

THOUGHTS ON JOINT OPERATIONS IN INDIAN CONTEXT

BY

COL GEORGE JACOB ✓

(DS COORD(ARMY), DSSC, WELLINGTON)

General

1. The concept of the Army, Navy and Air Force coming together and synergizing their operations to maximize their individual capabilities - is not new. This idea reached its high point during the Second World War with the massive Normandy landings as a notable example of inter-Service co-operation. The recent Gulf Wars and the ousting and ongoing confrontation with Taliban in Afghanistan by US and allied forces have further cemented this concept as the ultimate key to ensure success in conflicts. In the present day context this concept has got an enormous push with the paradigm shift from the long duration attrition wars to short, intense high technology wars. The distinctions of the land forces, air force and maritime forces, operating as independent, single forces have consequently blurred leading to the concept of integrated operations to produce a greater punch, maximising operational effectiveness and increasing the chance of success. Slowly but surely, the traditional incongruity between land and air theatres of operations, and the maritime domain too, has become peripheral. It has thus become imperative for the Indian Armed Forces to train, plan and work jointly integrating their operations during conflict situations to achieve the desired outcome.

Article at a Glance

- **Inter-Service cooperation is not new.**
- **Indian Armed Forces have worked closely especially during 1971 war.**
- **Need for jointmanship to take root in view of short, intense future conflict scenario.**
- **Joint commands are not a necessity for jointmanship.**
- **Political aim during a conflict should evolve into a joint military aim.**
- **In air-land operations concept, each Service will have overlapping responsibilities in specific areas.**
- **There is a need for acceptance of common turf and not exclusive roles to each Service.**
- **Services should agree on a common doctrine.**
- **Need for change in old mindset while looking at each Service roles.**
- **Requirement to smoothen inter-Service rivalry.**

2. In most operations since independence, the Indian Army and Indian Air Force have worked together and the Indian Navy too has joined in with its limited resources. The victory in 1971 stands as a testimony to the constant and intimate integration of individual Service plans to achieve the national aim. This jointness and complete complementing of the plans is often attributed to the fact that all Service Headquarters were in New Delhi because of which the three Service chiefs were able to meet daily and dovetail operational plans into each other's. Whereas, the military headquarters of Pakistan's Armed Forces were dispersed and each Service fought its own war. With the advent of network centric operations, distance may not pose difficulties in future conflicts, however, jointmanship should take root in earnest in India's Armed Forces. With the establishment of the Integrated Defence Staff, joint cohabitation exists to a certain degree in New Delhi, and in the tri-service command in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and in the evolving Strategic Forces Command, but jointness has not permeated to all levels.

Are Joint Commands a Necessity?

3. For the extreme view, the country needs to have joint commands and operational commanders in the theatres that matter, with specific resources allotted to it. It is may be comical to imagine that in the West, the Army Commander will be in Pune, the Naval Commander in Mumbai and Air Force Commander in Ahmedabad with liaison teams of other Services effecting the required jointness in each Service theatre headquarters. It would be no different in other theatres with no two Service theatre commanders in the same location. However, is there a need to be sitting together, with a single commander to push his agenda to achieve the theatre and consequently the joint aims? The answer is a 'No'.

Is there a need for each Service theatre command Headquarters to be located together, under a single commander to achieve the theatre and consequently the joint military aims?

4. There could be no divergent view from the need for the operations of the terrestrial forces to be supreme. Finally the victory on land will decide the outcome of any full spectrum military conflict. Air and maritime elements will need to assist and further the swift and easier achievement of victory by the land forces in any conflict. Air element has the reach, lethality and swift maneuver capability to cause devastation of the enemy's core assets. However it needs to be orchestrated to be complementary to the land force actions.

5. The need therefore is to arrive at the methodology of employment of the land, air and maritime assets. The roles that they have to play in any scenario have to emerge clearly. Possibly it would lie in the manner in which any national emergency should be tackled. The singularity of the aim should be final and binding. The political aim would thus evolve into a joint military aim. Thereafter the individual Services should arrive at their own Service specific aims wherein each would automatically find that the support to other Services is a natural conclusion. In doing so the roles each Service has to play would emerge as also the allocation of resources.

