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Joint Commanders' Conference 2026: India Frames New Doctrine for Cyber, Space & Cognitive Warfare

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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Joint Commanders' Conference 2026: India Frames New Doctrine for Cyber, Space & Cognitive Warfare

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WHY IN NEWS

The **second Joint Commanders' Conference**, themed “**Military Capability in New Domains**”, was held at the **South Western Command Headquarters, Jaipur**, on **May 7–8, 2026** — timed to coincide with the **first anniversary of Operation Sindoor**. Defence Minister **Rajnath Singh** and CDS **General Anil Chauhan** presided, alongside the chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

WHAT IS THE JOINT COMMANDERS' CONFERENCE?

The Joint Commanders' Conference is a **high-level tri-service conclave** bringing together the political leadership (Defence Minister), military leadership (CDS, Service Chiefs), and theatre/functional command commanders. It serves as a platform to:

- Review India's evolving security environment and threat landscape
- Align military strategy with the Government's foreign and defence policy
- Unveil new doctrines, operational concepts, and capability road maps
- Accelerate integration of the three services toward jointness and theatre commands

The first edition of this conference was held in **Lucknow in 2025** (post-Operation Sindoor), where India first articulated its shift toward a **rapid, decisive retaliation doctrine**.

KEY OUTCOMES OF THE 2026 CONFERENCE

1. *New Warfare Doctrines for Emerging Domains*

New doctrines were released covering India's approach to:

DOMAIN	KEY CONCEPTS
Cyber Warfare	Offensive and defensive cyber operations; protection of critical information infrastructure (CII); adversary network disruption protocols
Space Warfare	Counter-space capabilities; satellite protection; space situational awareness; dual-use space assets
Cognitive Warfare	Information warfare, psychological operations (PsyOps), narrative management; countering disinformation as a strategic tool
AI in Military Operations	AI-driven targeting, logistics, ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance); autonomous systems in tri-service ops
Unmanned Systems	Drone swarm doctrines; counter-UAS frameworks; integration of drones and loitering munitions in joint operations

2. Aatmanirbharta in Defence

A central focus was on **accelerating indigenisation** — developing a robust **civil-military fusion** ecosystem for defence innovation. Key thrust areas:

- Faster absorption of iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) products into frontline units
- Expanding the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) with strategic partners
- Reducing import dependency in ammunition, electronics, and naval systems

3. Operation Sindoor as a New Benchmark

Rajnath Singh called Operation Sindoor “**a defining model of modern warfare**” — noting that India had achieved:

- **Air superiority in under 72 hours** (per US defence analysts)
- Successful integration of **Rafale (SCALP/HAMMER), BrahMos**, drones, and loitering munitions
- First simultaneous use of **electronic warfare suppression, cruise missiles, and air-launched precision bombs** in a combined tri-service campaign

The operation is now being studied as a **case model** for India’s military doctrine going forward.

BACKGROUND: INDIA’S DEFENCE JOINTNESS DRIVE

India’s push toward **tri-service integration and joint commands** has been underway since the creation of the **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** post in January 2020, following the Kargil Review Committee recommendations. Key milestones:

YEAR	MILESTONE
2020	CDS post created; Department of Military Affairs (DMA) established
2021	Draft Theatre Command framework proposed (maritime, air defence, land)
2022	iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence) accelerated post-Russia-Ukraine learnings
2023	Agnipath scheme; integration of AI in ISR operations
2024	Inaugural Joint Commanders' Conference (Pune)
2025	Operation Sindoor — real-world test of tri-service jointness; 1st post-Sindoor conference (Lucknow)
2026	2nd conference (Jaipur); new domain doctrines released

WHY THESE DOMAINS MATTER: UPSC ANGLES

Cyber Warfare

India's critical infrastructure — power grids, banking systems, nuclear plants — is increasingly targeted. The National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIIPC) under NTRO is the nodal body. India's cyber security policy under the National Cyber Security Policy (2013; revision pending) needs urgent modernisation.

Space Warfare

India's ASAT (Anti-Satellite) capability was demonstrated in **Mission Shakti (March 27, 2019)** — making India the 4th country globally to demonstrate ASAT capability. The Defence Space Agency (DSA) was established in 2019. India's satellites — for navigation (NavIC), earth observation (Cartosat, RISAT), and communications (GSAT) — are strategic assets requiring active protection.

Cognitive Warfare

Pakistan's IB and ISI-linked disinformation operations — fake social media accounts, doctored videos, and falsified civilian casualty reports — were extensively used during Operation Sindoor. India's counter-narrative operations were assessed as effective, but a formal **cognitive warfare doctrine** had been absent until now.

AI in Military

India's AI-in-Defence roadmap (2018, revised 2021 and 2023) aims for 75 AI-enabled defence products by 2025. Autonomous drones, predictive maintenance, and AI-powered ISR are key areas.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Joint Commanders' Conference (2nd edition, Jaipur, 2026); theme: "Military Capability in New Domains"; CDS: Gen Anil Chauhan; 4 new warfare domains – cyber, space, cognitive, AI/unmanned; ASAT (Mission Shakti 2019); NCIIPC under NTRO; iDEX; Agnipath scheme

India's national security challenges; tri-service jointness and theatre commands; role of AI and unmanned systems in modern warfare; cyber threats to CII; space as a contested domain; Aatmanirbharta in defence

Civil-military relations in India; role of CDS and Department of Military Affairs; parliamentary oversight of defence; India's defence diplomacy

"The nature of warfare is changing faster than India's capacity to adapt – is India's tri-service integration doctrine ready for multi-domain warfare?"

FACTS CORNER – KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

Joint Commanders' Conference: 2nd edition; Jaipur; May 7–8, 2026; theme: "Military Capability in New Domains"

First edition: 2025 (first held post-Operation Sindoor as joint platform)

CDS: General Anil Chauhan (3rd CDS; took office January 2024)

Operation Sindoor described as "air superiority in 72 hours" and "benchmark for modern warfare"

4 new domains covered: Cyber, Space, Cognitive, AI/Unmanned Systems

NCIIPC (National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre): under NTRO, MHA oversight

Mission Shakti (March 27, 2019): India's ASAT test; 4th country globally after USA, USSR/Russia, China

Defence Space Agency (DSA): est. 2019 under IDS (Integrated Defence Staff)

iDEX (Innovations for Defence Excellence): under DIPAM; funds startups solving defence problems

Civil-military fusion: key concept from Xi Jinping-era China's MCF policy; India developing its own model

Sources: [PIB – Joint Commanders' Conference](#), [Business Standard – Op Sindoor benchmark](#), [DD News – Joint Commanders Jaipur](#)

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Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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