

## *Opinion*

### **JOINTMANSHIP 2.0**

*Rear Admiral Monty Khanna, NM*

This writing stems from an incident in a class I happened to be sitting through along with my students of the NHCC at the Joint Capsule in Mhow. An elaborate presentation on one of the joint doctrines had just been completed and the session was thrown open to questions and comments of the participants. During the course of this interactive session, one of the officers made a passionate case wherein he questioned the necessity of the presentation itself. His case essentially rested on the fact that joint structures were inherently weak in our organizational structure. Thus, even though at institutes such as the war colleges, students devoted considerable time to these studies, once students returned to their parent services, jointmanship as a theme received only lip service. What then was the requirement of spending a substantial amount of time on studies that had a miniscule commitment from practitioners and consequently little applicability? The question set off a healthy debate that had to be cut short for want of time.

During the final summing up, I was given an opportunity to share my views. My advice to the participants was that during the course of their future careers, they would come across several instances wherein it would be readily apparent that a change in existing practices would bring about greater efficiency. Some of these changes would be within their power to implement, some they could probably influence and some they would be powerless to do anything about. However, at the end of the day, they needed to be clear on one issue - there was no escaping from the fact that they would have to play with the cards they had been dealt. They would therefore need to cater for the inefficiencies of the environment in their plans and its execution. To correctly understand and prepare for these, it was essential to know about existing structures and processes along with their strengths and limitations. The study of joint doctrine at the war college met this requirement and therefore merited their attention.

While this may be true for an operator, the demands from those currently engaged in planning the future trajectory of our force are much greater. Speed, in its wider connotation of application of force, is the essence of conflict. When

Admiral Mike Mullen was asked what would be the three major attributes essential for a force to fight future wars, the answer given was speed, speed and speed. To ensure that one constantly operates inside the decision making loop of the adversary, it is essential to maintain a tempo he cannot match. Along with speed comes the meticulously choreographed orchestration of all the available vectors to produce the maximum possible effects. While a preconceived plan may be the basis for this orchestration, it has to be flexible and adaptable to react to a highly dynamic situation and has to be robust enough to provide for the fog and friction of war.

It is well recognized by most armed forces today that a prerequisite for speed of decision making and the precise orchestration of multiple vectors is unity of command. Joint commands have evolved over the years to primarily address this issue. Most major armed forces have gradually adopted structures, the primary building blocks of which are joint theatre commands. The most recent in the list of countries doing so is China where recent literature suggests that the country will soon move towards a structure based on five theatre commands from the existing seven Military Regions.

India remains an aberration in this respect. While the Kargil Committee report recognized the necessity to strengthen joint structures, it recommended an incremental approach with the initial creation of the joint Andaman & Nicobar Command. The problem in following such an approach in a resource-constrained environment is that individual services will always place the requirements of their own commands above those of a joint command. With perpetual step-motherly treatment, an experiment of this nature is either doomed to failure or at best will operate sub-optimally. Further, this will be used by naysayers to demonstrate that joint theatre commands are not suitable to our environment.

Another argument commonly used against joint theatre commands is that these make sense only for those countries where the fundamental characteristic of warfare is expeditionary. The narrative goes on to state that in our case, where we have to contend with unsettled borders, single service commands are better suited for resource management and application of force. This is also reinforced by the argument that since our structure has stood the test of time and has hitherto delivered good results, change is not warranted.

If standing the test of time were to be the benchmark for judging the effectiveness of a process or organization then 'innovation' as a word would not exist in our dictionary. If failure were to be the sole criteria for bringing about the necessary consensus for change, then we would be doomed to contend with failure at regular intervals. Further, while one may make an argument that hitherto we have performed well, it is only a much deeper analysis that will answer the question if we could have achieved the same results more efficiently. The downside of being a victor is that such introspection does not come easily.

Rapid and optimally sequenced/ synchronized application of force through multiple vectors can only be achieved through unity of command. While doctrine and strategy may address some lacunae, these cannot overcome fundamental structural impediments. Further, jointmanship in warfare cannot be based on the bonhomie between senior commanders. Conversely, our structures have to be robust enough to function efficiently even when confronted with strained relations and competing goals of the senior hierarchy.

If joint commands are the way ahead, what would be the optimum way to do so? To my mind, we need to adopt a threat/ contingency-based approach. A joint commander needs to be given single point responsibility and consequent accountability for tackling a threat/ contingency emanating from a nation in its entirety. Using this as a basis, a proposed solution would be to adopt a four-command based structure, whose responsibilities would be as follows: -

- Western Command: Pakistan
- Northern Command: China. Nepal and Bhutan could be included for reasons of contiguity
- Eastern Command: Bangladesh and Myanmar
- Southern Command: Coastal Security, IOR and Out of Area Contingencies

Each theatre command would include component commanders from each of the three services who would command their service assets allocated to the command. In addition, senior coordinators from the functional commands (Cyber, Space and Special Operations) would also form part of the joint staff. The staff

should also include a senior Foreign Service officer to provide the much needed political advice to the commander. The commander and his staff would be able to focus on the nation(s) assigned to them with undivided attention. Every contingency from HADR to High Intensity Warfare would have to be prepared for.

In this organizational structure, the Chiefs of Staffs would essentially be force providers charged with the raise, train and sustain functions. As per current norms, they would be part of the Chiefs of Staff Committee headed by a chairman/CDS. The COSC and its chair would provide military advice to the government and allocate forces to the theatre commanders. Such allocation need not be written in stone. It would be dynamic, based on fast changing requirements, particularly in the case of highly mobile air and marine assets. The COSC will also administer the functional commands and exercise control over the Strategic Forces Command.

How would we assign duties related to internal security? One way of doing so would be by creating a Homeland Security Command as a fifth command. The downside of doing so would be that lower formations would have to be dual tasked reporting to different commanders for external/ internal security duties. This would go against the fundamental grain of unity of command on which this proposed structure is based. It may therefore be prudent to divide the nation into four regions for purposes of internal security and assign concurrent homeland responsibilities to each of the theatre commanders. The consequent dilution in external focus would have to be accepted.

Theatre commands would have the additional advantage of optimizing our force structure. Commanders charged with conducting campaigns in their entirety and being held accountable for their outcome would rapidly shed the colour of their uniforms and press for assets that are best suited for the capabilities they bring to the table. Consequently, issues related to inter-se prioritization between the demands of the services for accretion of assets could be addressed in a more rational manner.

There is a crying need for implementing structural changes to the organizational set up of our armed forces. A long period of relative peace has given rise to a sense of complacency, which is misplaced. Joint theatre command of the type described above would bring about synergy, enhanced efficiency, speedier decision making and optimization of resources; all of which are essential for maintaining today's peace and preparing for tomorrow's wars.



### ***About the Author***



*Radm Monty Khanna, NM, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 01 Jan 83 and is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla; Defence Services Staff College, Wellington; College of Naval Warfare, Mumbai; and the Naval War College, USA. He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, two Master's Degrees from Madras University and Cochin University of Science and Technology and an MPhil (Defence and Strategic Studies) from Mumbai University. His afloat commands include Indian Naval Submarine Sindhuvi Jay and the frigates Krishna and Gomati. The officer was also the Naval Attache at the Embassy of India, Washington D.C. On promotion to Flag Rank, he took over as the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Foreign Cooperation & Intelligence) from Jan 12 to Dec 13 and is currently Commandant of the Naval War College, Goa. The author can be reached at [montykhanna@hotmail.com](mailto:montykhanna@hotmail.com)*