Once the national political aim is formulated taking into account the abilities and capabilities of each of the Services, each Service should work out the contribution it can make to the achievement of the political aim.

Air Land Operations

6. Major theatre land operations which emphasizes Air Land operations concept will involve operations against the enemy in depth, although such operations will in many cases be nonlinear and dynamic, placing additional demands on joint coordination and creating additional opportunities for employment of both elements in a variety of settings, as specified in the overall theatre plan. A typical theatre campaign plan would divide Air Land operations into three major areas: the forward area; the joint battle area; and the joint staging and dispersal area. Both Air Force and Army, and Navy too in some cases, will have some degree of responsibility for activities within each area. Inside the staging area, air, ground and maritime forces in some cases, are concerned primarily with logistical, basing, airlift and deployment concerns. It would be prudent to assume that most of the activity in the forward area and the joint battle area as being an overlapping Army and Air Force effort. In the forward area, the Air Force would gather intelligence, strike strategic targets, conduct offensive counter air interdiction and engage in special operations when required. The Army's role in the forward area would be breaking the crust and creating the opening for its forces to thrust deep which it may have to carry out with integral resources. Within the joint battle area, air and ground forces would concentrate major combat power, engage in fire and maneuver, fire support, special operations and counter surface forces operations. This would be at the enemy's operational centre of gravity where the "decisive operations" will bring about the total and violent destruction of his forces.

Need for Common Turf

7. It is in furtherance of these Service specific roles and allocation of resources that each Service theatre commanders will have to come together to jointly plan and integrate their operations. To illustrate a typical scenario, the employment of air power need not always precede land operations. Air defence and destruction of enemy air force being its immediate concerns before an all out onslaught to destroy enemy targets, own air power can be employed to precede the land operations or held back to take on the enemy air force as it is employed as sequel to crossing of land borders and consequent outbreak of hostilities. In either scenarios, the support to land forces will not come in the desired quantum from the very beginning. How should the land forces therefore approach this problem, of being on its own without any air cover for may be three to four days, till the air element has won its war? It will have to not only cater for its own air defence but reinforce its own fire power to make up for the deficiency of air in the crucial first few days. Does it mean that the domain of Air Force in terms of medium to high air defence would need to be usurped? How can such dilemmas be addressed? The true jointmanship therefore will lie in understanding the roles and ability of the other Services. It would thus emerge that there may not be a need to have the Services integrated and a lead theatre commander appointed. Even if it is done, the roles will be played out in the same manner but may be with an undesirable single Service specific bias. To make maximum out of the resources, a joint approach is therefore ideal, letting few common turf while resolving all coordination issues.

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8. True jointmanship, should therefore go beyond advocating joint operational commands. It should extend to many other aspects like joint staff and joint training at various levels. National Defence Academy and Defence Services Staff College stand as two premier institutions that contribute tremendously to establishing the required bridges and understanding of other Services. The joint curriculum in Defence Services Staff College today incorporates the vital aspects of jointmanship so essential today. However, jointness in operations among the three Services is still distant and there is the requirement for the top commanders from the Integrated Defence Staff to debate and fine tune

the modalities with the respective Service Headquarters and between theatre commanders of respective Services. There is a need to have a formal arrangement in the form of a Joint Planning Centre to facilitate the integration of plans between the Service Headquarters and in each theatre. This can help institutions like the DSSC to incorporate the relevant issues in its training curriculum.

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Joint War Doctrine

9. The Joint War Doctrine formulated in 2006 as a consequence to the Kargil operations for achieving greater integration and operational cohesiveness among the three arms of the Indian Armed Forces is a big step towards understanding, integrating and propagating the operational concepts at the highest level. Each of the Services have also prepared and adopted their own doctrines and vision documents retaining the Service individuality and turfs. While it is necessary to define Service specific roles and capabilities keeping in mind the changing geo-political security environment, it should not be a tool to create chasm in the joint operational concepts and thinking.

