

18. Military Leadership in the 21st Century

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Introduction

The subject covered in this chapter: “Military Leadership in the 21st Century”, is vital to the nation, for the Indian armed forces are the ultimate guarantors of our nation’s security and well-being. How this instrument of last resort performs will be largely determined by the leadership that steers this organisation in peace and leads it in war.

Whilst working on the manuscript, we had to guard against a tendency to become overcritical / negative or may be even cynical, for it is so easy to fall into that trap. So let us start by very candidly and forcefully stating that the Indian Armed Forces are the most professional, capable, credible and well led organisation, in fact, the ‘pride of our nation’. Being so important to the nation’s well-being, there is no scope for any complacency. Others may have this luxury, the armed forces don’t. They need to constantly look within to remain dynamic and relevant, always one step ahead of the challenges and threats. And in this organisation, leadership plays the most crucial role and, hence, the criticality of the subject.

Role of the Armed Forces: Remaining Relevant

☒ The armed forces have a **primary role** to protect and secure our nation from external threats and a **secondary role** to aid the civil authority when called upon to do so. Whilst the primary role is their *raison d’etre*, the secondary role is gaining prominence with a variety of requests/tasks which clearly lie in the civil domain. Moreover, the armed forces are steadily being dragged in as “first responders” because of the non-performance of other agencies and the people’s lack of confidence in them. We have also seen the severe consequences of the delayed call-up of the armed forces, as witnessed during the floods in Uttarakhand in 2013, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 2014 and Kerala in August 2018. So

what do the armed forces do? Await a formal call-up and see the problem magnify, or take the initiative when they see things going beyond a point? The answer is not easy: in law and order situations, it may be prudent to await a call, whereas, in a natural calamity or disaster situation, local/operational commanders must step in at the earliest. The bottom line is that the armed forces need to remain relevant whenever the nation calls and, therefore, the senior military leadership needs a good **politico–military understanding** and rapport in difficult situations.

☒ Beyond the primary and secondary roles, the armed forces also have a **‘derived role’, which is gaining prominence:**

- The very presence of the armed forces has a salutary effect on the environment, and, therefore, in marginal areas, they need to mark their presence in some form. Increasing their footprint in and around the challenging areas is desirable.
- Their professionalism and conduct is a great morale booster for the nation – here’s one organisation that works and has the confidence of the citizens across the length and breadth of the country.
- As part of military diplomacy, all ranks of the armed forces, specially the senior leadership, including the defence think-tanks and veterans, take actions to further enhance goodwill and mutual trust among the comity of nations. They also project an objective and convincing view of our policies and their rationale to ensure the integrity and strategic interests of the state.
- Commencing with our laudable contribution to United Nations UN peace-keeping operations in Korea in 1950, the Indian Armed Forces and their leadership have been pioneers in taking a leading role in maintaining peace and security worldwide, under the UN Charter.
- Their contribution in sports, environment protection, ethical integrity, etc is becoming more significant, by the day.
- Approximately 60,000 soldiers retire and join the society every year, enriching it with their discipline, commitment and nationalistic approach.
- The leadership of the armed forces has remained committed to making a positive contribution in various committees, tribunals and diplomatic engagements to further our national interests.
- On balance, by carrying out the primary, secondary and derived roles, as stated briefly, the armed forces have been making a significant contribution to nation-building as well.

- Last but not least, the armed forces have come to uphold the integrity and unity of our country in the true spirit and as per the core values of our Constitution.

Thus, remaining relevant to the nation and its security needs is becoming more and more significant in the 21st century.

Challenges for Military Leadership in the 21st Century

Before looking at the challenges for the military leadership, it may be prudent to briefly highlight the envisaged future conflict scenario.

