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Developing Joint  
Culture;  
Imponderables  
&  
Imperatives

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# *Developing Joint Culture; Imponderables and Imperatives*

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*“Jointness 2.0, that is developing Joint Culture in Armed Forces, is the way forward”  
(PIB, 2024)*

*- Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan*

## **Abstract**

*This article seeks to analyse the ‘clarion call’ given by the CDS to develop Joint Culture. It postulates that enhancing Jointness and Integration resultantly facilitates fostering of Joint Culture. It exhorts elevating Joint Culture beyond mere symbology to more self-generating and continuously evolving paradigm. It concludes that vibrant Joint Culture will develop expeditiously only if Joint Operational Structures I.e. Integrated Theatre Commands are created at the earliest without further dithering and deferment. Integrated Theatre Commands in effect are a sine quo non towards developing Joint Culture.*

**Keywords:** Jointness, Joint Culture, Integration, Theatre Commands

## **Context**

The CDS during his talk on ‘Jointmanship; The Way Ahead’ urged the Services to “create a Joint Culture as they move towards forming Joint Operational Structures.” He said, Jointness 1.0 focused on fostering harmony and agreement among the Services. Since there were no significant disagreements, there is now momentum to advance to the next stage, referred to as Jointness 2.0. (Alex Philip, 2024)

While acknowledging the unique cultures of the three Services, he emphasized the importance of developing a unified Joint Culture. This new culture, while distinct from the individual Service traditions, should honor their uniqueness. The goal should be to extract the best attributes from each Service and integrate the highest common strengths, rather than compromising by adopting only the minimum shared traits. (Alex Philip, 2024) said the CDS. He further elucidated measures taken to create ‘symbology’ depicting Joint Culture.

## **Area of Inquiry**

To study the proposition of developing Joint Culture; its imponderables and imperatives.

## **Understanding Culture**

Culture maybe be defined as: -

- The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time (Webster, n.d.)
- The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterises an institution or organization (Webster, n.d.)
- Culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements(White, n.d.)

## **Cultures in the World**

The count of total number of cultures in the world is large as also difficult to arrive at accurately as culture constitutes a wide array of aspects such as social, religious, linguistic, and historical elements. The number of ethnic groups worldwide also runs into thousands, each with its own unique customs, traditions, and beliefs. The ethnologue(Eberhard et al., 2024) mentions that there are over 7,000 living languages, generally linked to particular ethnic groups and its culture. A total of around 200 recognised sovereign nations exist each having its own exclusive culture, in terms of language, customs, traditions, and historical past. There are regional cultures also within countries. India is a diverse country and is an example of cultural plurality (National Portal of India, n.d.). Significant cultural differences do exist between India's North and the South, East and the West; for example, states such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, North Eastern states, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal have their distinct culture. The culture of the indigenous is also a gross variance from the predominant cultures of the country. The native American tribes of United States, Aboriginal groups of Australia, and a number of indigenous communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are apt examples. The religion impacts culture, thus we find unique cultural practices of major world religions. Numerous subcultures also develop based on shared interests, lifestyles, and identities. Such

areas could be music, hobbies, social movements (e.g., environmentalism, LGBTQ+ communities) or any other miscellaneous area of interest.

Thus, it may not be possible to have a universal culture of the world, notwithstanding endeavours currently and in the past to impose culture upon the other due to variety of political, economic, or social motives. For example, cultural change endeavours upon their colonies by imperial powers. Prevalence of many distinct cultures is an in-disputed reality despite an increasingly interconnected world.

Notwithstanding, the above, blending of different cultures together due to intermingling and historical events or experiences over centuries does occurs which is labelled as cultural syncretism. Instance, worth mentioning is the Indian syncretic culture developed over centuries due to various influences or the Kashmiri syncretic culture as is famously espoused.

