

CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF (CDS)**Prelims: Polity & Governance- Institutional Reforms****Mains:****GS-III- Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.****GS-II- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.****Context:**

- ▶▶ In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister announced the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff to provide “effective leadership at the top level” to the three wings of the armed forces, and to help improve coordination among them.

What is the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)?

- ▶▶ The CDS is a high military office that oversees and coordinates the working of the three Services, and offers seamless tri-service views and single-point advice to the Executive (in India's case, to the Prime Minister) on long-term defence planning and management, including manpower, equipment and strategy, and above all, “jointmanship” in operations.
- ▶▶ In most democracies, the CDS is seen as being above inter-Service rivalries and the immediate operational preoccupations of the individual military chiefs.
- ▶▶ **The role of the CDS becomes critical in times of conflict.**
- ▶▶ **Most countries with advanced militaries have such a post, albeit with varying degrees of power and authority.**
- ▶▶ The United States Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS), for example, is extremely powerful, with a legislated mandate and sharply delineated powers.
- ▶▶ He is the most senior military officer and military adviser to the President, and his remit extends to the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the Defence Secretary.

In US:

- ▶▶ The Chiefs of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and National Guard too, are members of the JCSC.

- ▶▶ All, including the CJCSC, are four-star officers, but by statute only the CJCSC is designated as the “**principal military adviser**”.
- ▶▶ However, the CJCSC is barred from exercising any operational authority over combat commanders in varied theatres; this authority rests exclusively with the US President.

So, why had India not appointed a CDS until now?:

- ▶▶ India has had a feeble equivalent known as the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC); but this is a toothless office, given the manner in which it is structured.
- ▶▶ The seniormost among the three Service Chiefs is appointed to head the CoSC, an office that lapses with the incumbent’s retirement.

Issue with Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC):

- ▶▶ In 2015, then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar had described the CoSC arrangement as “unsatisfactory”, and its Chairman as a “figurehead”. The post did not further tri-service integration, resulting in inefficiency and an expensive duplication of assets,
- ▶▶ The CoSC system is a leftover from the colonial era, with only minor changes being carried out over the years. Apprehensions in the political class about a powerful military leader, along with inter-Services bickering, have long worked to disincentivise the upgrade of the post.

Kargil Review Committee (KRC):

- ▶▶ The first proposal for a CDS came from the 2000 **Kargil Review Committee (KRC)**, which called for a reorganisation of the “entire gamut of national security management and apex decision-making and structure and interface between the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces Headquarters”.
- ▶▶ The Group of Ministers Task Force that studied the KRC Report and recommendations, proposed to the Cabinet Committee on Security that a CDS, who would be five-star officer, be created. In preparation for the post, the government created the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) in late 2002, which was to eventually serve as the CDS’s Secretariat.
- ▶▶ However, over the past 17 years, this has remained yet another nebulous department within the military establishment.

But what happened to the proposal?

- ▶▶ No consensus emerged among the Services, with the IAF especially opposed to such a move. The UPA, then in opposition, was against the idea of concentrating too much military power in the CDS’s post.
- ▶▶ The Ministry of Defence (MoD) too, opposed it subtly for the same reasons, and because it could disrupt civil-military ties in the latter’s favour.

What is the case for having a CDS?

- ▶▶ Although the KRC did not directly recommend a CDS — that came from the GoM — it underlined the need for more coordination among the three Services, which was poor in the initial weeks of the Kargil conflict.
- ▶▶ The KRC Report pointed out that India is the only major democracy where the Armed Forces Headquarters is outside the apex governmental structure.
- ▶▶ It observed that Service Chiefs devote most of their time to their operational roles, “often resulting in negative results”.
- ▶▶ Long-term defence planning suffers as day-to-day priorities dominate.
- ▶▶ Also, the Prime Minister and Defence Minister do not have the benefit of the views and expertise of military commanders, in order to ensure that higher level defence management decisions are more consensual and broad-based.

Arguments Against?

- ▶▶ Theoretically, the appointment of a CDS is long overdue, but there appears to be **no clear blueprint for the office to ensure its effectiveness.**
- ▶▶ India’s political establishment is seen as being largely ignorant of, or at best indifferent towards, security matters, and hence incapable of ensuring that a CDS works.
- ▶▶ Militaries by nature tend to resist transformation.
- ▶▶ In the US, the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act elevated the Chairman from first among equals to the “principal military advisor” to the President and the Secretary of Defence.
- ▶▶ In the Indian context, critics fear, the **absence of foresight and understanding might end up making the CDS just another case of “jobs for the boys”.**

Who at present advises India’s Prime Minister on military matters?

- ▶▶ In effect it is the National Security Adviser.
- ▶▶ This has been especially so after the Defence Planning Committee was created in 2018, with NSA Ajit Doval as its chairman, and the foreign, defence, and expenditure secretaries, and the three Service Chiefs as members.