Considering the geo-political-economic- strategic environment, with nuclear armed states around, and the devastation likely to be caused by wars, the probability of a total war appears less likely. However, given our unresolved border disputes with our neighbours, and the continued proxy war cum cross border terrorism from Pakistan, the probability of limited conflicts would remain high. Due to technological advancements, there has been a conceptual shift in the emerging contours of conflicts the world over. The conflicts would be of short duration, dominated by a wide variety of devastating firepower and manoeuvre, characterised by a network of centric systems in place. More than being number - based, progressively, greater reliance would be placed on knowledge - based operations, involving full spectrum of the force structure. It would be a force structure, and its leadership, that would be required to not only combat conventional forces, cyber and space-based assets, but also, more importantly, insurgents, terrorists and violent non-state actors. The conflicts could well be beyond geographical boundaries, to protect one's national, economic-cum-strategic concerns.



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Hybrid Nature of Combat: The nature of combat has changed steadily over the years, but the most dramatic change occurred in the Nineties at the end of the Cold War. To the hitherto fore mix of 2nd and 3rd Generation Warfare, got added a new dimension of the 4th Generation and now the 5th Generation, aptly being termed as “hybrid warfare”. This has been to the fore in recent conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Whilst the Indian Army has engaged in conventional combat as well as long periods of counter-insurgency, we are yet to experience the full dimensions of hybrid warfare in

a full scale conflict. The question that arises is: what type of military leaders do we need to combat hybrid warfare, and, more importantly, are we training and grooming our leaders, specially at the higher levels appropriately? This in itself is a separate subject of study, but some qualities that have become most essential are: **wider education base (as distinct from training), innovation and adaptability, boldness and risk taking abilities.** More important is the ability and willingness to look over the horizon, thus, being prepared for newer threats and challenges before they hit us. The Army Training Command would be well advised to review its approach to training with a greater focus on, ‘**why**’ rather than, ‘**how**’, an appropriate mix of training and education.

- ☒ **VUCA:** The managerial acronym VUCA, for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous, has been in use for over three decades, both by the military and corporate leadership. Just as it has been used by the military leadership in Iraq and Afghanistan, it would be far more pertinent in the conflicts of the future , which would straddle the land, air, sea, cyber and space domains. These conflicts would have a surfeit of unprocessed information, with technology thrown in, and leaders would be expected to give quick decisions . The luxury of delayed decision-making is passé. A timely decision could , more often than not, be the turning point of any operation, be it at the tactical, operational or strategic level. It also highlights the importance of having a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty.
- ☒ **Harmonising Technology and Human Resource:** The armed forces have largely been overwhelmed by the power point. With slick presentations prepared by smart staff officers, everyone seems to be on top of the situation, whereas, in reality, there are considerable issues to be tackled. Yes, technology needs to be harnessed to our operational advantage, but optimum value will only be achieved when this is harmonised with the human resource, certainly not at the cost of it. Star wars is slick, but the reality has recently been witnessed in Afghanistan. Robust military leadership can be optimised through technology, not substituted by it. The recent bias towards science and technology at the cost of art and the humanities needs a rebalance. The art of warfare, especially at the operational level cannot as yet, be substituted by the science of it. A recent initiative to turn the National Defence Academy (NDA), totally science oriented and technical, was shelved when Lieutenant General A K Singh was the Southern Army Commander.



Decision Making in a Complex Environment: A complex matrix of factors is making, 'decision-making' very challenging in the 21st century. The information overload is clouding minds and it requires true leadership qualities to distinguish the wheat from the chaff. Good communications are tempting commanders to reach down many levels, thus, local conditions are having a disproportionate influence on the higher level decision-making. The consequences of decision-making are turning more and more military leaders, especially at the senior level, 'risk averse'. If a leader is to pursue an ethos of 'risk avoidance', he will seldom be able to exploit opportunities that come his way, and this ethos is infectious, leading to an Army of conformists, with a tendency to look over their shoulders. We have seen glimpses of this in earlier encounters on the Line of Control (LC), and Line of Actual Control (LAC), where local commanders hesitated to react, awaiting instructions from higher Headquarters (HQ). This is changing of late, with clear directions and delegation of authority.

