



Higher Defence Organisation in India

Changes required in the Higher Defence Organisation of our country have been subject of constant debate, with many - and diverse - views continuing to be aired. A common denominator seems to be dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. The need to improve on existing templates is a laudable thought, but does it require major surgery? Also, must we be taken in by examples of systems obtained from other countries, or should we seek solutions that are more appropriate to our circumstances? Should we blindly ape what others do or use our genius to fashion systems that are more applicable to our needs? What are the changes that could be introduced to advantage? This article addresses these questions and more, the views expressed being personal, not parochial and based on lifetime experiences of my service in the Indian Air Force.

Before any form of surgery on our defence organisation is countenanced, it is pertinent to pinpoint facts in the prevailing system. We have won all the wars we have fought, sans the 1962 border war, and that is by itself sufficient proof of the soundness of our organisation. If a military organisation is essentially established to prepare the armed forces to win wars, our system has stood the test of time. In 1962, our problem was the lack of intelligence and intent, compounded by inadequate preparation resulting in the Chinese taking us by surprise. Possibly, we were also unsure as how to wage that type of warfare. The fact is that no different manner of higher defence organisation would have turned defeat into victory. It is

thus logical to conclude that the wars that we have fought since Independence do not make a case for any major change in our organisation.

However, there certainly are areas of concern that should be addressed. Our procurement system is painfully sluggish and laboured. Jointness amongst our services could be improved, relations and mutual confidence between the services and the Ministry of Defence should improve. Perhaps one possible cause of the present state of affairs is inadequate understanding of the other(s) point of view and, maybe, even some doubt of intentions. However, the solution to bring about improvements stare us starkly in the face. We need greater understanding and appreciation of these

differing viewpoints, and we must not ever forget that we are on the same side. To my mind, it is a mental challenge and not an organisational limitation. We can, by clear intent, make the system work much better, which is what we should do.

The ongoing debate on higher defence management largely deals with three issues: the armed forces becoming part of the government and active participants in decision making. Also, for greater understanding to develop, officers from the armed forces should occupy berths in the civilian hierarchy and vice versa. This should be done at both middle and senior levels.

Then, the need for a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) or a Permanent Chairman