



Book Review

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Rear Admiral (Retd) A.P. Revi, *Restructuring India's Military Out of Box Option*. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 2012, 305 pp., \$15.00, ISBN 978-81-212-1160-4

Needless to state, modern wars cannot be fought in isolation wherein the Army, Navy and Air Force will conduct their operations in “water-tight compartments”. Undoubtedly, war is a joint and an integrated endeavour, which needs coordination at all levels and certainly cannot be achieved with organizations of yore.

A key recommendation of the Group of Ministers (GoM) Report on “Reforming the National Security System” submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Security/GoI in the year 2001 regarding the institution of the post of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has not yet happened owing to lack of “political will” and “reluctance of our own Service HQ who are not keen to dilute their fiefdoms”. The author, whilst stressing upon the urgent need for the appointment of CDS, creation of Theatre Commands etc., has suggested in the interim, an out-of-box option to take the GoM recommendations forward pending creation of the appointment of CDS. The objectives of such a re-structuring/change and the advantages that will accrue could,

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however, have been buttressed to build up a strong case for re-structuring, if at all warranted.

In the first instance, the book has brought out in the first four Chapters several global models of Higher Defence Organizational Structures prevalent in some countries like the USA, UK, Russia, China and the “trials and tribulations” that they had to surmount during the re-structuring process. No doubt, it was not a “smooth ride”. I may add, however, that the political systems of Russia and China are totally different from ours. I presume the models may have been included by the author to offer another perspective from a different angle.

In the fifth Chapter, the author has built his case for an “out-of-box option” in a very systematic and cogent manner. To start with, the main characteristics of the global models discussed earlier have been summarized with each model emphasizing “clear political control over military”, “Revolution in Military Affairs”, “Out of Area Operations”, “Joint Operations”, “Theatre Commands” and “Integrated/Joint/Unified/Functional Operational Commands”. Thereafter, he has covered shortcomings in the Indian environment prior to proposing an “out-of-box option” for India in two parts, namely a “Long Term Option” and an “Interim Option”. However, it is felt that he could have also mentioned the peculiarity of the Indian working ethos, which is “hierarchical based” and does not easily admit the Western concept of “first amongst the equals”, as a shortcoming.

An “out-of-box” solution has been proposed by the author considering the fact that the appointment of CDS will have to await implementations of certain essential conditionality, which are long-term in nature, the most important being passing of an Act of Parliament and implementation of the “Theatre Command” concept.

In an “Interim solution”, the author has proposed taking the Cabinet Committee of Security (CCS) decision of 2002 forward, in “Two Stages”. In the “First Stage”, he has proposed an immediate upgrade of the Chairman, Integrated Defence Staff (CIDS) to the same rank as the three Service Chiefs (continuing to exercise operational control over their respective Service as hitherto), similar to the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) and Chief of Joint Operations (CJO) in the UK in a “double hated” appointment. The CIDS will act as a head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) [appears to have been erroneously reflected, since in our case it is Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (Ch CoSC) Secretariat reporting to the Chairman, JCSC, for all traditional roles of the Secretariat as also exercise operational

authority over the Andaman and Nicobar Command, Strategic Forces Command (SFC), Special Forces (SF) and Space Command (SC) etc.]. In the case of the latter, he would be accountable to the proposed Defence Council (DC) directly, headed by the Raksha Mantri. (The composition of DC in the first stage of the interim solution is, however, not reflected!) Now this proposed solution is fraught with two ramifications of a grave nature brought out in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, an objective evaluation of the higher defence control would cause certain inadequacies and a brief examination would be in order. The Ch CoSC is presently the Cabinet's highest professional body on Policy, Planning and Force Development, even though its access is confined to the Department of Defence/Ministry of Defence only. During war, the Ch CoSC is expected to direct operations in conformity with the defined political objectives. CIDS, bypassing the Ch CoSC and reporting to the DC directly, can have serious repercussions. Ideally, CIDS should be reporting to the Ch CoSC, who in turn can report to DC.