- ☒ **Mediocrity to the Fore:** Meritocracy in the armed forces is still sufficiently valued, but mediocrity is creeping up. Among many factors, reservation, introduced at the Colonel to Brigadier level, is now beginning to push up mediocrity in larger proportions than is desirable in the senior ranks. A concerted effort to introduce it at the "Two-Star" rank was thwarted with great difficulty by some of us at the high table. Had it succeeded, the results would have been disastrous for the well-being, efficiency and morale of the Indian Army. Mediocrity/mediocre performance cannot be allowed to prosper in the armed forces, where lives are at stake; where decisions by military commanders can mean the difference between life and death.
- ☒ **Short Tenures of Commanders:** Due to the short tenures of commanders, most of them look at short-term perspective planning, primarily to show tangible results, for understandable reasons. Also, they work on the assumption that no major operation would take place during their short tenure, due to which the focus shifts to meeting non-operational requirements. Resultantly, the long-term perspective takes a very low priority, as the aim remains to show results within the short tenure rather than operational preparedness. This trend, among the commanders, shows the leaders in a poor light, which must be checked. Fortunately for the Army, the commanding officers - the cutting edge - have stable tenures to maintain the Army operationally effective. Increase in tenures of formation commanders would certainly help to improve our operational effectiveness and optimize full potential of its military leaders.

☒ **Transparency: Power of the Social Media:** This is a hard truth of the 21st century that has to be recognised by all leaders, especially those in high places. Incidents even of a trivial nature become viral over the social media and tend to be blown out of proportion. The electronic media also tends to favour a negative portrayal. Therefore, recognising this reality, military leaders need to be not only **ethical** and **correct**, but also **transparent**. At the same time, the organisation needs to look within and also educate about, and discuss, this issue, so that its own leaders don't start spreading this malaise. In-house mechanisms should be vibrant enough to offer redressal of grievances, even against the hierarchy.

☒ **Trend towards Egalitarianism:** The 21st century trend is towards a classless society in the socio-economic and political domains. There is an increasing discomfort towards authority, especially the perks that go with such authority. Recent debates in the country on many issues are reflective of this trend. Our men and young leaders come from the same stock; therefore, what are silent whispers today, are bound to grow. We need to take cognisance and corrective action, before this issue spreads in the armed forces also. 'Share and Care' may be a good way to look at 'Welfare Issues'.

☒ **Officer's Shortage Impacting Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency:** For too long, the armed forces have tried to live with the shortage of officers. Whilst managing in peace-time, such shortages have a serious impact in operational situations. It could be summarised that the next rung of Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) haven't been able to fill this void. The world over, the trend in modern warfare is towards officer intensive roles; existing units/formations are being milked to meet the requirements of the new organisations, seriously impacting functional efficiency. Whilst some steps have been taken, they are not bold enough. With increase in educational levels and better awareness, every commander must ensure performance-based promotion among the JCOs and NCOs, which will automatically push the benchmark a few notches higher for them to deliver. In this regard, some very bold and innovative measures to enhance intake were suggested, but the attempts were thwarted by a conformist, bureaucratic wall within Army HQ itself.



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ethics and Morals – The Difficulty of Being Good: We are living in the midst of the 21st century society, where standards of ethics and morals have reached a low point. Whilst the society may learn to cope, and live, with this, we, in the armed forces, cannot afford any such dilution. On

the other hand, maintaining the high levels of ethics has itself become very challenging. When we talk of integrity, it covers not only personal but also professional integrity. The Chetwode Motto has guided officers for long, but is it adequate, or is there a need for a more detailed code to guide the leaders on this vital issue? It is perhaps time to look at what Dee Ward Hock, an author, an expert in the financial industry and an active developer of new models of social and business organisations, had to prescribe to leaders, *“If you seek to lead, invest at least 50% of your time in leading yourself—your ethics, principles, motivation and conduct.”* This is so very true for good military leaders, especially in an environment where the politico-socio-economic-technological milieu has undergone a sea-change over the past three decades. Even with a rapidly changing value system in the society, the fundamentals of leadership like character, integrity, loyalty, courage and ethical conduct will not change.