**Organisational Culture:** Edgar H Schein in his seminal work ‘Organisational Culture and Leadership’ opines - Culture can be understood as the collective shared learning of a group, encompassing behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects of its members’ overall psychological functioning. For this shared learning to develop, the group must have a history of shared experiences, which requires a degree of stability in its membership. With such stability and a common history, the innate human desire for consistency, stability, and meaning leads to the formation of patterns among these shared elements, which ultimately come to be recognized as culture.(Schein, 2010).

**Culture in Business :** Development of organisational culture in businesses too, has its roots firmly in strong leadership, interwoven with business strategy, and organically grows from the bottom up. Its foundation is a strong mission statement, guided by an authentic vision, and reinforced by a system of values that unites employees around a shared purpose (Tenney, n.d.) Also, it possible that within a large conglomerate, various sub businesses exhibit varied cultural traits (sub-cultures) based on their industry, leadership, geographic location, history, and strategic goals viz the Adani Group of companies.

**Development of Culture :** It is apparent from the above essentials of ‘culture’ that for cultural development stability of membership of a group is important. Such stability occurs, when people reside in country or geographical region or are members of an organisation or institution. The stability leads to shared experiences further leading to shared learning, which

manifests in shared attitudes values, goals and practices. It will be an endeavour to examine the call to create Joint Culture as an amalgamation of the ‘best of the three services’, as intended by the CDS, against such culture development pre-requisites and manifestations.

### **Culture of Armed Forces; Voids of Joint Culture**

**Culture of Armed Forces :** The primary role of the Armed Forces of any nation is defence of the country. The personnel are primarily drawn out of the people of the country thus the basic cultural values, and beliefs of the country perse has an immense impact upon Armed Forces culture. The culture of any Armed Force also develops based upon its historical experiences, values, beliefs, and direction of leadership over decades. The typical service conditions and role of each Armed Force i.e. the Army, the Navy or the Air Force, leads to development of its uniquely different culture.

**Culture - Indian Armed Forces :** The CDS during his ibid talk conceded that the “three services have their distinct culture,”(The Print, 2024) owing to their unique role on land, maritime and air domains. Their typical origin, historical past, and service conditions is also a contributing factor. As divergently different requirements are necessitated from its human resources, blooming of distinct culture which is starkly different from the other and at times causes discomfort to the other Service. Maj Gen BS Dhanoa says Each Service upholds a unique set of values and ideals that shape its distinct culture and inform its unwritten principles regarding its role and identity within the military profession. For the Army, this is rooted in its identity as the nation’s protectors, driven by patriotism and pride in operating in even the most remote parts of the country. The Navy emphasizes its deep understanding of the nation’s strategic and operational challenges, priding itself on maritime professionalism and representing the nation on a global scale. Meanwhile, the Air Force focuses on leveraging technology and the strategic application of airpower as central to its purpose in statecraft. It is also fact that personnel get motivated to enlist for a particular service based upon its history, role, service conditions, culture, uniform, arms, equipment et al(Maj Gen Dhanoa, 2022)

**USA Dynamics :** Williamson Murray in his article ‘Does Military Culture Matters?’ transcribes – There is no singular, unified American military culture. Instead, the four branches, shaped by their distinct historical backgrounds and the different environments in which they operate, have developed cultures that are vastly different from one another. The environmental factors are crucial to understanding the unique cultures that each Service has cultivated. Even with the best intentions to promote joint operations, these differences will continue to influence how airmen, sailors, soldiers, and Marines perceive warfare. The Air Force, for example, remains a technology-driven entity, with air warfare, involving the coordination of numerous aircraft targeting both ground and airborne threats, requiring a more hierarchical structure compared to ground operations. The complexities of tanker support, countering enemy air defences, and the interaction between air-to-air combat and bombing necessitate a systematic approach to aerial warfare. Similarly, the Navy’s emphasis on highly technical surface, submarine, and aviation combat encourages a technological and engineering-focused approach to warfare. In contrast, both the Army and Marine Corps, shaped by the realities of land combat, adopt a more Clausewitzian perspective on war. Despite these environmental influences, each Service is also defined by its own set of beliefs and traditions, which play a vital role in how they prepare for and conceptualize warfare. (Murray, 1999).

