Joint Theatre commands

Why in news?

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Three services are split on the decision to form joint theatre commands.

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What is the issue?

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- The chiefs of the three defence services appeared together to issue the Joint Doctrine last month.
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- The three forces disagreed on the proposal to create integrated theatre commands.
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- The Army is in favour of the proposal, while the Air Force is strongly opposed to it.
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- While the Navy’s view is more nuanced, it too is not in favour of implementing the proposal currently.
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What is the reason behind such spat?

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- The recommendations of the expert committee headed by Lt General D B Shekatkar submitted its report to Ministry of Defence and have sought the views of the three service chiefs by the end of the month.
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- The proposal is to create three integrated theatre commands: northern command for the China border, western command for the Pakistan border and southern command for the maritime borders.
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- As the borders with Pakistan and China are land-centric, it is expected that

the northern and western commands would have to be headed by an Army General.
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- The southern command would have to be headed by a Navy Admiral.
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- The Army’s rationale for integrated theatre commands is based on the need to have a unified direction and control of war.
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- This was put forth by the Army during deliberations on the proposal at the combined commander’s conference, chaired by the Prime Minister, at Dehradun in February.
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- The army went with the rationale that the opposing side in China has a single command while the Indian side has seven commands of the Army and Air Force for the same task.
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- The need of the hour is combat efficiency and economy of resources which is considerably undermined by present separate 17 commands.
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- With a single commander all the military assets can be brought under him.
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- For e.g., on the Pakistan border, there are at least three Army commands and two Air Force commands.
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- India needs one integrated command, as all modern militaries have, such as the United States or even China.
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- But the Air Force contends that foreign examples are not applicable to the Indian situation.
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- “The US has global roles where it can’t move assets from one theatre to another.
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- India has no such problems of distance and time.
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- The Chinese have the theatre commands because Xi Jinping wanted to reduce the power of the PLA (Chinese military).
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- According to the Air Force, India should be considered as a single theatre where resources can be easily moved between various areas as required.
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- But with only 34 fighter squadrons instead of 45 and three AWACS and six mid-air refuellers, the problem arises on how to distribute them.
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- Navy’s position is that there is a need for greater jointness among the three services, but it is not appropriate to move to integrated theatre commands anytime soon.
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- The Navy has a much wider maritime role across the seas, where a lot of coordination between various commands is done by the naval headquarters.
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- If these individual commands go under different theatre commanders, these assets will not be available practically.
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- The diversity of views means that it will require the ministry and the government to take the lead.
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- But, adding to the uncertainty is the fact that Defence is scheduled to retire later this month and there is no clarity on the appointment of a full-time Defence Minister.
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Source: Indian Express

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