The creation of the theatre commands can bring Jointness on paper in the Indian armed forces. However, the true Jointness can only be achieved after addressing the areas as highlighted hereunder (Parrikar, 2020): -
- b. The integration process must start with the general purpose or common equipment logistics, including spares of the equipment commonly used by the three services. Seeming to be a simple task will require a lot of effort to overcome this hurdle.
- c. All three Services have different operating philosophies, and joint training must start to bring them to par and understand each other's philosophy.
- d. Establishing effective mechanisms for joint planning, decision-making, and execution.
- e. Developing unified operational concepts, tactics, and procedures for all services.
- f. Regular conduct of the joint exercise will also help in the integration process that is missing at present in the Indian armed forces.
- g. At present there are very less inter services postings between the Indian armed forces. Increasing inter-service postings and making them mandatory for higher ranks will help the integration process in the long run. Individual services are likely to lose out in a joint system.
- h. The promotion procedure for officers should be spelled out in detail with milestones; if they are posted to another command, they should not fear that their candidacy for promotion will be terminated, same for the rankers also. Rather they should be encouraged for postings to other command.

4.3 Advantages.

- a. Theaterization is a significant structural reform aimed at enhancing the Indian military's operational efficiency and effectiveness. Its primary advantages include:
 - (1) This choice suggests a single threat, a single country, and a single command that oversees them. Depending on the type of threat, it would result in coordinated operations. It would simplify operations synchronization, deployment, and planning. Each command will have

multiple roles including insurgency(Major General Harsha Kakkar (Retd), 2020).

(2) Theaterization helps to break down the barriers between the services and improve understanding, coordination, and cooperation at all levels. This in fact serves as a prerequisite for effective joint operations.

(3) By consolidating logistics under theatre commands, the military can expect long-term benefits. This unified framework eliminates redundancies by collectively addressing the needs of all branches, preventing wasted resources on duplicate purchases, and streamlining operations for a more efficient and cost-effective logistics system(SAHA & MISHRA, 2020).

(4) The various military commands in India are currently dispersed among several geographic regions. This occasionally makes it difficult to communicate during joint operations and drills. Since it takes several clearance levels from different hierarchies and geographical locations to validate plans and tactics. These communication methods could be easier and more effective with a single command structure (SAHA & MISHRA, 2020).

(5) A singular command structure streamlines decision-making, strengthens deterrence by presenting a unified front, maximizes military effectiveness through cross-domain synergy between Army, Navy, and Air Force, and fosters a collaborative environment for more efficient planning and training, ultimately leading to a more agile and powerful fighting force.

(6) Theater commands will have clear operational responsibilities, leading to better planning and execution.

(7) Streamlined processes and better coordination will allow for more rapid deployment and sustained operations.

(8) Theater commands can tailor their forces and capabilities to specific threats, enabling a more credible deterrence posture.

(9) The ability to rapidly deploy and employ forces will enhance India's crisis response capabilities.

(10) Streamlined structures may lead to a reduction in overall manpower requirements.

(11) Integrated logistics support will streamline supply chains and ensure timely delivery of critical resources.

- b. Theaterization has the potential to make the Indian military more powerful and adaptable, ready to handle the security concerns of the twenty-first century by tackling issues like inter-service competition, resource limitations, and operational complexity.

4.4 Disadvantages

- a. There are, however, a few disadvantages also in particular when viewed with a subcontinental lens. These include:

- (1) Common to all armed forces around the world, inter-services rivalry exists in Indian armed forces also. The establishment of theatre command may intensify this phenomenon since each service may have different priorities, doctrines, and operational needs that can create conflicts and hinder smooth coordination.

- (2) Synergizing different branches of the military into a theatre command requires efficient command, control, and functional mechanisms. This is an uphill task and may require extensive investment by the commanders.

- (3) While a singular command offers faster decisions, stronger deterrence, and smoother operations, it necessitates significant restructuring. Increased force size demands more facilities and resource allocation. Seamless integration across branches requires extensive joint training with revised syllabuses, shared facilities, and frequent exercises, a complex but ultimately empowering transformation.