- ☒ **Politico–Military Interface:** The armed forces do not function in a vacuum and have to be alive to politico–strategic considerations. As military leaders rise in the hierarchy, they are often confronted with considerations other than operational, for which a large number are not prepared. This shortcoming needs to be corrected through the requisite exposure and training / interaction of military leaders, before they step into the operational level of command. A similar exposure for the civil hierarchy would be most desirable to achieve the optimum level of civil-military synergy.
- ☒ **Jointness and Integration:** Stephen Cohen , in his Book “Aiming Without Arming: India’s Military Modernisation” highlights that each of the three services tend to function independently and disjointedly, and are not at all keen on jointness. In our view, this has become a huge challenge, and to ~~say~~ it bluntly, we are nowhere near the desired levels, despite lip-service by all the stakeholders.
 - To start with, integration between the Ministry of Defence and the Service Headquarters needs greater focus and attention. Cross-manning of select posts would be a good start point.
 - Even in the 21st century, the three Services are stand-alone, with less than optimum synergy. This also affects the attitude and functioning of senior military leaders and is not in sync with 21st century requirements.
 - Within the Army itself, parochialism and turf considerations are not uncommon and mar the ‘moral authority’ of senior military leaders.

It would, therefore, be proper to first integrate the different arms and services within the Army. Though easier said than done, the start point would be to respect each arm and service, and play to their strengths to integrate them to contribute toward the overall mission, rather than speak about the weaknesses alone. It would also facilitate rightsizing of the Army with minimum turbulence.

☒ **Notion of Victory:** This itself is getting redefined in the 21st century, as we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Victory at any cost may no longer be acceptable. The nation will expect its military leaders to achieve success at least cost, especially in human lives. Wars fought away from society will be fought through them and it will be challenging to distinguish the foe from the innocent. Collateral damage will weigh on the minds of planners and executors.

☒ While the military campaign may be short and swift in our context, the post conflict period may be prolonged and stabilisation operations will demand a comprehensive civil/military approach.

Management of Change

Our military leadership has to understand that most Indians, by nature, are status quo entities, despite the rise of India due its economic growth, military strength and being a pioneer in Information Technology (IT). As a consequence of this, ‘strategic restraint’ and ‘strategic timidity’ had apparently become an acceptable norm, save in the recent times when certain actions have shown otherwise. Although stated in a different context by Charles Darwin about two centuries ago, the following is, perhaps, far more pertinent today :

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change.”

The earlier we understand that change is a must, no matter how small, the better it would be. Strategic leaders should, therefore, imbibe Darwin’s thought and manage change for further improving the organisational structures, doctrines and systems, with minimum turbulence.

On the other hand, there is extraordinary emphasis on acquiring state-of-the-art technology and hardware, but very little thought is given to reviewing the organisational structures, strategy and doctrines. It would, therefore, be prudent for leaders to take a *de novo* look at organizations and doctrines.

Art of Dealing with People: The Human Dimension

Despite numerous debates, it is acknowledged that regardless of advancements

in technology, weaponry, and changes in the socio-economic conditions, certain things remain constant, i.e. wars will essentially be fought by soldiers operating under VUCA-like conditions. It translates into extreme stress, strain, ambiguity and uncertainty. As such, it is critical that leaders at all levels (strategic, operational and tactical) have a deep understanding of human behaviour, so as to achieve optimum results. The human dimension, from a leadership perspective, in a simplistic form, means *'the art of dealing with people effectively'*.

The Stanford Research Institute, has quantified the importance of understanding people and dealing with them as 88 percent of leadership strategy. Therefore, in a developing country like India, with huge diversity in its demographic pattern, "understanding and dealing with all ranks will be one of the biggest challenges to the military leadership in the 21st century".