10. The fundamental elements of national defense strategy, demands continued strong adherence to concepts within our own military structure of jointness and interoperability among the Services and as India takes up the role of a major power with the ability to work effectively and efficiently. By doctrine, all three Services should be prepared to conduct operations across the operational continuum ranging from peace keeping and humanitarian operations and low intensity conflicts to full scale warfare. As the Indian Armed Forces modernizes and the internal security environment and international obligations would demand a transition from the traditional roles to power projection in the region, it is increasingly important for all the Services to agree on common doctrine to successfully operate across the continuum of military operations

'Birds of the Same Feather'

11. The difference in uniform and wearing of the rank remains one of the biggest hurdles to the feeling oneness of the Armed Forces and amalgamation of

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thought and interests. It gives the visible reason to be different, to be divorced, to be unique; leaving the march to the common goal of jointmanship disorganized. There is a case to review the need for separate uniform especially combat uniform, for each Service. The common man often gets confused as to the credentials of a particular Service person depending on the non-familiarity with a particular Service.

Changing the Old Mindset

12. Recently in an article, a retired Chief of Naval Staff lamented that the Moghuls and the Marathas had invincible armies and the British allowed the Indian Army to grow to mammoth proportions during the World Wars while India's seaward defences were underwritten by the Royal Navy and the Indian Navy was never allowed to grow to anything more than a coastal force. He goes on to complain that at the time of independence, the naval budget was only three per cent of the defence budget and even today, the strengths of the three Services in India are lopsided with the Army 20 times the size of the Indian Navy and 10 times the size of the Air Force. Therefore he concludes that the first priority of the Air Force and Navy and their chiefs in India is to maintain their identities. In a lighter vein he grumbles that in Punjab, there are Jarnail (General) Singhs and Karnail (Colonel) Singhs while there are no Admiral Singhs or an Air Marshal Singhs. There needs to be a magnanimous and unselfish approach while comparing the strength and roles of the individual Services.

The two smaller Services should not be wary of jointmanship with the apprehension that they and their achievements would get swallowed up by the bigger Service. The days of an unverifiable comment attributed to a Defence Minister that in the

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Defence Ministry "We listen carefully to the Army, we humour the Air Force and we ignore the Navy" are surely over with each Service projecting and getting their share of funds for modernization and expansion based on threat perceptions and justifiable requirement.

Inter-Service Rivalry

13. Inter-Service rivalry possibly exists in armed forces of all countries. The need is to smoothen such rivalry which is the consequence of closely guarded turfs, and encourage jointmanship which has to be done by the Services themselves. To achieve jointmanship, each Service must recognise the roles of other two Services and overcome their

inhibitions and reservations by letting common turfs to emerge based on operational requirements and achieve commonality in approach. Fortunately for India there is the role that the Government can play to bring all the Services together and dictate if needed the levels of jointmanship that is mandatory. India may have to finally follow the path US took where the Government coerced the Services to go the 'joint' way. Each Service should look at resolving the irritants in the relationship with other Services, genuinely. The mutual benefits that will accrue when the entire resources of all the three Services will be at the disposal, would be phenomenal. In a divorced context, the united stand the three Services took, fructified in extracting a favourable award from the Sixth Pay Commission Anomalies Committee of the Secretaries set up by the Government when faced with strong resentment among defence personnel over inadequate salary hikes proposed by Sixth Pay Commission.

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Conclusion

14. During Sri Lankan operations of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force, Indian Navy rose to the occasion to ferry across and maintain efficiently a sizable strength of Indian Army and its equipment, while undertaking a constant patrol of the sea approaches to the island. During Kargil operations but for an initial hiccup, the contribution of the Air Force in softening of the well-dug-in defences is today well acknowledged. These not so distant examples of understanding and close cooperation between the Services vindicate the accusations of a history of narrow Service specific outlook and inability of move towards jointmanship.

15. The young men and women in the Armed Forces today must be sensitized that they are not just part of the Army, Navy or Air Force but they are truly part of a joint armed force. The need of the times is to train the way the servicemen and servicewomen are required to fight ie, the joint way. Methodology and standard operating procedures will have to be evolved at all levels to seek and orchestrate operations jointly. Today, with advances in communications, situational awareness and familiarity with each other's tactics, techniques and procedures should enable the three Services to work closely together. The ongoing counter insurgency and low intensity maritime operations too find occasions where one Service would need close and integrated support from another Service.