- (4) There is a specific culture of each service. Even the terminologies and clichés are different. Amalgamating personnel from different services and adjusting them to the same culture is a time-consuming task.

- (5) Theatre commands work best in situations where there is little danger to one's own area and opponents must be defeated in distant regions. Large resources are typically needed for theatres. China didn't enter theatre command until it began to build global aspirations and made large investments in its military. Direct territorial dangers face India from all sides and in all ways. India does not have enough resources to fight on two fronts, let alone one. There are just 31 combat squadrons left in the IAF, therefore if these limited resources are divided up and distributed across different "theatre commands," their use is probably not going to be at its best.

- (6) The implementation of Theatre Commands in India is sparking debate about the potential for reduced control by individual military services over their assets and operational roles. This could lead to a perception that the role of the Service Chiefs is diminished with their focus potentially shifting solely to training and supporting Theatre

Commanders. While Theatre Commanders might enjoy greater authority, dynamism, and access to resources for integrated operations, this shift could create friction and ill will amongst the Service Chiefs.

(7) Theatre Commanders can promote jointness and a unified response. Services could retain core functions like training, while ITCs manage deployments and resources. A well-defined framework and phased implementation can ensure success.

(8) Distributing defense forces' assets across theatre commands will be a complex task. Theatre commanders, particularly those overseeing high-threat regions, may naturally prioritize securing a larger share of resources, especially from the Indian Air Force.

(9) Clear demarcations between theatre commands, particularly during wartime operations, are crucial. In a scenario like a conflict with Pakistan, where the Western Theatre Command and the Maritime Theatre Command might be engaged, meticulous planning and robust communication protocols are vital to prevent friendly fire incidents.

(10) Overlapping functions and resources may lead to inefficiencies and increased spending.

b. It's important to remember that these difficulties are manageable, and the Indian military can minimize these dangers and optimize the advantages of theaterization with proper preparation and implementation.

4.5 Theaterization – Cooperation Between CDS and Commands

a. Theaterization requires greater cooperation and coordination among different branches of armed forces at all levels and in all situations. This is a time taking process and given the situation India is maintaining with its two neighbor's vis China and Pakistan, the process of generating cooperation and coordination needs to be expedited.

b. This requires clear understanding at all levels. There is a need to crystallize the concept for the upper and middle echelons of the armed forces who can then train the lower echelons. The impediments that have been highlighted above require consistent and concerted efforts by all.

c. For Theaterization, there is a requirement of hierarchical changes. There is still confusion on the functioning of CDS as he will be a single-point military advisor to the defense minister on military matters. Its charter states that he would be single point military advisor to the government and would have no operational as well as authoritative control over the three chiefs, their respected services and all the forces. He wouldn't be considered as a serving commander of the forces but rather more of a military bureaucrat as he would also function as the Secretary of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA). Ostensibly, he will have authority over the three chiefs as far as his connection with the

government is concerned, yet the services chiefs are overall responsible for the functioning of the three forces.

d. Whether the theatre commanders will be directly under CDS for operational matters or not is something missing from the documents available on the concept (Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah, 2024a).

4.6 Theatre Commands Functions

a. Unlike US Combatant Commands with vast regions and diverse threats, India's Theatre Commands target specific areas like borders with China or Pakistan. This allows India to tailor its forces and prioritize inter-service cooperation within the theatre, while the US prioritizes complex coordination across large areas with air, land, and naval assets, including carrier-based fighters working with land-based forces. The aforementioned information can be used to identify the following crucial characteristics of a theatre command: (Sachdev, 2021) (Mulay, 2023):

(1) India's evolving Theatre Command system needs a forward-thinking approach to address not just immediate threats, but also potential future challenges. These geographically focused commands, led by commanders with access to all three service branches (land, sea, and air), will operate autonomously in planning and executing operations within the national military policy. While strategy remains at a higher level, theatre commanders will be crucial in ensuring seamless joint operations, maximizing the effectiveness of combined forces against any adversary.