For a military leader, despite the technology boom, the human dimension will play an increasing role in all facets of military life in the future too: be it team building, retention of talent, managing a change, building core competencies for effecting a change, managing diversity among all India class composition troops, or managing promotions, postings and tasking of troops for various missions.

Considering the importance of relations between military leaders and their followers, and the role strategic leaders are required to play, it is important that leaders in uniform should transform their style of functioning, while retaining the core values: character, integrity, loyalty, courage and ethical conduct. The importance of understanding human behaviour in the profession of arms has been best stated by Colonel Ardant Du Picq, a French Infantry officer who died in 1871, due to injuries sustained in the Franco - Prussian War, which remains relevant even today:

The human heart is then the starting point in all matters pertaining to war

The best masters are those who know their men the best.....

The Way Forward

☒ Having taken stock of the challenges, it could be summarised as to ~~what~~ is the state of the 'higher level leadership' in our armed forces and the way forward will become clear:

- A small percentage are outstanding military leaders, with clarity and conviction, well versed in the higher direction of war.
- A fewer still qualify to be role models based on their integrity, competence and commitment.
- A percentage of mediocrity manages to get in and is not able to ~~rise~~

above the tactical level.

- The status quo approach and turf considerations manage to retain a hold on many at the cost of the organisation.
- The shortfall in 'visionary leadership' to measure up to 21st century challenges becomes apparent.

☒ With that as a backdrop, let us look at the ways and means to set right, invigorate, and move forward. In the military leadership lie the nation's expectations, confidence and assurance, that guarantee the security and well-being of the country and all its citizens. This necessitates exceptional and extraordinary standards of military leadership at all levels, especially the senior levels.

☒ Leadership is present in all walks of life, so how is military leadership different? In view, three things distinguish a military leader:

- **Unlimited liability contract** towards serving the nation / organisation, without any caveats.
- As military leaders, they deal with **life and death** issues, **not profit and loss**.
- The armed forces are the **last resort** and, therefore, do not have the luxury of being runners-up even once.
- Motivation, therefore, has to be at a different level : it has to be about trust, camaraderie, leading by example, standing up for what is right, about putting yourself in harm's way before your subordinate, and, finally, it's about national spirit and regimental ethos and spirit.

Professional Aspects and Core Values.

☒ **Prominent Roles of Strategic Leaders:** While looking at the strategic leadership, it is important for leaders to comprehend the emerging politico-economic-social scenario, and relate it to the strategic scenario, as it may unfold under different circumstances. This is important because the leader would be required to analyse the strategic risk profile of various options available, and then make strategic choices. Subsequently, while the operations are in progress, managing the emerging uncertainties and ambiguous situations or scenarios would be the core function of the leader. Therefore, to deal with complex situations, a leader needs clear vision, clear direction, agility of mind, high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. Only then can we expect new solutions to unpredictable situations. While discussing vision, the words of Rev Theodore Martin Hesburg, President of the University of Notre Dame for 35 years (1952–

87), come to mind,

“The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. You can’t blow an uncertain trumpet.”

- ☒ There is reason to believe that there is a bias that is confusing event management for military leadership. Nothing could be further from the truth. We need to nurture and develop combat leaders as distinct from event managers: leaders who lead from the front, follow the Chetwode Motto, stand up when the chips are down and who can, through personal example and influence, both direct and indirect, make their men achieve the seemingly impossible.
- ☒ Do we have such leaders in our midst? The answer is a categorical ‘Yes’, but such leaders need to be recognised, nurtured and supported.
 - The most powerful tool any military leader carries is not his weapon but his mind. The Indian armed forces must reinforce with vigour the “yodha ethos” and develop “scholar warriors”, who have the character and courage of conviction, combined with professional competence, mental agility and strength, to measure up to the most challenging tasks.
 - Encourage creative thinking, based on operational logic and professional education to enable growth of dynamic leaders. The risk taking ability needs to be nurtured at all levels, so that decisive operational moments are optimised.
 - The empowerment and education of subordinates must remain a solemn responsibility of the military leadership at every level.
 - Any commander, who sends untrained troops into operations, in both conventional or sub conventional environments, would be committing the biggest sin of one’s life. When the Naxalite movement was at its peak in 2010, instructions were received to move regular troops immediately into the heartland of the restive region with multiple aims, save anti - Naxal operations. It must be said to the credit of our leadership that the Army remained firm in not sending any troops unless they were trained for the new operational environment. The troops finally went after being fully trained and equipped, and their conduct during their training exercises and their genuine concern for the well being of the people was highly appreciated by the local populace at large.
- ☒ **Work from Hope of Success Rather than Fear of Failure:** There are grounds for thinking that incompetent commanders tend to be those in whom the need to avoid failure exceeds the urge to succeed. The armed Forces need to create an environment where leaders focus on success