**Voids of Joint Culture :** It is thus apparent from the above arguments that in context of the Indian Armed Forces or Armed Force of any other country (USA taken for illustration), Joint Culture does not come about naturally despite the personnel being drawn from the common cultural background of the country, common goal of the Services being the defence of the country and common ideal being love for the nation and selfless service. The respective Service culture becomes unique, has a deep impact on personnel and hinders seamless interoperability with sister services. The cultural distinctions are accentuated and turn into disconnect, while operating in bi-service or tri-service scenarios. This stems from lack of understanding of each other’s role, parochialism, tendency of one upmanship, protecting own turf and inter service rivalry to get the maximum out the scarce resources over the other. Overall, such a situation, affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the Armed Forces and cannot be allowed to manifest, given the fact that bi- service / tri service operations are the inevitable contemporary environment and the future. The concept of Jointness and Integration attempts to fill up the vacuum of Joint Culture.



## **The Three Dimensions; Jointness, Integration and Joint Culture**

*“Jointness is more than a word, it is a mindset.”(Davis & Smith, 2020)*

*- General Jean-Paul Paloméros, Commander NATO Allied Command Transformation*

**Jointness :** The Joint Doctrine of Indian Armed Forces 2017 attempts to define Jointness and Integration. Jointness refers to having an optimized capability for Joint Warfighting, extending beyond just Joint Operations. The distinction lies in the hyphen's placement. It is important to recognize that Jointness is a broader 'Concept,' while Joint operations are simply one of its practical applications, alongside single-Service operations, both of which are subsets of the larger idea of conceptual Jointness. Effective centralized planning fosters the proper allocation of forces, ensuring the right mix is applied at the right time and place. Jointness facilitates a high degree of cross-domain synergy, significantly improving the potential for success and contributing to strong morale, camaraderie, and team spirit. Achieving Jointness requires a commitment of resources; commanders must dedicate time, personnel, and resources to nurture Jointness within the Armed Forces.

(HQ IDS, 2017)

**Integration :** “The more common use of the term ‘Integration’ in contemporary military matters is in reference to the **integration of ‘processes’ across all operational domains of land, air, maritime, cyberspace and aerospace, towards optimisation of costs and enhancing readiness**” (HQ IDS, 2017). For instance the recent integration of the communication infrastructure of the three services so that they are able to communicate seamlessly with each other.

**Jointness and Integration Foster Joint Culture :** We have already considered ‘culture basics’ in the beginning of this paper and learned that for culture to develop it is important to have a defined group, such group due to its interactions develops shared vision, goals, customs, and traditions. Leadership also plays an important role. Culture i.e. ‘way of life’ develops in the group. It would be evident that enhanced Jointness and Integration endeavours enable the interaction of the three Services with each other more, leading to better understanding, cooperation and leads to joint operations. Services becoming more interdependent, draw from common inventories and overall enhanced interoperability ensues in bi

service or tri service operational environments. During the process, the ‘felt need’ generates, developing common protocols of communication, understanding, and planning viz common Joint Services Staff Duties (JSSD) manual, COPP (Common Operational Planning Process) et al. In such an atmosphere, development of ‘Joint Culture’ becomes an inescapable necessity or subtly and automatically develops. It becomes the invisible adhesive that binds the distinctly different Services together; towards achievement of shared vision, mission, and goals – by developing shared values, attitudes, mutual respect, congenial working environment of cooperation, and collaboration. However, as the important pre-requisites of developing culture viz stability of membership of the group and unity of the command is full filled by Jointness and Integration; full-blown Joint Culture may still not develop.

### **Status Check - Jointness, Integration and Joint Culture in Indian Armed Forces**

During the said talk (The Print, 2024) the CDS took pains to enunciate actions taken towards furthering Jointness and Integration.