(2) India's Theatre Command system, designed for geographical focus and joint operations, demands a forward-thinking approach to address not just immediate threats but also evolving security landscapes. Theatre Commanders, with access to all military branches (land, sea, and air), will wield significant autonomy in planning and executing operations within the national military framework. While grand strategy remains at a higher level, theatre commanders become pivotal in ensuring seamless joint operations, maximizing the effectiveness of combined forces against any adversary. Importantly, these commands are inherently integrated, eliminating the need for designations like "land-based" or "maritime" theatre commands. This structure streamlines operations and fosters unity of effort by limiting the number of entities involved in a specific conflict.

(3) The Sub-theatres or component commands could be created within the theatre to provide more in-depth planning and execution. Therefore, integrating planning, keeping an eye on how operations are being carried out, modifying plans in response to changing circumstances, and performing regular administrative and training duties are the main responsibilities of a theatre command.

(4) The land, sea, and air force Commanders support the Theatre Commander. Theatre commands are not just for running things. Commonalities across the three Services would be necessary for the structure, the main ones being an integrated communication system and integrated logistics and maintenance. Integration efforts ought to begin concurrently with the finalization of the structure.

(5) The experience of the US, Russia, and China highlights that establishing integrated theatre commands is a complex decision that transcends the military itself. It requires political will and leadership to navigate the restructuring, resource allocation, and inter-service cooperation necessary for a successful implementation. While the military executes the plan, political backing is crucial for overcoming bureaucratic hurdles and ensuring long-term success. Theatre Command's execution road map and appointment of CDS was done by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Although the reorganization of defense forces was advocated by the Group of Ministers (GoM) in 2001, it took an additional 18 years to designate the CDS, and the bill was ratified in 2023. Despite forming the government in 2024 through a coalition, it is anticipated that PM Modi would give the opening of Theatre Command high priority.

(6) In this regard on 4-5 September 24, the Indian military held its first Joint Commanders' Conference at Lucknow. The Indian Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh stressed on the need for a unified vision to enhance military integration and synergy and a roadmap being set for the creation of Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs)(Pradip R. Sagar, 2024).

CHAPTER 5

THEATERIZATION – EFFECT ON REGION AND BEYOND

5.1 Introduction

a. The Indian Theaterization is being undertaken keeping in view its perceived threat from China and Pakistan. Also, India wishes to fulfill its role as net security provider in Indian Ocean; epitomized in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy issued in Feb 2022(White House, 2022). Therefore, Maritime Theatre Command has also been instituted. Although theaterization is undertaken for offensive plans and there are constraints as mentioned above in fully materializing this concept, yet it certainly calls for adequate preparations on part of India's both neighbors vis China and Pakistan for whom threat level has been increased(Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah, 2024a).

5.2 India's Maritime Ambitious – Dominate Indian Ocean & Beyond

a. Indian Navy is the strongest navy in the Indian Ocean and in the last two-decade India understood the role of the navy to dominate the Indian Ocean. India's increased defense spending has been continually growing for the last 10 years. In the year 2013, it was ₹ 2845.97 billion, in 2024 it was ₹6215,41 billion almost 208 percent increase in past 11 years(Malik Qasim Mustafa, 2023). Indian Naval shares also increased subsequently; Indian military planners shifted from continental to maritime strategy. The Indian maritime interests not only cover the Indian Ocean but a large part of Western Pacific Ocean and some part of Eastern Atlantic Ocean, which reflects the ambitious of India to be recognized as world power in future. The relations between India and the US improved a lot in the past two decades, inclusion of India in QUAD (includes India, Australia, Japan and the US), I2U2 (includes India, Israel, UAE and the US). Moreover, India and the US conducted following agreements, which were only allowed by close US allies (Misbah Mukhtar, 2020).

(1) **2016 - Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).** It includes procedures for logistics supplies, support, and services. The agreement includes training, medical services, fuel, spare parts, transportation, food, water, repair & maintenance, clothing, and communication services

(2) **2018 - Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA).** The COMCASA allows the U.S. to transfer data equipment and secure communications to India. Real-time data sharing over secure channels with the Indian military is also possible now

(3) **2020 - Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).** The agreement allows for geospatial intelligence sharing with enhanced access to each other maps and satellite imagery. As a result, India now has the capability to access detailed information regarding military

installation and troops troop placement to target attacks with more precision and accuracy. It will enhance the Indian military system and the accuracy of weapons such as ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, drones, etc.