rather than failure avoidance.

- ☒ **Professional Dissent:** Genuine and constructive professional dissent needs to be encouraged in the armed forces, since its exclusion would only encourage mediocrity and predictability. **Let's be clear that blind confirmation is not loyalty, nor independent thinking, dissent.**
- ☒ A leadership programme to train officers in **operational art** and the **higher direction of war** has become imperative. The Army Training Command (ARTRAC) may consider establishing a faculty of 'higher leadership', with visiting faculty consisting of eminent, proven and charismatic military and civil leaders, both serving and retired. The selection of the faculty is critical and should be based on role model leaders, irrespective of rank/status.
- ☒ And, lastly, the challenge remains of how to select, nurture and promote leaders in peace-time, who will come good in a war/crisis and not prove to be just paper tigers. As a lot has been written on this subject, it is time that we start taking actions on the recommendations.
- ☒ As India tries to define its place at the high table, in this quest, there are obligations and expectations. This requires leadership of an exceptional calibre, not only at the cutting edge and directional level, but, more importantly at the conceptual, operational–strategic level of command and staff.
- ☒ So what are the expectations from leaders at this level?
 - Such leaders have to be **transformational**, with high tolerance for ambiguity and professional dissent.
 - They should have **leadership vision** and a developed sense of **battlefield intuition**.
 - A **victorious will** combined with **calmness in crisis** has to be the hallmark of such leaders.
 - Strategic level leaders need to be able to co-relate the external influences with the internal environment and without compromising the core values, shape the environment to optimise the endstate.
 - Military leaders will be expected to expand, not constrain, the nation's range of strategic options.

Organisational Aspects

- ☒ **Encourage Meritocracy:** The profession of arms is too serious to allow any space for mediocrity, especially in the higher ranks. This needs the most serious attention from the high table of the Chief and Army Commanders / equivalent. The time for reservations is long over and a review is necessary, as was planned, in addition to a host of other measures that can be

undertaken.

- ☒ **Assessment and Selection System:** In all fairness, the assessment and selection system of the armed forces has been fair and objective. But it has not been dynamic enough to cater for various challenges that have appeared over time. It is also ‘**one-man-centric**’, lacking consistency, with periodic flip-flops, which open it to accusations of bias. Over-assessment, of which most are guilty, has overwhelmed the system, making it lose its discerning character. Looking back, while selecting officers for sensitive appointments as also while processing complaints on MS matters, the Military Secretary’s (MS) Branch would often, informally, refer to the closed period of reporting, i.e. 1984 to 1989, in order to know the actual performance and potential of an officer. In this melee of inflationary reporting, the organisation loses out on professionally competent officers with high integrity and ethical value system. Similar is the case of appointments at senior levels, with square pegs being driven into round holes. So what recipe/change does one offer? A few suggestions are:

- **Consider 360° evaluation** – a limited trial may be ordered to evaluate and harmonise before introduction. Although the civil administration has already introduced this for senior level selections, we are in the business of conducting operations, which has no soft options. This option has to be exercised with deliberation and care.
- **Review assessment system** so that assessing/reviewing officers are able to offer a true representation of performance and potential; many steps can be taken.
- **Assessment of integrity** has to be more detailed; today, virtually everyone is getting an outstanding report, quantified as ‘9’, thus, permitting officers with questionable professional competence and integrity to get through and surprise the system in the senior ranks.
- Ours is a **command oriented Army**; yet everyone is not suited for it. Since it is a must for further promotion, many unsuitable officers are given crucial command assignments. This is the most critical issue, and needs a more dynamic solution.



