

"Chief of Defence Staff Gen Bipin Rawat is working on a timeline for the rollout of joint commands of the Army, Navy and Air Force. What are the existing commands in India, and how will jointness help?"

On Monday, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat said his office is working on a tentative timeline for the establishment of joint commands among the three defence services — Army, Navy and Air Force — beginning with an Air Defence Command. With the creation of the CDS post on December 31, the government has set the ball rolling for bringing jointness and integration among the services.

What are joint commands?

Simply put, it is a unified command in which the resources of all the services are unified under a single commander looking at a geographical theatre. It means that a single military commander, as per the requirements, will have the resources of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force to manage a security threat. The commander of a joint command will have the freedom to train and equip his command as per the objective, and will have logistics of all the services at his beckoning. The three services will retain their independent identities as well.

There are two tri-services commands at the moment. The joint command at the moment, the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), is a theatre command, which is headed by the chiefs of the three services in rotation. It was created in 2001 after a Group of Ministers had given a report on national security following the Kargil War. The Strategic Forces Command was established in 2006 and is a functional tri-services command.

What is the structure right now?

There are 17 commands, divided among the three services. The Army and the Air Force have seven commands each, while the Navy has three commands. The commands under the Army are Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, Central, Southwestern and the Army Training Command. The Air Force has Eastern, Western, Southern, Southwestern, Central, Maintenance and Training commands, and the Navy is divided into Western, Eastern and Southern commands.

These commands report to their respective services, and are headed by three-star officers. Though these commands are in the same regions, but they are not located together.

How do joint commands help?

One of the main advantages is that the leader of a unified command has control over more varied resources, compared to the heads of the commands under the services now. For instance, the head of one of the proposed commands, Air Defence Command, will have under him naval and Army resources, too, which can be used as per the threat perception. And the officer commanding the Pakistan or China border will have access to the Air Force's fighter jets and can use them if needed.

Rawat clarified, however, that not all naval resources will be given to the Air Defence Command, nor will all resources of the Air Force come under another proposed command, Peninsula Command, for the coasts. The Peninsula Command would give the Navy Chief freedom to look at the larger perspective in the entire Indian Ocean Region in which China's presence is steadily increasing.

The other key advantage is that through such integration and jointness the three forces will be able to avoid duplication of resources. The resources available under each service will be available to other services too. The services will get to know one another better, strengthening cohesion in the defence establishment.

When will the new commands be ready?

CDS Rawat has said a study for a proposed Air Defence Command has already been initiated and a report on the details of the command are expected by end of March. He said the Air Defence Command should start becoming operational by the end of this year, and the Peninsula Command by the end of 2021, followed by theatre commands — joint commands looking at the land boundaries — with the first of these to begin rolling out by the end of 2022.

Army chief General M M Naravane is not as optimistic about the timeline for the theatre commands, and said on Thursday that the idea is still at a “very preliminary” stage, and added that at the moment it is “just very loud thinking”. He said the rollout of the theatre commands will take “much longer”.

How many such commands are expected to roll out?

While the number of commands India needs is still being studied, the CDS has envisaged that there could be between six to nine commands. It is not certain how many land-based theatre commands on the borders will come up. The CDS said it will be studied, and the study group will be given the options for creating two to five theatre commands. One possibility is to have single commands looking at the China and Pakistan borders respectively, as they are the two major threats. The other option is to have a separate command for the border in the Jammu and Kashmir region, and another command looking at the rest of the western border. There could be independent commands looking at the border with China which is divided by Nepal.

There will be two functional commands as well. A proposed Logistics Command will bring the logistics of all the service under one person, and the CDS is also looking at a Training and Doctrine Command, so that all services work under a common doctrine and have some basic common training.

A committee headed by Lieutenant General D B Shekatkar had earlier recommended three new commands: Northern, for China; Western, for the Pakistan border' and Southern, for maritime security.

Do militaries of other countries have such commands?

Several major militaries are divided into integrated theatre commands. China's People's Liberation Army has five theatre commands: Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central. Its Western Theatre Command is responsible for India.

The US Armed Forces has 11 unified commands, of which seven are geographic and four functional commands. Its geographic commands are Africa, Central, European, Indo-Pacific, Northern, Southern and Space. Cyber, Special Operations, Transportation and Strategic are its functional commands.

Rawat has said India will not follow any country and find its own structure for the unified commands.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

Q. Consider the following statements: -

Assertion (A): The Chief of Defense Staff has said that a joint command of the three troops will be established.

Reason (R): Under Unified Command, resources of all services are integrated.

Code:-

- (a) Both Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are correct and Reason (R) is the correct explanation of Assertion(A).
- (b) Both Assertion (A) and Reason (R) are correct and Reason (R) is not the correct explanation of Assertion (A).
- (c) Assertion (A) is correct and Reason (R) is incorrect.
- (d) Assertion (A) is incorrect and Reason (R) is correct.

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 22 Feb., is 1 (a)

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

What does Unified Military Command mean? How can the creation of unified military command in a subcontinental-sized country like India surrounded by many countries be beneficial? Discuss. (250 words)

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.

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