



THE UNACCEPTABLE IDEA OF THEATRE COMMANDS

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There are adequate examples of how Theatre Commands will not work, these are from operations / exercises by Indian Armed Forces. If each Theatre is to be independent and self-sufficient in itself, then everything they do, be it exercises, operations, readjustments, activation has to be done solely by the Forces within that Theatre, and other Theatres will not shed their Land Forces, Air Forces, Naval Forces for this task. That is the very basis of having Theatre Commands is it not? Each Theatre does not rely on another Theatre to do its job. This is how USA's Theatre Command concept functions, and USA needs that kind of self-sufficient Commands consisting of all types of military Forces. Let us see what we would have done in our exercises / ops and how it would have unfolded.

Brass Tacks

Had there been a Western Theatre Command then, no forces from Southern, Central, Northern or Eastern Command would have been available. No Air Forces outside Western Theatre would

have been used. The Navy was not involved, and in any case Naval Forces would not be part of Western Theatre. Even today, Western and South Western Army Commands have no roles in territories where Navy support is directly expected. So would Brass Tacks have gone thru as it did? WAC would have been split into Northern Theatre and Western Theatre, so forces in Northern Theatre would not be available for Brass Tacks. The Air Forces of Western Theatre would have been inadequate to support the Brass Tacks concept of deep penetration, and Air Defence of the penetrating and fast moving Indian land forces.

CACTUS

The area of operation would be the Southern Theatre. The forces required for CACTUS would never be placed under Southern Theatre permanently, their major tasks are in the West, East, South West Theatres. Nor would Southern Theatre have the air forces required, because those forces are fully committed during peace for

the North, West, South West, Central and East Theatres. How would the South Theatre have executed CACTUS? The forces that can be placed permanently under South Theatre would have to be meagre always, incapable of executing any worthwhile operation without massive support from other Theatres, especially the Air Forces. For CACTUS, air forces from Western, Central and Eastern Theatres were committed and operated, and they maintained the air-bridge to Maldives. A Southern Theatre could not have done it, and never can. The reach, speed, flexibility of air forces pre-empts their being cocooned within a small Theatre; it destroys what air forces are created for.

IPKF

The South Theatre could not have even planned let alone execute IPKF without borrowing forces from all over, as was indeed done during IPKF. Eastern Naval Command came in, as did Western. The forces demanded by IPKF can never be kept idle in Southern Theatre waiting for Out of Area Contingencies (OOAC) to happen one day. What happens if there is no OOAC for 10 years? Will that large force remain in the South in an inactive Theatre? The IL-76s maintained IPKF as well as Northern & Eastern Command during the IPKF deployment. Theatres will cripple this huge flexibility.

SAFED SAGAR and SIACHEN

Would the Northern Theatre have been able to handle it with their allocated Forces? And

because each Theatre has its own Air Forces, the Central or Western or Eastern Theatres will not shed their Air Forces which are required to defend their respective Theatres. Can Northern Theatre by itself execute and maintain Siachen and Ladakh with the Air Forces allocated to it? No. Let us now look how it is happening now. There are no Theatres; the Indian Air Force with its reach, speed, flexibility can simultaneously support Northern Command and Eastern Command, while still having the ability to give air support to South Western Command as well as Southern Command. If the air forces are parcelled out into 5 Theatres we will have inadequate air power to maintain and support each Theatre. If we want self-sufficiency in each Theatre, the result will be massive duplication of resources to meet the threats of each Theatre. We cannot afford that expense, and should not. If not anyone else the bureaucrats know it, as do Finance / Audit wizards. They will never permit such ridiculous expenditure to fulfil Theatre concepts because some guys want it.

KARGIL

How would Northern Theatre by itself have done this and yet kept the pressure on the Kashmir LOC? The Mirages of Central Theatre would have had to join the battle. The IL-76s from Central Theatre would have joined in to build up forces into Leh & Thoise. That then is the very basis of 'Not Restricting Air Forces into Theatres in India'. Air Forces in India cannot belong to a Theatre, they have to support the whole country

at the same time, and they can do it, because the Air Force is built for supporting Land Forces across thousands of kms simultaneously. You cannot chop that massive capability into small 'kababs' to satisfy someone's culinary preferences.

Look at It Differently

USA can and has to allocate everything to one Theatre because their Theatres are thousands of miles apart. Our max distance is 2500 kms from Siachen to Kanyakumari, and Naliya to Dinjan, covered in less than 4 hrs by our heavy lift kites. The IL-76 sqn flew more than 500 hours during Gagan Shakti; at an average speed of 550 kms/hr it is 2,75,000 kms in one month, about 9200 kms every day, which is **Four Times across India**. The Theatre *wallas* want to keep this massive flexibility within a geographical region that has a max distance of not even 1000 kms? What military genius is this?

2. What Air Mshl Jayal has written has been said for many years, and the bureaucrats have seen the merit in the solid evidence and facts given by him and others. Stubborn, pre-disposed concepts surreptitiously bring arguments, discussions, deliberations at institutes like AWC, DSSC, CENJOWS, HQs of Army Commands, possibly IDS, NDC trying to resurrect this impossible concept of Theatre Commands, which is alien to India. Look at Pakistan, they do not even have Commands, they only have Corps. And how much trouble these Pakistani Corps give to our

Commands, and now we want to make the Commands into Theatres? What will change on the IB and LOC and LAC if we make Theatres? Will the adversary get frightened and succumb to our Theatres? He will laugh at us for splitting our already limited resources into unrealistic fighting formations. They will have funny War Games and Sand Models at Staff College in Quetta. The enemy is just waiting for us to make this foolish mistake. Can we not see the blunder? Better to stick to what we have and make it more powerful as well as flexible, and spend more time at Multiplex Theatres or Home Theatres. Sorry for being impertinent, but it needs to be said.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])