(4) 2023 – Master Ship Repair Agreement (MSRP). MSRAs currently allow US Navy support vessels, not combatant warships, to be repaired at Indian shipyards, offering benefits for both sides. While this collaboration strengthens US-India ties, it's important to manage expectations; MSRAs don't currently extend to warships, which might require a separate agreement with stricter security measures (Ms Anuttama Banerji and Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan, 2024).

b. These agreements allow India to strengthen its relations with the US. The US needs India in containment of China in Indo Pacific Region. In recent years, they both have intensified their strategic alliance, particularly in the fields of security and defense. They are concerned about China's increasing assertiveness and influence in the Indo-Pacific Region. They have been collaborating to support a free and open Indo-Pacific that abides by international law and norms. To offset China's rise, the US has also been working to fortify its regional ties and partnerships. India has been regarded as a trusted partner in this situation because of its strategic location, economic potential, and military prowess. Notably, India has a complicated relationship with China and has followed a strategy of strategic autonomy to uphold cordial ties with both China and the US.



Figure 1: Indian Maritime Interests (Commodore Sanjay J Singh, 2015b)

5.3 Indian Relations with Neighboring Countries

a. In the past decade, ever since Mr. Modi became PM, the relations between India and its neighbors are at lowest ebb due to India's Hindutva, assertive policy. The relations between India and its neighbors have been affected by historical and political issues, trade imbalances, nuclear weapons, and strategic partnerships, leading to conflicts in the region.

b. India-Pakistan relations have been strained for decades, but tensions have escalated significantly in recent years. A series of flashpoints have further complicated matters. In 2017, India refused to participate in a SAARC conference held in Pakistan, highlighting underlying distrust. The situation worsened considerably in February 2019 with the Pulwama attack in Kashmir which India blamed on Pakistan-based militants. This led to retaliatory airstrikes by India and the downing of an Indian MiG-21 by Pakistan. Further straining ties, India's abrogation of Article 35 A & 370 which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, was met with fury in Pakistan. This move prompted Pakistan to downgrade diplomatic relations, halt bilateral trade, and expel Indian diplomats. These developments paint a grim picture for India-Pakistan relations, with little sign of improvement in the near future.

c. After winning the presidency of the Maldives in October 2023, Mohamed Muizzu used slogans against the presence of Indian Forces in the country and demanding their withdrawal. The 76 Indian military troops who were stationed there were repatriated by the Maldives government and substituted by civilians. The Maldives' relationship with China improved after President Mohamed Muizzu paid China a visit on January 24. Before that, each Maldives president had previously traveled to India. On March 20, 2024, the Maldives and China inked a defense pact. Specifics are still pending, but the sources stated that China will show its support by updating the Maldives' military aid (Bhawna Pokharna, 2024).

d. Similarly, a small Katchatheevu Island belongs Sri Lanka's fifty years ago, Now PM Modi described a wrong decision by then government. The new Indian stance has created a diplomatic rift between two countries (Junaid Kathju, 2024). Rising tensions simmer as Sri Lanka accuses India of capitalizing on its political and economic woes to secure exploration rights for the Afanasy Nikitin Seamount, a cobalt-rich underwater mountain. Located within Sri Lanka's claimed extended continental shelf under UNCLOS, the island nation fears India's activities infringe on its resource rights and risk harming the delicate marine environment (web desk, 2024).

e. Recent ousting of ex PM Shaikh Hasina Wajid on 5 Aug 2024 by students' movement is a setback for India. As Shaikh Hasin Wajid was pro India and ruling since 2009. The interim and new government in the Bangladesh will not be so friendly as Shaik Hasina Wajid, rather anti Indian policy may be implemented. The other previous issues like border killings of their citizens, the hosting of over a million Rohingya refugees since 2017, and perceived discrimination against Muslims due to recent Indian policies like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) exists. Additionally, the unresolved issue of Teesta River water sharing continues to strain ties between the two countries, fueling anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh.