Something also needs to be done to dissuade the increasing trend of **complaints**; in fact, repeated complaints against supersession. There are many officers who have risen to high levels by getting relief at every rank! An odd complaint by an officer is quite understandable.

Otherwise, it actually tantamount to ‘**cleansing one’s career at every stage**’, which places the complainant much higher in the order of merit in comparison to his / her non-complainant peer. Resultantly, in a few cases, complainants stand to gain in selection boards at the cost of non-complainants. Once the Additional Director General, Chief of the Advisory Board (ADG CAB) wanted to visit Germany to interact with his counterpart. When a request regarding this was sent by the Deputy Director General Military Intelligence (Foreign Division) [DDG MI (FD)], it was a surprise to learn that there was no such organisation in the German Army, as the need for it had not been felt.

- **Senior appointments (Lieutenant General and equivalent)** should be approved by an **appointment board**, composed of the Chief, Vice Chief and Army Commanders / equivalent. The Chief may retain a veto, based on a speaking order. Every other organisation in the country has such a collegiate system. This would be successful only if we can guard against a parochial approach that has become the bane of the system.
- The time has come to move away from age related senior appointments. We are mature enough to pick up the most competent and suitable for the highest appointments, through a **credible system**. We cannot afford the luxury of **date of birth** as the **ultimate determinate**. Any such change should always be with prospective affect, lest it gives rise to apprehensions of bias.
- ☒ **Major changes**, as detailed below, are under consideration in the officer promotion system in the US Armed Forces¹, though it is still work in progress:
 - Ending some of the up-or-out rules that force officers to leave military service if they fail to be promoted along rigid timeliness.
 - Allowing promotion boards to move high-performing officers higher on the promotion list regardless of their time in service.
 - Allowing service secretaries to create “an alternative promotion process” for specific career fields.
- ☒ **Establishing Accountability:** It could be stated upfront, that the ~~Indian~~ armed forces are shy of enforcing professional accountability. While personal misdemeanors are brought to book, how many officials has the organisation removed from command assignments for **operational incompetence – few and far between**. The American Army lost its

moorings when it stopped relieving incompetent officers from command assignments – resulting in their dismal performance in Vietnam. This needs a serious relook within our Army as well.

- ☒ **Embracing Change:** The **culture of status quo** can no longer be allowed to impede progress. An analysis of past studies undertaken, with great deliberation, shows **implementation ranging from zero percent to 50 percent**. The last transformation study in the Army (2008 - 09), ironically has met a similar fate. We need, '**visionary leaders**', who have a vision for tomorrow and who work with focus to leave a better organisation for the military leaders who will follow. The transformation that such a visionary leader will usher in may result in **short-term turbulence**. They must stay the course and not be dissuaded by short-sighted vested interests.
- ☒ **Ethics and Priority:** The armed forces as an institution cannot allow any compromise in their own standards of ethics and probity. The **impeccable character and transparency** that is expected of military leaders should be constantly reinforced. Therefore, there is a requirement to lay down a code of conduct to ensure a culture of ethical standards and probity. Senior officers should **lead by example** and **set the standards**. It will suffice to say that military leadership is '**leadership by deeds**'. There should be 'no double standards' and commanders should have an approach of '**top down** - **top first**' in this regard. This notwithstanding, there is a growing tendency among officers, senior and junior alike, to remain critical of the system and the senior officers. It may not be incorrect to state that our systems will automatically improve if every commander (colonel onwards) in the chain remains transparent and follows the code of ethical conduct within his sphere of influence / command, rather than indulge in unhealthy criticism.
- ☒ For a healthy professional atmosphere, a clear distinction between '**on parade**' and '**off parade**' should be observed. The armed forces should not carry their ranks too far in off parade activities.