**Good Start :** He mentioned that the country had a good start in terms of jointness by establishing Joint Services Wing (JSW) later National Defence Academy (NDA) right at the time of independence. However, the process was not followed up primarily due to developing inter services rivalry over scare budget. The acrimony between the Service Chiefs percolated down to the rank and file too. Seeds of doubts and distrust were thus sown. He conceded that each service has its own culture, and it is difficult to integrate.

**Strategy for Jointness and Jointmanship :** Dwelling upon his strategy, the CDS mentioned that he started with “presenting the bigger picture” as to why are we doing? how will it benefit the transformation? – as part of change management strategy.

Next was to have a vision 2047 as under: -

“to be an integrated, all domain, dynamic and self-reliant in capability and thought ready to respond across all spectrums of conflict, to protect our national interests in concert with other elements of national power.”

**Top-Down Approach :** He mentioned that the guiding coalition of the CDS and three service chiefs, with CDS as the Permanent Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee was established. He started - consensus building with first meeting symbolically at the NDA; the basic alma mater for joint training. The Chiefs cooperated keeping the inter service rivalry aside.



Next was to create a sense of urgency amongst middle level officers – who will be catalyst for change – initiated by senior leadership. He reached out to them. Interaction was increased to build momentum, and he has addressed at least 30,000 officers by now. The kind of reforms being attempted was explained to them.

Structured interaction apart from COSC was done with the service chiefs under OP TIRANGA. Free flow of ideas and consensus building was carried out. Issues on which consensus was arrived were taken up for implementation. 11 meetings took place, while COSC had 14 meetings each lasting 3 to 4 hours.

VCOAS Committee also had 18 meetings to speed up reforms, while 13 sub committees of COSC met regularly to physically carry out directions of COSC.

He also mentioned that akin to Army Commanders Conference a tri-services conference ‘Parivartan Chintan’(PTI, 2024) under CDS of ANC (Andaman and Nicobar Command), SFC (Strategic Forces Command), Joint training institutions i.e. NDA, DSSC (Defence Services Staff College), CDM (College of Defence Management), MILIT (Military Institute of Technology) was organised to brainstorm jointness. Cyber and Space Agency and AFSOD (Armed Forces Special Operations Division) also attended.

Towards integration Parivartan Chintan II(PTI, 2024) was organised. COSC Sub Committees have met 56 times in this regard.

**Effects of Parivartan Chintan II :** He happily mentioned that the integration efforts at the apex level snow balled into larger voluntary interactions at command level. The commands carried out joint exercises on their own viz TRISHAKTI PRAHAR, SAMANVAY, KAVACH, VAYU SHAKTI (other services also too part), GAGAN SHAKTI, BHARAT SHAKTI (showcased Indian made weapon systems).

**Symbology to Establish Joint Culture :** He stated that towards establishing joint culture certain symbology is being attempted viz movie (Joint) of the three services has been made, Republic Day Parade participation by Tri - Services organisations, joint exercises and preparing joint song like army, navy, air force song. The Owl magazine of DSSC will be truly purple with articles on jointness and integration. Also, for the first time a Joint Training Team under a Brigadier has been formed at DSSC and 44 students are part of newly created Deep Purple Division. These students would be trained to tenant joint staff appointments which will come about upon establishment of Theatre Commands.

**Integration :** On integration, the CDS said that “it is the next level of Jointness.” It is co-joining of diverse entities or organisations. It is a physical activity which is apparent, visible and can be objectively measured. He mentioned that recently when both the aircraft carriers were ashore, the MIG 29 aircrafts of the carriers did ORP (operational readiness platform) duties at Nalia air force base. Cross posting of officers has been carried out and ‘join the armed forces’ advertisement have been placed instead of single service recruitment advertisement. However, to make integration enduring the following measures are being taken: -

- Issue of Joint instructions (akin to army/air force/ navy instructions), joint orders, joint policies (only tri service organisations or for all) and joint directives.
- Physical integration being attempted in nine verticals i.e. operations, operations - logistics, intelligence, capability development, communications and information technology, training, maintenance and support services in service, human resources, administration and legal. He said that 65 initiatives out of total 112 considered have been taken up for integration.
- Integration has already been achieved as regards common Air Defence Network, Common SOP for inter service joint communication architecture, inter service organisation bill(PIB, 2023) repair of common usage communication equipment, helicopters, small arms etc.