f. Tensions between India and Nepal rose in November 2019 when India released a new map incorporating the disputed Kalapani territory, a strategically important tri-junction with China, within its borders. Nepal vehemently

contested this move, highlighting the complex and sensitive nature of their relationship (Sohini Nayak, 2023).

g. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan have also seen movements against Indian products, with concerns over economic dominance and trade imbalances.

h. The establishment of the Indian Theatre Command marks a pivotal shift in regional power dynamics. This integrated military structure signifies India's growing military might and preparedness, even amidst a nuclear-armed neighborhood like Pakistan. It reflects a proactive approach to regional security challenges and bolsters India's position as a major player in South Asia's complex geopolitical landscape. However, neighboring countries fear this growing military presence could disrupt the existing power balance in the Indian Ocean. It appears that India's approach has shifted from a protective stance to a more assertive one, potentially indicating an interest in exerting influence over resources in the Indian Ocean that belong to smaller neighboring countries. This change in behavior may have regional implications and could impact diplomatic relationships in the area, which is not good for the stability of the region.

5.4 India Theaterization – Global Concerns

a. India's military might dwarf its regional neighbors, eliminating immediate threats but raising concerns internationally. While the US seeks India's help to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean, India treads a cautious path. It strengthens ties with the US but also prioritizes its economic relationship with China, evident in China reclaiming its top trading partner position with a robust \$118.4 billion bilateral trade in 2024. This balancing act highlights India's strategic autonomy, prioritizing its own interests while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024). India has strategically leveraged its relationship with the US to maximize its benefits, while also maintaining stable trade relations with China.

b. China perceives this as a significant step towards enhancing India's military capabilities, potentially altering the regional power balance. While China has not publicly expressed overt hostility, it is likely concerned about the implications for its own security interests, particularly in the context of the ongoing border dispute and India's growing strategic partnerships.

c. Despite the recent disapproval by the West, India's strategic partnership with Russia, underscored by PM Modi's visit 8-9 July 2024 to Russia and President Putin's warm reception calling him 'Dear Friend', demonstrates India's pursuit of an independent foreign policy. This prioritizes its own interests in the international arena, even if it clashes with the West's stance on issues like the Ukraine war and importing cheap oil from Russia. The long-standing India-Russia relationship offers India a valuable strategic counterweight and potential for economic benefits (Al Jazeera and news agencies, 2024).

- d. India's planned theatre command reforms for its armed forces are a development with far-reaching global consequences. As the world's fifth largest economy with a GDP of US\$3.942 trillion (Forbes Correspondent, 2024), India's economic clout is undeniable. Additionally, its vast maritime responsibilities encompass the Indian Ocean, extend into the Western Pacific, and even touch parts of the Eastern Atlantic (Commodore Sanjay J Singh, 2015b). This expansive maritime domain underscores India's strategic ambitions.
- e. The Indian Ocean, a vital artery for global commerce, is a key area of focus for India's theaterization efforts. By streamlining operations, India could seek to establish a more dominant presence in the region. This might involve establishing bases in strategic locations around the world, strengthening its naval power. Such a shift could potentially disrupt global trade flows, and the international community may not fully realize the implications until it's too late. The Indian Ocean could then become a region heavily influenced by India's maritime dominance.
- f. The possibility of India controlling strategic chokepoints in the Indian Ocean or elsewhere raises the specter of disruptions to vital trade routes and oil supplies. This could have a domino effect, jeopardizing global economic stability and potentially impacting world peace. Open communication and careful international cooperation are crucial to ensure that India's strategic rise aligns with the interests of a peaceful and prosperous world order.
- g. While the current US-India partnership positions them strategically against China's growing influence, the future holds uncertainties. Concerns linger about a potential decline in US superpower status. In such a scenario, an unchecked Indian military expansion could raise global security anxieties.
- h. India's theatre command reforms, coupled with its economic and military ambitions, necessitate a nuanced approach from the international community. Fostering strategic partnerships and encouraging transparency in military modernization will be key to navigating this evolving geopolitical landscape.
- i. India is also member of recent initiatives of the US such as I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE and the US), QUAD (India, Japan, Australia and the US), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) 14 countries including India etc. India is also eyeing that AUKUS (Australia, UK and the US) in which Australia will get 8 nuclear submarines, may be similar package will be offered to India as well in future.
- j. Theaterization of Indian armed forces are not designed for sub-continent, India aspire to be world power and may dominate the world like the US. More military bases will be established in other parts of the world to enhance its maritime interests. India's growing maritime ambitions, with its rapidly modernizing navy and increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, are being ignored by the world. While some see a potential future where a powerful Indian Navy could challenge global order with bases beyond not only in the Indian Ocean but may establish bases in the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean as well.

