Proposal for Integrated Theatre Commands

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What is the issue?

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- Military reforms and creation of "Integrated Theatre Commands" (joining Army, Navy and Air force) is being debated widely now.
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- In this context, there is a need for clear policy-driven directives that meet India’s national security needs and challenges.
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What is the context of the proposed defense reforms?

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- "Naresh Chandra Committee report", prepared in the aftermath of Kargil War focused on a restructuring of "higher defense organization" as the first step.
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- This was intended to improve synergy among different state departments - bureaucracy, military, research and development, intelligence etc.
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- While little progress has been made to institutionalize these recommendations, the debate has now gone towards reforming the operational realm.
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- Here, the proposal is to set up joint theatre commands where interoperability across services like "army, navy and air force" is being sought to be enhanced.
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- Unfortunately, in this regard too there has been no progress, with services getting pitted against one another in a series of turf wars for operational control.

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What are the concerns?

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- The proposal for standalone theatre commands like the pilot in Andaman & Nicobar Islands lacks clarity on the overall picture.
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- The discussion of the kind of integration envisioned at the higher echelons (like the post of "Chief of Defense Staff") hasn't been having a clear direction.
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- Whether theatre commands would reduce the powers of chiefs of the various services over their resources is also not known currently.
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- The Indian Air force has also expressed operational problems in being delegated under theatre commands, due to shortage of resources.
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- Notably, with a sanctioned strength of 45 squadrons, the Air force currently operates with just about 32, due to shortage of fighter jets.
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- Further, during all previous military initiatives, the Air force under the current command structure has delivered clear and appreciable results.
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What is the way ahead?

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- The evolving nature of the warfare has changed the way combat is carried out and the focus on integrated commands might actually be redundant.
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- Further, it's only for far off offensive missions that theatre commands are more suited to and home defense is largely done through conventional commands.
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- With technological advancements in weaponry, the focus should be more on upending the defense arsenal and its operability.
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- The future battle field is lesser about mobilizing large armies and more about better surveillance, and cyber capabilities to pre-empt attacks.

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- In this context, reducing the tooth-to-tail ratio (combatants-to-support staff) and improving the potency of the tail operators is vital for the military.
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Source: The Hindu

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