Operational Aspects

- ☒ **Capability Development:** In the last 5-6 decades, there have been 8 major conflicts, and over 100 in the sub-conventional domain. In fact, open armed conflict waged by one state against another has become the exception rather than the rule. India has been subjected to both types of threats and that poses a dilemma for capability planners: **where should the focus lie?**
- ☒ In our case, where we still have two inimical neighbors, we cannot afford

to ignore the ‘**most dangerous**’, i.e., the conventional threat, but with an adaptability to tackle the ‘**most likely**’, i.e., the ongoing sub-conventional threats in various parts of the country. This needs to be further quantified into specific and overlapping capabilities. The Ministry of Defence should clearly lay down the capabilities required, in consultation with the ‘defence forces’, whilst ushering in cutting edge technology.

☒ **Integrated Theatre Commands – The Way Forward:** Much has been written about creating a permanent Chairman of the Chief of Staff Committee (COSC). It is suggested that the way forward is to define the desirable end state that should be achieved to give India integrated and synergised armed forces, which will measure up to the future challenges of the 21st century.

☒ With respect to creation of theatre commands, we may have to analyse the rationale of our adversary in the north. It may be of interest to know that seven military regions (MR) of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), China, have been replaced by five theatre commands on February 01, 2016, to meet the futuristic operational requirements. It certainly gives the PLA certain obvious ~~operational~~ advantages, both towards the east, southeast and towards India, in that order. Though there is a resistance to change, some hard decisions have to be taken in the larger interest of the nation’s security.



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5 Star Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) with Integrated Theatre Commands should be the desired goal, with the Western, Northern / Eastern Theatres under the Army, the Central Theatre under the Air Force and the Southern Theatre under the Navy. In the interim, to reach the goal, we may go in for a very focussed effort to achieve jointness, have Functional Commands and a Permanent Chairman, COSC. This has already been dealt with at length in an earlier chapter on the subject.

☒ **Nuclear Deterrence:** Nuclear weapons are not for war-fighting, but at mainly as deterrence against a nuclear capable likely adversary; in our case, we have two, i.e. Pakistan and China. Whilst India’s and China’s nuclear doctrine is in the open domain, Pakistan has deliberately kept it opaque, thus, hoping to deter India’s conventional advantage.

☒ There is danger in falling for his bluff, for it will severely restrict our response to the ongoing sub-conventional threats. Most experts have extreme views on this subject and, therefore, their advice needs to be

balanced, and our response options kept open across the spectrum of conflict.

Conclusion

Whether a man is burdened by power or enjoys it; whether he is trapped by responsibility or made free by it; whether he is moved by other people and outer forces or moves them – this is the essence of Leadership.

— Theodore H White

- ☒ The armed forces **have been, are and will** remain crucial to the nation's security and well-being. How they deliver will depend mostly on the calibre of the military leaders who lead, and steer the organisation.
- ☒ We, therefore, need leaders who are steadfast, visionary and who measure up to the highest standards of military skills, who have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges of modern warfare and who possess the endurance, strength of character and mental resilience and flexibility to carry the burdens that modern warfare conditions impose.
- ☒ Each leader has a unique and distinctive personality, which makes him stand apart. How to measure good leadership is a natural question to ask—as also what distinguishes a great General from the good ones.
- ☒ The yardstick to measure great leadership should be the culture of enduring excellence which a leader leaves behind after he is long gone from the scene. On balance, the recipe for such a military leader of the 21st century would be:

Humility in his persona and arrogance in his uniform

– based on his integrity, competence and commitment.

Notes

1. “Congress is Giving Officer Promotion System a Massive Overhaul”: forums. space battles. com, July 26, 2018.