5.5 Impact on India-Pakistan Relations

a. Pakistan's military planners are closely monitoring the ongoing Theaterization of India's defense forces. This restructuring is likely to prompt a reassessment of Pakistan's wartime strategies. The potential threats are as follows:

5.6 Potential Threats

a. A more streamlined Indian military structure could be perceived as a threat by Pakistan, leading to increased tensions and a higher risk of miscalculation during border incidents.

b. India may choose to focus more of its resources on its western borders with Pakistan rather than its eastern borders with China. Which China might view this as a chance or to tip the deterrent imbalance.

c. Theater commands can enable faster mobilization and deployment of forces, increasing the pace of potential aggression.

d. The integration of land, air, and naval forces can lead to more coordinated and effective operations, posing a greater challenge to Pakistan's defense.

e. Improved command and control systems can enhance India's information advantage, impacting Pakistan's operational planning and decision-making.

f. The theater commands could facilitate the implementation of India's limited war doctrine, aiming for quick, decisive gains with minimal escalation.

g. India's enhanced conventional capabilities could potentially complicate Pakistan's nuclear deterrence strategy.

h. The formation of theater commands might trigger an arms race in the region as Pakistan seeks to counterbalance India's growing military strength.

i. The evolving security dynamics could lead to heightened tensions and instability in the South Asian region.

j. The potential for increased competition between India and Pakistan could exacerbate existing proxy conflicts in the region.

k. India's Cold Start Doctrine (Cold Start is the name given to a limited-war strategy intended to conquer Pakistani land quickly without, in theory, risking a nuclear battle) against Pakistan may be greatly strengthened with a functioning Western Theater Command. The Army and Air Force must work closely together to quickly deploy Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) to implement this doctrine. Tension arose from the IAF's prioritization of autonomous missions.

But these differences might be overcome by the WTC's unified leadership, creating the synergy that is essential to the Cold Start Doctrine's success (Usman Haider, 2023a).

I. Pakistan views a functioning WTC as a worry. It might expedite India's Cold Start Doctrine, which would be concerning given the country's current political atmosphere and a quicker escalation of future hostilities. It is crucial to remember that these are only possible threats, and the real effect will rely on several variables, such as how well India implements its plans, how well Pakistan responds, and the overall geopolitical environment.

5.7 Potential Benefits (for Pakistan)

a. A streamlined Indian military structure could lead to clearer lines of communication and command, potentially making future actions by India more predictable and reducing the risk of misunderstandings.

b. The restructuring of Indian forces might reveal potential weaknesses in their new command and control structure, which Pakistan can exploit.

c. A clearer picture of Indian military capabilities and intentions can be developed, enabling Pakistan to refine its defense strategy accordingly.

d. Theaterization might also signal India's commitment to maintaining a strong military presence, potentially deterring adventurism from both Pakistan and China.

e. The Indian move could catalyze for Pakistan to strengthen its existing alliances and explore new partnerships.

f. A clearer understanding of the Indian threat can help Pakistan prioritize defense spending and resource allocation.

g. By identifying areas where India might be vulnerable, Pakistan can focus its resources on developing countermeasures.

h. The establishment of Indian Theater Commands will likely require at least a decade to fully operationalize, necessitating the development of new doctrine, training regimens, and equipment. This extended timeframe provides a strategic opportunity for Pakistan's Armed Forces to reassess and refine wartime preparations to effectively counter evolving Indian threats.

m. It is essential to approach these potential benefits with a nuanced perspective. The actual impact of the Indian theater command on Pakistan will be influenced by a multitude of factors, including the pace and effectiveness of India's implementation, the evolving geopolitical environment, and Pakistan's military modernization efforts. Continuous monitoring and adaptation will be crucial to capitalizing on opportunities and mitigating risks.

