

## Permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee: Should the appointment be delayed Further?

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In early December 2013, the Indian media reported that a proposal for the creation of the post of Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC) was being sent to the Cabinet Committee on Security for consideration. This came in the wake of the three Services Chief agreeing to the establishment of the post as per the recommendations of the Naresh Chandra Task Force. In this context, the Prime Minister's address at the Combined Commanders Conference in November 2013 is significant, given his stress upon "*the urgent need to establish the right structures for higher defence management and the appropriate civil-military balance in decision making that India's complex security environment demands*". The media reports also speculated that the Permanent Chairman CoSC will be appointed with effect from 01 January 2014; however, the appointment of permanent Chairman CoSC or Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is yet to materialise. Thus the issue that merits consideration is: when will the ideal time come for the appointment of permanent CoSC; will another crisis like Kargil or Mumbai terrorist attacks lend it an urgency; and should the appointment of the Chairman CoSC be delayed further?

The three main actors involved in the process; the political leadership, the bureaucracy and the armed forces have so far lacked consensus on the appointment of the CDS and this has oft been cited as the reason for non-implementation of the same despite a number of committees comprising members from the political leadership, bureaucracy and the armed forces having recommended the appointment of CDS. Irrespective of the reasons, the real loser is the nation since a very important issue concerning national security remains unaddressed. The Prime Minister's statement and the agreement among the three service chiefs for a permanent post, which hitherto was a roadblock, is a major breakthrough. At no time in the past have the three services been unanimous in their outlook towards the creation of CDS or the permanent Chairman CoSC, though it was recommended 13 years ago.

Though the general elections are due after a couple of months and the present government has limited time available to take major policy decisions, the need of the hour is to build a political consensus on the issue without further delay. It will be to the credit of the government if it is able to generate political consensus before the next general elections take place in 2014 and appoint a Permanent Chairman CoSC or CDS. It will be a major breakthrough in the defence reforms in the country. The bureaucracy may continue to scuttle the proposal due to insecurity in their minds of losing their turf, yet it needs to be forced upon all the stake holders to accept the decision in the national interest. The strategic community can play a proactive role for there is no valid reason for India to be depriving itself of such an essential reform. The three Service Chiefs have underlined the necessity of a Permanent Chairman CoSC by sending their unanimous recommendation to the government. Even in the US, the political leadership had to push the unwilling armed forces to accept the Goldwater Nicholas Act, 1986. This act essentially strengthened the existing Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff system. The UK is also introducing a series of reforms in its higher defence management and the Levene Report has emphasised the role and responsibilities of the politicians, bureaucracy and the military at the policy, strategic and operational levels. The experience of these two democracies emphasises the need for political direction in India as well. Any delay in appointing a CDS or Permanent Chairman CoSC could cost the nation dearly and will be at its own peril.

*Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.*