



# CENTRE FOR AEROSPACE POWER AND STRATEGIC STUDIES

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## Revisiting the Eight Decade History of Indian Jointness: Drawing the Right Lessons from Op Sindoor

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## Introduction

Operation *Sindoor* was the first significant armed conflict after the establishment of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) in August 2019. Since the establishment of CDS, there has been a consistent focus on jointness and shedding of single-service interests. Thus, over time, it has become almost sacrilegious to speak of individual service interests. Jointness is now the accepted convention. While the actions of the Indian Air Force (IAF) during Op *Sindoor* resulted in spectacular outcomes, many of which were caught on camera, there have been no attempts by the IAF to boast about their achievements. Likewise, considering the damage observed on the Indian border villages inflicted by Pakistan, it would be safe to assume that the Indian Army's response would have been far more devastating on Pakistan. Similarly, no attempts were made to showcase them either. The tri-service press briefs have been well-coordinated and included the actions of the Navy, which were out of public sight. Another key aspect is the visible synergistic action of the Ministries of External Affairs (MEA) and Defence (MoD). In 2019, the initial press brief, following the Balakot strikes, was delivered by the Foreign Secretary with no MoD representation. Whereas in Op *Sindoor*, both MEA and MoD representatives participated in all press briefings. Thus, this operation could be studied in future as a textbook case of synergy in national security.

The concept of 'theaterisation' has been popularised as a solution to a perceived lack of jointness in the Indian Armed Forces. Various authors have proposed several models. However, in the absence of theatre commands, what explains the synergy during Op *Sindoor*? I attempt an explanation.

The results for this synergy can be traced back to 1944, when the original seeds of jointness were planted in India. The Government of Sudan, recognising the valour and sacrifice of Indians in the Second World War in the defence of Sudan, gifted an amount of £ 1,00,000 for the construction of an Indian national war memorial. The Indian National War Memorial Committee of Council was constituted.

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APPENDIX 'A' (Contd)

<u>Proposed by HR the Governor of</u>	<u>Proposal</u>	<u>Reasons and Remarks</u>
9. PUNJAB	A <u>military academy</u> to serve all three Services.	An educational establishment would be of greater practical value than an architectural memorial.
10. BOND	A <u>military academy</u> for the three Services but Ministers unofficially add the rider that it should be open to "all Indians whether coming from Pakistan or Hindustan".	
11. UP	<u>Military Academy</u> . The cost should certainly be mainly borne by Govt who could provide the necessities and the National War Memorial Fund could provide the amenities such as a good library and gymnasium for games etc. Architecturally the building could be designed to commemorate the gallantry of the Indian Fighting Forces.	Utilitarian age. So much remains to be done to improve the condition of soldiers and ex-soldiers. It seems better to go in for some practical scheme rather than a monument.

Image: Extract of Proposals of the Indian National War Memorial Committee of Council

Source: The National Archives of India

This committee, after a thorough debate, recommended the construction of a tri-services military academy as the most suitable form of a war memorial.

Following this decision, another subcommittee was formed to study and make recommendations for the Indian Military Academy. The Subcommittee thus recommended the creation of what is now known as the National Defence Academy (NDA) with the iconic Sudan Block as its central structure.

### *Sudan Government's Gift*

159. We have been asked to submit a separate recommendation regarding the use to which the gift of £100,000 by the Sudan Government should be devoted.

This gift was made in appreciation of the distinguished Services rendered by formations of the Indian Army in the campaign in Eritrea and Abyssinia 1940-41.

We feel it appropriate, therefore, that the gift, with such additional amount as may prove necessary, should be devoted to the erection of some particular memorial building which would stand in perpetuity as the centre of the existence of the Academy, which is in itself a memorial.

Image: Extract of Recommendations of the Sub-Committee

Source: The National Archives of India

The Subcommittee included Vice-Chancellors from universities, the principal of a school, and members of all three services, including then-Wing Commander Subroto Mukerjee, who later became the Air Chief. They toured eleven military academies across the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), and Canada, studying in detail the training, syllabus, moral code of conduct, general orientation, and other aspects