5.8 Strategic Reassessment

a. Pakistan's military will likely undertake a comprehensive review of its own doctrines and deployments in response to India's Theaterization. This reassessment could involve:

- (1) Optimizing troop placements based on the anticipated threats posed by the Indian theatre commands.
- (2) Prioritizing investments in military capabilities to ensure Pakistan maintains a credible deterrence against a potentially more agile Indian military.
- (3) Engaging in regional dialogues to promote transparency and reduce miscalculations.
- (4) Develop doctrines and operational concepts that account for the increasing complexity of warfare, including cyber, space, and information domains.
- (5) Ensure a force structure capable of rapid response and adaptation to evolving threats.
- (6) Enhance interoperability among the armed forces and with allied nations.
- (7) Invest in advanced Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) systems to gain a superior situational awareness advantage.
- (8) Strengthen early warning capabilities to detect and counter potential threats.
- (9) Protect critical infrastructure and information systems from cyberattacks.
- (10) Acquire and develop precision strike weapons to neutralize high-value targets.
- (11) Strengthen air defense capabilities to protect against aerial threats.
- (12) Continue to invest in counter-terrorism capabilities to address internal security challenges.
- (13) Ensure the credibility and survivability of the nuclear deterrent.
- (14) Develop a range of nuclear options to deter conventional aggression.

(15) Strengthen relationships with regional partners to counterbalance Indian influence.

(16) Diversify diplomatic relations to secure support and resources.

(17) Utilize economic diplomacy to enhance national power and influence.

(18) The new concept is likely to favor India in addressing a two-front war scenario more effectively. It may take time, additional resources, and major changes in its operational, logistic, and Command articulation but shall free its forces from any hasty decisions and makeshift arrangements in the eventuality of facing both China and Pakistan at the same time (Lt Gen Muhammad Asif, 2024).

b. Pakistan must undergo a comprehensive strategic reassessment to effectively counter the implications of India's theater command structure. This necessitates a multi-faceted approach encompassing doctrinal evolution, technological advancements, diplomatic engagement, and human capital development.

5.9 Way Forward - Pakistan

a. Pakistan must keep a careful eye on the events since they have a direct impact on the country. While it will take some time for India to experience these changes, once they do, they could become dangerous. The coordination among the defense forces needs to be enhanced.

b. It is expected that Western Theatre Command will be the first to be operationalized and Maritime Theatre Command will also be established simultaneously. For Pakistan, the new concept is likely to somewhat dilute the focus and deployment of Indian forces against our borders. However, Western Theatre Command should be expected to be more lethal and specialized in dealing with Pakistan without looking over their shoulders. Also, without an active threat on its borders with China, we should be prepared to face the full onslaught of the Indian war machine (Lt Gen Muhammad Asif, 2024).

c. India's theatre command initiative presents a strategic challenge for Pakistan. Military doctrine of Pakistan, formulated in 2011, may not fully address the operational complexities posed by integrated theatre commands. To effectively respond, Pakistan's military needs to prioritize jointness at all levels, from doctrinal development and training exercises to actual wartime operations (Usman Haider, 2023a).

d. The Pakistani military must be assessing the recent events in the area and preparing a retort. To effectively coordinate operations to address these strategic developments in the Indian armed forces, Joint Service Headquarters will play a critical role.

