DOMAIN-CENTRIC PROFESSIONAL MASTERY: THE FOUNDATION OF AN INTEGRATED MILITARY FORCE

‘Professional mastery requires an excellent and comprehensive understanding of a profession’s vast body of knowledge that is complemented by the recognised ability to apply that knowledge unerringly to achieve the desired objective.’

- Dr Sanu Kainikara, Professional Mastery and Air Power Education

Military forces have been tracing a path of evolution throughout history. They have gone from being purely land based fighting elements in prehistoric times, to the addition of maritime warfighting capabilities and, a little over a century ago, accepted the arrival of military capabilities based in the air domain.

It took a very long evolutionary period for this triumvirate of military capabilities to develop and mature into coherent capabilities with distinctive characteristics. The evolution of military forces in the three distinct physical domains has occurred at a steady and appreciable rate of progress.

In the past few decades, strategy, technology and concepts of operations have combined with the changing characteristics and conduct of war to create an undeniably accepted need for the military forces to function in a ‘joint’ manner. This change in the rudimentary basis of the employment of military forces did not come as a sudden revelation, but was the result of understanding hard-learned lessons from successful as well as disastrous operations and campaigns. Accordingly, the evolution in the development of military forces gathered speed and the rate of change was far greater than in the past. Joint military operations, the hallmark of competent military forces for the past several decades, are inherently complex to plan and execute. However, the effects that are created by a joint operation far outweigh those that can be created by a single-domain force under the same circumstances.

The need to conduct joint operations brought to the fore the multifaceted nature of the command and control structure that is necessary to be activated in order to achieve the desired effect optimally. Joint operations also highlight the less than optimum understanding that the different domain-centric Services had of each other’s capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. These two issues were recognised as the fundamental challenges to be addressed and ameliorated in order to ensure that the advantages that accrue with joint operations can be harnessed effectively. It was also felt that efficiently conducted joint operations would put less strain on the military forces.

Prior to the advent of air power as an element within the military forces of a nation, the compulsive need to conduct joint operations to ensure optimum efficiency was not very high. Air power, by its very characteristic of being an ‘envelope element’ makes it imperative for military forces to be joint in their application. Time and again it has been proven that joint operations provide the most effective way to create the necessary effects to achieve laid down objectives. In recent times, modern military forces have adapted the concept of joint operations to create an even better force, by attempting to
integrate the three different domain-centric elements into a holistic force, tailored for a particular mission, campaign or operation. The application of this adaptation is still in its infancy and has a number of challenges to overcome.

So, how is an integrated force created? What are the fundamental building blocks that a joint force must have before it aspires to become an integrated force? The answers to these questions are complex, as will be the transition of a joint force to an integrated force. The basic requirement will be for a military force to have achieved truly joint status and capabilities before integration can be contemplated. This itself is easier said, and written about, than practically achieved.

At the outset, it must be clarified that becoming an integrated force does not mean that the independent Services become subsumed into one entity. In fact, the requirement to succeed in integration is just the opposite. The unique characteristics of the three domain-centric forces—land, maritime and air—have to be well-honed and maintained at a high level of competence before any attempt at integration is to be made. Only after achieving this milestone can an individual Service start to contribute meaningfully to an integrated force. On the face of it, this assertion might seem paradoxical, but even a quick analysis will bring out the fact that the understanding and application of the unique capabilities of domain-centric forces, suitably adapted, is the cornerstone of an integrated force.

In order to achieve the necessary competence to adapt the core characteristics of a domain-centric force, a soldier, sailor and/or airman needs to be a professional master of his or her individual domain. In other words, only after achieving professional mastery of the single Service domain can an individual aspire to transcend into a different and higher level of competence necessary to deal with the complex requirements of an integrated force.

Professional mastery is a concept that has been, and continues to be, discussed and debated by almost all military forces. At the basic level, professional mastery is the ability of an individual to perform an assigned task optimally and to the highest level of competence necessary to deal with the complex requirements of an integrated force.

Only personnel who have achieved domain-centric professional mastery, either an individual or a collective group, have reached a level of competence when they understand the nuances in the development, application and sustainment of the power generated by the systems that operate in their domain. Further, professional mastery permits them to visualise and apply their domain-centric competence to creating integrated effects in an optimum manner. At the higher levels of command and direction from government, professional mastery also indicates the position and stature of the integrated force vis-à-vis other elements of national power and the national security calculus. The holistic application of force—lethal or otherwise—by an integrated military force is completely underpinned by domain-centric professional mastery resident in independent Services.

In the 21st century, a single domain-centric military force is a complex system of systems, demanding in-depth conceptual understanding and technological know-how of the systems by all personnel. While the minimum required professional mastery could be laid down, single Service mastery is dependent on the proficiency of the entire force. Only a force that has achieved collective, single domain-centric professional mastery will be able to seamlessly dovetail with the other Services to create the desired integrated effects to ensure national security. National security, from a military perspective flows from the foundation of single domain-centric professional mastery.

**Key Points**

- In the past few decades, the changing characteristics and conduct of war have created an undeniable need for the military forces to function in a ‘joint’ manner.
- Time and again it has been proven that joint operations provide the most effective way to create the necessary effects to achieve the desired national objectives.
- Domain-centric professional mastery is a foundational requirement for a military force to become truly integrated.