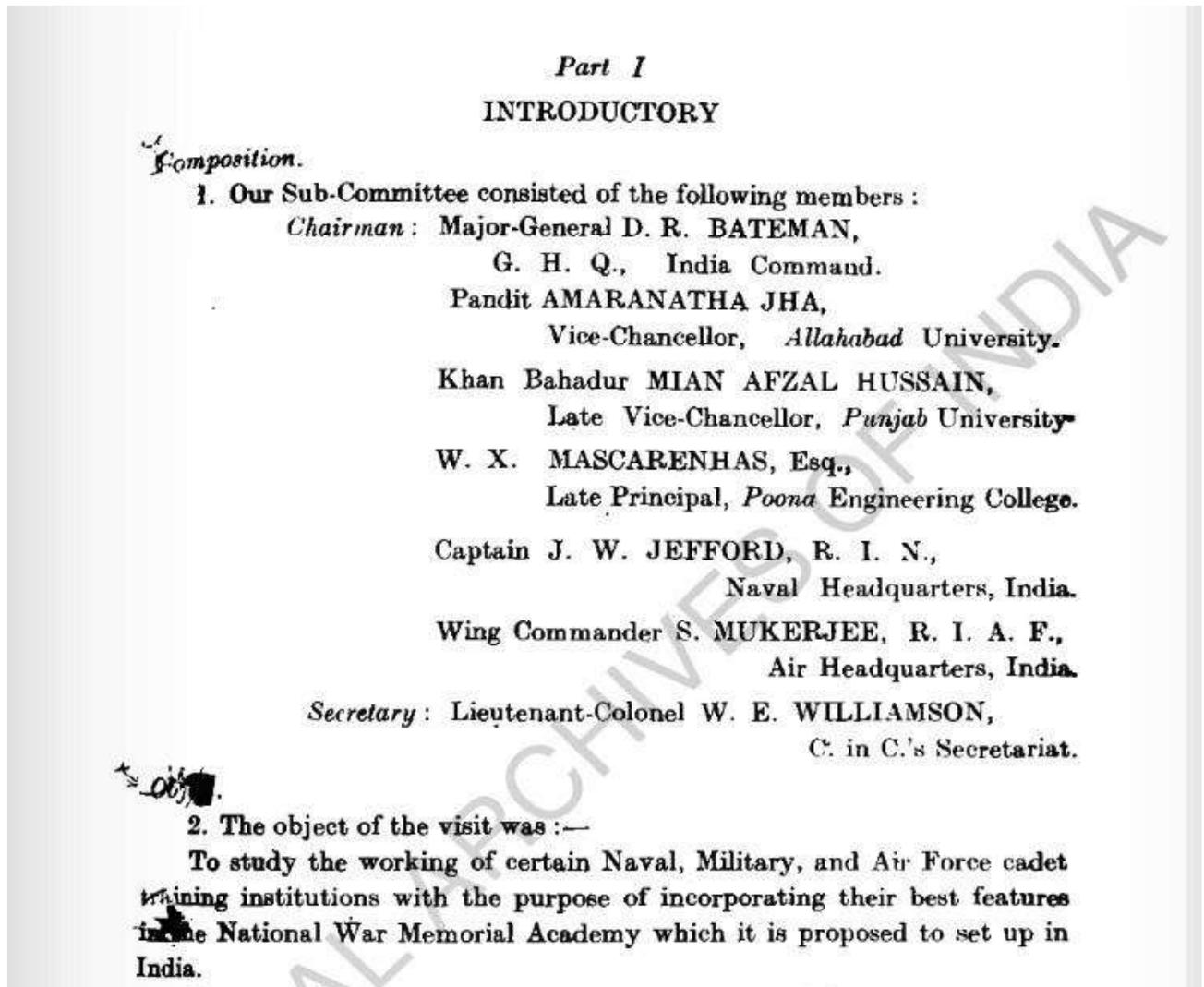


Image: Composition of the Sub-Committee and Objectives

Source: The National Archives of India

Indian Armed Forces officers, fresh from the experience of the Second World War, understood the significance of integration. None of the countries across the world then had a joint military academy. Thus, their proposal for a joint academy was novel.

5. In all the countries we visited, we found a keen appreciation of the need for close integration of the training of cadets, or young officers, for the various services.

Great interest was shown in the Indian proposal to train the cadets of all services at the one Academy. The majority of the officers, with the exception of some Naval officers with whom we discussed the proposal commended it warmly.

Image: Extract of the Report of the Sub-Committee on Military Academy

Source: The National Archives of India

In terms of integration, considerable thought and discussion went into the design of the training. To date, NDA follows this model of common training for all three services in the first two years, followed by the introduction of service-specific training in the third year.

To decide when specialisation should begin has raised many problems.

The Navy and Air Force are both acutely concerned with the necessity of providing early indoctrination and at the same time not prejudicing academic graduation.

It is well at this point to review our conception of the general purpose of the Academy which is not to produce trained officers of any Service but to offer a sound educational background with indoctrination with the fundamentals of all three Services and in particular the Service in which the cadet will be commissioned.

It is our opinion that this purpose can best be achieved by postponing specialisation to as late as possible. After careful consideration we suggest this should be done at the end of the second year.

Image: Extract of the Report of the Sub-Committee on Military Academy

Source: The National Archives of India

The training was also designed to foster a deeper appreciation of each other's perspectives. All cadets were supposed to have sufficient exposure to aviation to make them 'air-minded'. **A lack of air-mindedness is often cited as the key cause by proponents of air power when issues of jointness are argued.** Unfortunately, paragraph 148(d) is no longer part of the NDA training. It is perhaps worth revisiting this recommendation from 1945. The formation of the National Defence Academy (NDA) laid the groundwork for jointness among the Indian Armed Forces (the first seed of jointness).