Secondly, who is going to render the "single-point untrammelled military advice" to the political leadership, the very basis of Higher Defence Re-structuring? CIDS or Ch CoSC! This has not come out clearly in the book. This assumes even greater importance now that a yet another crucial dimension of the "nuclear weapon launch" decision has come into being. On one hand, we will have Ch CoSC who will not be having SFC under his control in the proposed organisation, yet senior to CIDS as also mandated to direct operations in war and, on the other hand, we would have CIDS with SFC under control but junior to Ch CoSC as also not mandated to direct operations in war! How we are going to deal with this dichotomy/anomaly in a hierarchy-based Indian working ethos or for that matter even "first amongst equals" model? Who then will give this crucial military advice, an untrammelled one at that, during execution of this interim solution?

The author goes on to state that the ANC and SFC will also serve the purpose of a "pilot programme" for creating the Unified Command ethos. To this end, a broad charter of duties, if not detailed, in respect of CIDS, SFC, ANC etc., could have been brought out. He has also stated that National Security Advisor (NSA) has no constitutional position or legal authority to issue executive order to the Military/SFC. He may be correct in stating this but NSA is only an "advisor" and is only "relaying" orders to the technical/military chain on behalf of the Prime Minister/Political Council, as such.

In the “next stage” of the Interim solution, the author has proposed establishment of “Theatre Commands”, only once CDS is firmly in saddle. However, given the nature of our likely commitments of our armed forces in the future and resource driven nature of our defence policy, its applicability would appear somewhat doubtful. India’s defence has been primarily oriented towards protection of the homeland with very limited expeditionary capability. India’s land borders and threats are predominantly land-based and oriented. Other models perceive global commitments: their land borders have been secured for decades. This contrasts sharply in comparison to India’s defence, which is primarily oriented towards protection of the homeland. In 65 years of our independence as a nation-state, troops, “eyeball to eyeball” at that, continue to be deployed against China and Pakistan. Also, in times of external contingencies, our Services have “risen to the occasion”, though admittedly not without some hitches. Furthermore, the high costs of major re-organization of the command and control structures of the armed forces may not permit India to incorporate the Theatre Commander concept in decision-making at the operational level. In any case, evolution of a Theatre Command concept in less than 2 years as proposed by the author is rather far-fetched.

The “Long Term option” entails full incorporation of the Revolution in Military Affairs and Revolution in Military Logistics developments with clear demarcation of responsibility between CDS (who will then be an operational authority), Defence Secretary, Chief of the Army Staff, Chief of the Naval Staff, Chief of the Air Staff etc.

It has been aptly brought out by the author that the purpose of higher direction would not be served until the extraordinarily important step of integrating the Services HQ and MoD has been initiated and the system allowed to stabilize with joint manning by civil and military officers. In this context, however, there will be also a need for a better decision-making and integration of all instruments of “National Power”, namely “Political”, “Economic”, “Military” and “International”, to tackle the multi-dimensional challenges ahead. It is also felt that Defence Procurement should not rest with the CIDS/CDS, as this would weigh him down with bureaucratic and administrative arrangements, thereby distracting him from his principal duties.

In the end it is felt that the “out-of-box option” proposed by the author will also not alleviate the workload on the Ch CoSC to any great extent (a common grouse of all Ch CoSCs), besides making matters more complicated.

In my opinion, a vastly improved set-up with a “permanent Ch COSC” (may even be a 5-Star rank) with more “teeth” to start with, i.e. placement of all operational Commands of IA/IAF/IN, SFC, ANC etc. in an unified manner under his operational control, may address the problem to quite an extent. To this end, the Services Chiefs will have to disassociate themselves from their operational roles at the outset. A crucial prerequisite will also be a comprehensive integration of the Services Headquarters with the MoD with “cross-posting” of officers, as also rightly brought out by the author. The author’s views on the requirement of the National Security strategy from which the National Military strategy will flow also need no elaboration.

The book evokes sufficient food for thought on a very topical issue. However, we need to tread cautiously. The Interim option will after all be a “stepping stone” to the institution of CDS. Furthermore, we cannot leave anything to chance lest we end up “queering up the pitch” or “get in a cleft stick” from where retrieval may not be easy!

Printer’s devils have crept in in numerous places which are quite distracting. Abbreviations have not been expanded correctly. Organizational charts are not legible at places making it difficult to comprehend.