- e. New expected scenario may be focused in wargaming exercise amongst the defense forces of Pakistan. To offset the advantages that India is anticipated to gain soon, Pakistan could need to devise a new military plan. It is better to complete this now rather than later(Usman Haider, 2023b).
- f. A powerful navy is essential for Pakistan, as its national security depends upon maritime security, 91% of Pakistani trade passes through sea, in time of war or tension Pakistan Navy is to ensure Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) are open
- g. The Pakistan Navy is to be given more resources to expand its fleet by acquiring additional ships, submarines, and reconnaissance aircraft. The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs), Unmanned Surface Vehicle (USVs), is crucial for enhancing its overall capabilities, which can be cost effective means of providing enemy position. These platforms are used by many nations; their experience can be shared to improve capabilities.
- h. Pakistan also needs to review own defensive mechanisms so that the threat being posed by Theaterization must be countered effectively(Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah, 2024a).
- i. On land, Pakistan already has this concept as there are Southern and Central commands functioning under Pakistan Army. PN needs to review its coastal defense mechanism. PN has Type Command system which may be converted into Task Command permanently which will be on the lines of Theatre Command System. The same may also be considered for the Pakistan Naval Fleet(Rear Admiral Faisal Ali Shah, 2024b).
- j. Additionally, as Indian Army Chief Manoj Pande stated in 2023, Theaterization will reorganize the outdated Indian Army formations and transform them into specially designed Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs). These IBGs might complete their operations faster while still maintaining the necessary IAF air cover if an ITC was operationalized. The "unity of command" that would result from having a single theatre commander would allow for the efficient coordination and guidance of all armed forces toward a single goal. It would eliminate the operational obstacles that prevented the Cold Start Doctrine from being implemented smoothly(Usman Haider, 2023a).
- k. Pakistan ought to take this seriously since it would allow "Cold Start" to heat up at any time. If a fresh crisis emerges, it will increase the desire to cross the Line of Control and international boundary with Pakistan which currently exists within the Indian political-military establishment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Considering the past performance of the Modi regime, India may go on yet another foolish move (Usman Haider, 2023a).

- I. To strengthen Pakistan's readiness for conventional and unconventional warfare, it is imperative to improve intelligence and surveillance capabilities to track and predict military activities by the Indian military.

5.10 Conclusion

a. The Theaterization concept represents a paradigm shift for the Indian Armed Forces, envisioned to bolster jointness, optimize resource allocation, and ensure a more agile response to contemporary security threats. Theaterization of armed forces is aimed to dominate Indian Ocean initially and then expand to Pacific and Atlantic Ocean as well. However, achieving a fully functional theatreized structure is a marathon, not a sprint. The experts estimate a decade-long time frame for overcoming the inherent challenges and complexities within the Indian defense establishment. Success hinges on unwavering political will and a collaborative spirit amongst the CDS and the Service Chiefs. The CDS, as the single-point military advisor, plays a pivotal role in fostering inter-service cooperation, streamlining bureaucratic hurdles, and ensuring smooth resource allocation across theatres. Equally crucial is the commitment of the Service Chiefs to relinquish siloed mindsets and embrace a truly integrated approach. The true efficacy of theaterization will be demonstrably tested in a multi-front scenario, such as a simultaneous conflict with Pakistan and a border escalation with China. The ability of the theatre commands to effectively orchestrate joint operations, leverage intelligence sharing seamlessly, and optimize resource deployment across diverse battlefields will be a defining moment for the transformed Indian military.

b. India's planned Maritime Theatre Command, focused on integrating its naval forces for dominance in the Indian Ocean, area of responsibility expands to the Western Pacific Ocean and part of the Eastern Atlantic Ocean. This shift from continental strategy to maritime strategy and a powerful navy with potential reach into the Pacific and Atlantic could disrupt the current balance of power. While some see India as a counterweight to China's rise, others fear an "uncontrollable" India that might threaten global trade by seizing choke points in the Indian Ocean and potentially challenging US dominance in the future. Pakistan Defense Forces need to update wartime doctrine and keep a close eye on the Indian Theaterization process. Pakistan may have to come up with a new military strategy to nullify the advantages that India is likely to get in the future. This should be done sooner rather than later. Overall, the impact of Indian Theaterization on Pakistan remains to be seen. While it presents potential threats, it could also lead to a more predictable security environment in the region.

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