He said that “Jointness needs innovative approach, collaboration, there is no limit and varies from person to person. We need to discard old, create new. We need to be creative in nature; have creative destruction(Kopp, 2023) i.e. create to destroy old or in business parlance the deliberate dismantling of established processes to make way for improved methods of production.”

He said that “Jointness will lead to better integration and integration to establishment of theatre commands – a sine quo non pre-requisite.” Such theatre commands will take us from – single to multi domain operations. However, will need change in Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, culture, information flow and would require fusing of space and cyber domains.

### **Jointness and Integration Fall Short of Creating Full Joint Culture**

We have seen previously that Jointness and Integration while fostering Joint Culture to some extent still fall short as important pre-requisites of development of Joint Culture in terms of ‘stability of membership’ (happens in Theatre Commands, presence of single combatant

commander takes place) is not fulfilled. This inhibits shared experiences and shared learning. Structured learning is also not available due to lacunas in JPME. The limited JPME is also not seriously taken as there are no joint staff billets to tenant post JPME. The respective Service Chiefs still exercise control over their respective forces even in Joint environment which act as centrifugal forces pulling away from Joint Culture paradigm.

The Aaron P. Jackson's model for evaluation of jointness (Choudhary, 2022) also highlights this issue and lists the following four key parameters to differentiate 'very joint military' and 'non-joint military':-

- Number of joint operational command and control, structures, and joint operations.
- Nature of integration within the Higher Defence Organisation (HDO) to reduce duplication of roles and resources, service support systems, etc.
- Nature of professional military education (PME) institutions and scope of joint military education in career advancement of military officers.
- Frequency and nature of joint military doctrines.

**Acculturation Deferred.** "Acculturation as is known is the process by which groups or individuals adjust the social and cultural values, ideas, beliefs, and behavioural patterns of their culture of origin to those of a different culture. This process of cultural change and adaptation occurs when groups meet one another. There are many ways to measure acculturation, but it generally includes changes in language, dress, food, and other aspects of culture" (Nickerson, 2024). It would be appreciated that tangible acculturation in the Armed Forces leading to development of Joint Culture happens substantially in Theatre Command kind of structures and not plug and play Jointness. A revolutionary approach thus may be required as the American experiences portends vis - a - vis evolutionary being followed presently.

### **Revolutionary Vs Evolutionary Approach; The American Experience**

The USA Armed Forces are presumed to be the most joint and integrated. The experiences of USA in World War II established the virtues of unified command in achieving military effectiveness. In that, USA achieved significant degree of unified command in the European theatre, but attempts to create the same in the Pacific became hostage to the bitter turf war of the services. Convincing lessons were thus learnt that integrated military structures were the need of the hour (Holmes, 2022) Following World War II, the US President Harry

Truman noted: “We must never fight another war the way we fought the last two. I have a feeling that if the Army and Navy had fought our enemies as hard as they fought each other, the war would have ended much earlier.”

Such experiences, led the US embark upon the process of Jointness and Integration for nearly 40 years after World War II by following an evolutionary approach to defence reforms with the passage of National Security Act, 1947, followed by Department of Defence Reorganization Act of 1958. The same however did not bear the desired fruits and operational difficulties and inter-service squabbling continued. Its disastrous effect was visible during operations of Grenada and Lebanon in the early 1980s .