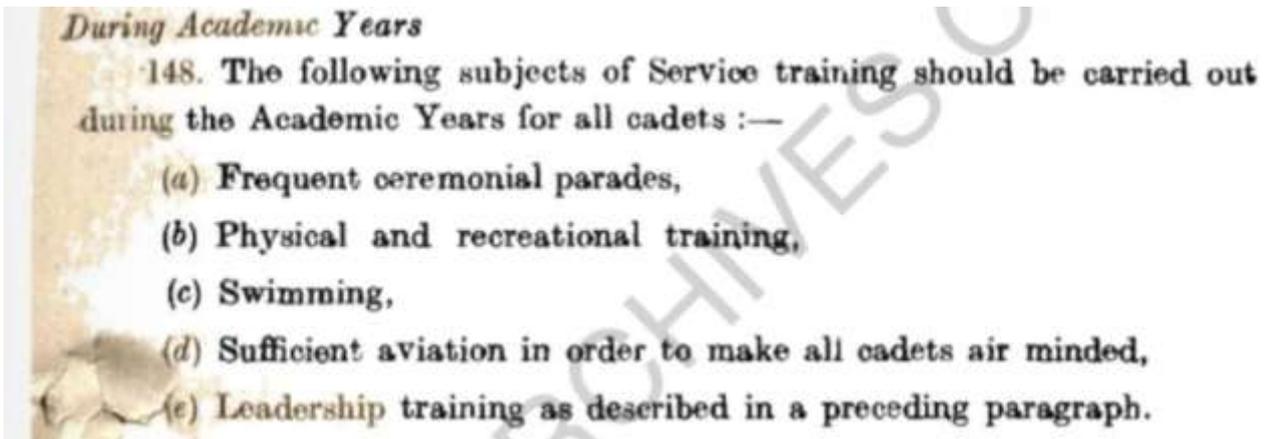


Image: Aspect of Air-Mindedness Amongst all as an Essential Training Requirement

Source: The National Archives of India

Admission into NDA was to be purely based on merit and devoid of any form of reservation, including that for the wards of ex-servicemen.

Admission to the Academy will be governed by merit alone. The working committee of the NVA has decided not to reserve any vacancies for sons of personnel of the Armed Forces. The application form submitted by candidates for admission to the Academy, it has been further agreed, need not contain recommendations relating to character and suitability, but will be confined to factual information.

Image: Recommendations on Selection and Admission

Source: The National Archives of India

This gave rise to a new problem: ***How could independent India generate a pool of suitable candidates to meet the annual requirement of an intake of 700 officer cadets from across the country's diverse locations and varying income statuses when the educational setup in India was inferior?*** This led to the creation of Feeder institutes. Thus, the second seed for jointness — the feeder institutes was planted. These institutes offer joint military training right from class six onwards. The students go on to occupy leadership positions across various fields beyond the military as well.

FEEDER SCHOOLS FOR THE NATIONAL WAR ACADEMY.

Education Board's Directive to Provinces.

NEW DELHI, Jan. 27 -- The Central Advisory Board of Education has endorsed the view of the Working Committee of the National War Academy that residential schools, where boys may obtain adequate facilities for developing character and powers of leadership, should be started by provinces and States to act as "feeders" for the National War Academy.

Image: Extract of Press Information Bureau Release, MoD, January 27, 1947

Source: Press Information Bureau Archives<sup>1</sup>

Returning to the key question of this article, what explains the synergy during Op *Sindoor*? The answer lies in the bonhomie between the service chiefs. Army and Navy chiefs are classmates from Sainik School Rewa, and the Air Chief and the Army Chief are course mates from NDA.<sup>2</sup> These are lifelong relationships with the equivalent of a family-level bond characterised by depth and strength. People go to great lengths for each other. Both feeder institutes (schools) and NDA are Indian investments in jointness, even before independence and were pathbreaking in the world at the time of their inception. To put it differently, **India has been a pioneer of jointness in the world.** Therefore, if any shortcomings in jointness are perceived, it would be prudent to examine the training, staffing and culture at NDA and similar institutes as the source. Deviations from the core founding principles of any institution are possible as it evolves over time.

Finally, Colin Gray wrote, "*Joint, which is to say multi-service, doctrine should express a judicious melding of beliefs among culturally distinct institutions, but often it comprises more of a brute force stapling together of unlike elements than a coherent whole. So-called joint military plans and performance similarly can have the character of a shotgun marriage than of anything resembling harmony.*"<sup>3</sup> Neglecting one's own history and pursuing solutions from foreign models can lead to a stapled model of jointness or a 'shotgun marriage'. It is worthwhile to revisit the history of jointness in India, in depth, to avoid such a situation.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Press Information Bureau, Government of India, "Feeder Schools for the National War Academy," January 27, 1947, [https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/ArchiveSecondPhase/DEFENCE/1947-JULY-DEC-MIN-OF-DEFENCE/PDF/DEF-1947-01-27\\_030.pdf](https://archive.pib.gov.in/archive/ArchiveSecondPhase/DEFENCE/1947-JULY-DEC-MIN-OF-DEFENCE/PDF/DEF-1947-01-27_030.pdf). Accessed on September 24, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> "Two Coursemates, Two Classmates, Will Now Head Three Armed Force Services," *The Economic Times*, September 21, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/two-coursemates-two-classmates-will-now-head-three-armed-force-services/articleshow/113552033.cms>. Accessed on September 24, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 77.

