Opinions on the Role of Chief of Defense Staff

What is the issue?

The Chief of Defence Staff should not become another interposed level between the Defense Minister and the service chiefs.

What is the post of Chief of Defense Staff?

- Indian Prime minister announced post of Chief of Defense Staff in his Independence Day speech 2019.
- The CDS is a high military office that oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services.
- It offers seamless tri-service views and single-point advice to the Prime Minister on long-term defence planning and management, including workforce, equipment and strategy, and coordination in operations.
- The role of the CDS becomes critical in times of conflict.
- As of now, India has Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC), The senior-most Chief of Staff is appointed to serve as a Chairman until he retires.
- The current Chairman is the Chief of the Army Staff.
- The CoSC is a toothless office in the manner of its structure.
- The post did not further tri-service integration, resulting in inefficiency and expensive duplication of assets.

What should be the role of CDS?

- **Charge of new organizations -** Retention of existing warfighting structures, while the CDS takes control of newer organizations being set up for tackling future threats, has some merit.
- Development of future technologies and means to face emerging threats in the cyber, space, missiles domain, nurturing of AI-based platforms, usage of drones for various roles and such modern conflict realities is indeed important.
- **Cost-effective development -** These advancements are extremely costly, and the CDS can facilitate optimal, cost-effective integrated development and deployment of such structures.
- Modern war and warfighting have tremendous economic costs.

- Defence budgets are invariably inadequate to meet the “wish lists”, and intense prioritization of capabilities is inevitable.
- The CDS can be the vital point to undertake such prioritization and rationalization, and, therefore, can play a stellar role in the perspective planning and development function.
- Considering the high cost of future technology, the CDS can also contribute towards the optimization of existing structures.
- Such review of existing establishments and manpower should also be an assigned task for him.
- **Integrating Workforce -** Future conflict situations would possibly need an integrated application of fighting formations and resources, with unitary operational control of deployed elements.
- The CDS would be better placed for integrated employment of warfighting potential, and therefore logically needs to be part of the operational control chain.
- His tri-service position makes him the most suited driver for the integrated application of warfighting resources and facilitates unitary control in integrated operations.

What lies ahead?

- In the debates on CDS, one often heard the designated profile as “providing single-point military advice”.
- National security decisions are always taken after a multitude of advisory inputs from a number of agencies, duly analyzing ramifications and end state probabilities.
- The CDS is better termed as the primary military advisor, with the service chiefs also remaining important military advisors.
- The CDS should not become another interposed level between the Raksha Mantri and the service chiefs, whose access to the minister should remain as prevalent.
- The CDS also has a primarily advisory role, and therefore should not be boxed into administrative efficiency roles, but must be in the operational control chain.
- In the interim, the CDS may not override the operational responsibility of the service chiefs, and in due course, his operational responsibility can expand and become more “hands-on”.
- Thus, it is clear that the CDS would play a far more critical role in the national security apparatus, than the three service chiefs.

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