The huge operational failures and lack of interoperability amongst the Services lead to the top down game changing Goldwater Nichols Act, 1986 (United States Public Law, 1986). This lead to creation of structures which ushered in theatre commands and lead to joint warfare planning, thus ensured true integration. The subsequent successes of the Theatre Commanders validated such revolutionary changes. The operations namely JUST CAUSE (Panama), DESERT STORM (Iraq, 1991) and DELIBERATE FORCE (Bosnia) saw the US forces operating jointly in all domains and complementing each other. Joint Culture also slowly developed leading to further increase in operational efficiency.

### **Indian Goldwater Nichols Moment Needs to Arrive Early**

Notwithstanding the initiatives of the CDS towards jointness and integration and developing joint culture (starting with symbology). The journey of the US Armed Forces in this regard would indicate that revolutionary measures like Goldwater Nichols Act are necessary rather than the evolutionary consensus approach being adopted presently which is akin to what the US Armed Forces did from the end of World War II until 1986. What learning the US Armed Forces had over nine decades needs to be contextualised and adapted earliest in the Indian scenario.

Our own war experiences be it Indo-Pak War of 1947-48 or Sino-Indian War of 1962 exposed the challenges of coordinating operations between the Army and the Air Force. The absence of a joint command structure, lack of integrated planning and coordination lead to operational inefficiencies and delays in decision-making. The situation improved in 1965 war and was at its best in 1971. However, the Kargil war underscored the urgent need for jointness in the Indian Armed Forces. Post Kargil review led to significant progress initially though post of CDS was created only on 24 December 2019 (PIB, 2019) nearly 20 years post Kargil.

### **Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast (Conmy, 2024)**

Management consultant and writer Peter Drucker famously said; "Culture eats Strategy for Breakfast". This phrase highlights the importance of culture over strategy. For however good the strategy maybe without a sound culture such stratagem is bound to collapse or be poorly executed. Thus, the focus needed to develop Joint Culture in the context of the Armed Forces.

### **Theatre Commands a sine-quo-non Pre-requisite for Joint Culture**

In the context of the Indian Armed Forces, Joint Culture would develop expeditiously only once the three services operate under the umbrella of Theatre Commands. Theatre commands promise unity of command (single operational commander), common mission, integration of all pre-requisites viz intelligence, logistics et al for attainment of the mission and joint staff. This leads to permanency of the 'group members', enhanced interaction and dependencies.

Another facet focussed upon by Goldwater Nichols Act was JPME. JPME revamp and making it a continuum i.e. at regular intervals throughout the service is the need of the hour. As the present set up of initial JPME at NDA and thereafter 10 year plus hiatus with DSSC as the next forum is unacceptable. For JPME education and training along with enabling environment of Jointness and Integration at Theatre Commands fosters Joint Culture and manning of Joint Staff.

### **Conclusion**

Despite reports of numerous committees post Kargil, India was able to appoint a CDS only on 30 Dec 2019 after nearly 18 years. The primary task of CDS was to promote jointness and integration. He was also to create Theatre Commands within three years i.e. by early 2023 (Singh, 2023). The sad and untimely death of the first CDS delayed the process of reforms. The next CDS could be appointed only after nearly 10 months. The current CDS has rightly identified Jointness, Integration and developing Joint Culture as important landmarks to be achieved. However, he has linked substantial progress in these areas as a sine-quo-non for establishment of Integrated Theatre Commands. This approach may not bear fruits as is the American experience and we may continue the 'slow march' for decades in all domains of Jointness, Integration and Joint Culture.

An early path breaking initiative such as the Goldwater Nichols Act is an imperative. Such Act leading to establishment of Theatre Commands, Service Chiefs being responsible for Raise, Train and Sustain (RTS) functions only and making JPME a continuum throughout the service would lead to permeating of Joint Culture speedily due to functional imperatives. Such Joint Culture would lead to the Armed Forces becoming efficient and effective in achieving operational objectives with economy of effort and resource optimisation. Thus, Theatre Commands are a sine-quo-non pre-requisite for developing Joint Culture and should be created at the earliest without further dithering and deferment. They could turn out to be the one stop solution to many of the issues that ails inter service and tri service interoperability.

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