

Strategic Discourse on the
People's Republic of China
Military, Power and Politics

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Military, Power and Politics

Edited by

Lt Gen Gautam Banerjee

Foreword by

Gen NC Vij, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM

Director, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi



Vivekananda International Foundation
New Delhi



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and Politics

Editor: Lt Gen Gautam Banerjee

Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi

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Foreword



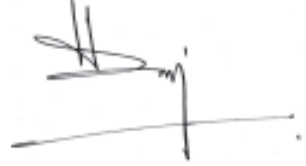
China's nearly three decade long march to superpower status has ever been an interesting object of study and analysis among the China-watchers as well as the strategic community in India and abroad. That interest is a corollary to China's rise in the global economic equation and its traditional propensity to back up its regional ambitions with hard diplomacy, economic allurements and finally, military power.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) today is a global player, an influential one at that, its outreach second only to the superpower, the United States of America. It is India's great neighbour, and a powerful one at that. But regrettably, the PRC carries an innate wariness of India, viewing the latter as a challenge to its regional hegemony. It therefore needs no emphasis that every diplomatic, economic or strategic step that the PRC takes, assumes significance in India's context.

We, the scholars, analysts and mentors at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), New Delhi, are committed to understanding China's ambitions, compulsions and misgivings, and do our bit to assuage the perceptive differences. To that end, the VIF undertakes wide-ranging studies and analyses of various facets of endeavours that the PRC is intent on and publishes objective papers for the strategic community to peruse.

This Book, *Perspectives on the People's Republic of China* is a compilation of some of the notable papers authored by eminent scholars of the VIF, its purpose being to bring these analyses to the readership

in one compact volume. I am sanguine that the effort put in by us would be of value to the readers.



New Delhi
March 2017

(General N C Vij), PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd)
Director, VIF,
Former Chief of the Army Staff &
Founder Vice Chairman, NDMA

Preamble

Notwithstanding the centuries old religious and cultural relationships, India and China have never really been geographical neighbours. On ground and in all intents and purposes, that situation actually prevailed in the Indo-Tibet context, till the People's Republic of China (PRC) asserted its effective sovereignty over the entire Tibetan landscape and its hapless people. Thus within a span of just two years in the early 1950's, China's shadow of neighbourhood fell upon India. Regrettably, that shadow, instead of bringing solidarity, shattered the centuries of peace that the Himalayas had bestowed upon the Indian Sub-Continent.

PRC is our great neighbour, and a great power much in excess of India's not so inconsequential global status. It is ruled with a firm hand by its communist-autocratic regime which sets its own codes, exclusive norms of behaviour, brooks no opposition and is not shy of using force to have its way. That such a power finds in India a competitor and an obstacle to its regional hegemony is indeed a burden India must bear. The foremost endeavour in that context would be to know the Chinese strengths, vulnerabilities and aspirations, the purpose being to seek reconciliation with these, accommodate when possible and stand up when unacceptable.

This book is a compilation of perceptions that noted China watchers have come to register from gestures, promulgations, publications and actions made by the PRC in the recent years. Obviously, due to limited visibility of PRC's quests and intents, papers presented in this book had sometimes to be tinged with subjective analyses of known facts and informed inferences.

It is hoped that the book would serve its purpose to propagate deeper understanding of our great neighbour.

Jai Hind.

March 2017

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1

India–China Relations: Problems and Prospects

Kanwal Sibal

Rise of China: Challenge or Opportunity?

China's extraordinarily rapid rise in the hierarchy of global power is raising concerns about its future policies. The opinion is divided whether China will increasingly assert its power in disruptive ways or will act more responsibly as its own stakes in the international system grow. Arguments can be made for both views, though emerging signs suggest that China's self-assertion is becoming an unpleasant reality, whereas the expectation that it will work for and within a global consensus remains more a matter of hope.

A rising China presents both a threat and an opportunity. The dilemma for India, the US, Japan, the major European countries and others is how to find a balance between engaging China to build on the positives and constraining it to ward off the negatives.

China's economic and commercial expansion is making it a crucial country in global trade and financial flows. The opportunities provided by the huge and growing Chinese market cannot be ignored by governments and corporations. At the same time, with recession and unemployment in the Western countries, concerns about China's mercantilist approach, its Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) violations and resort to unfair competition are growing. The accumulation of huge

foreign exchange reserves by China has led to demands by the West of financial re-balancing, revaluation of the Chinese currency and a shift in China's export-led strategy towards the stimulation of domestic demand. At the same time, with the Eurozone in crisis, China is being wooed to invest in European securities to alleviate the sovereign debt crisis there.

China's growing military strength has been a natural fallout of its phenomenal economic growth in the last thirty years. The weight of the PLA in decision-making in the country has caused a muscle-flexing by China sooner than expected. The political fiction of China's peaceful rise is being exposed by its aggressive maritime claims in the South China Sea as well as stepped up claims on the Indian territory, causing great anxiety in its neighbourhood.

Sino-Indian Relations: A Brief Overview

India, with a geographical contiguity with China since its occupation of Tibet in 1950–51, is directly affected by the various dimensions of China's rise. Its dilemmas are somewhat sharper than those of others because of this contiguity and the nature of the issues involved in the relationship.

India's China problem began with its failure to properly assess the security implications of the takeover of Tibet in 1950 by Maoist China. For the first time in history, a political and geographical buffer between China and India was being removed. In the absence of a formally demarcated border in the western sector in Jammu and Kashmir and China's position on the McMahon line in the east, its occupation of Tibet should have warned us of the dangers ahead.

Within 12 years of its entry into Tibet, China imposed a border conflict on India, whereas without territorial contiguity the two countries had no conflict between them for thousands of years. In fact, they interacted culturally very productively over centuries through the spread of Buddhism in China. The Indian and Chinese civilisations even marked the wider space between them without conflict or rivalry – the culture of South-East Asia – and even gave this region the name of Indo-China.

The 1962 border conflict came as a political shock to India as India had bent over backwards ever since its own independence and the

Maoist revolution in China to reach out to the communist regime and accommodate it bilaterally and regionally, whether by immediately recognising it, supporting its rightful entry into the United Nations, recognising Tibet as an autonomous region of China or holding China's hands at Bandung and helping to alleviate the fears of the South-East Asian countries of the communist take-over of this large country.

India made a crucial mistake in signing the 1954 Trade Agreement with the Tibet region of China that accepted, in effect, China's sovereignty over Tibet, without linking this vital concession to either a settlement of the boundary with Tibet or at least an agreement on the framework of a settlement. India should have anticipated that sooner or later, China would extend its physical control upto the geographical frontiers of Tibet as it perceived them or as they suited its strategic needs.

China's unilateral action in altering the ground situation by constructing the Aksai Chin road in Ladakh prompted India to hedge against further encroachments and fait accompli by extending its presence and authority in the remote areas hitherto left unoccupied. Its strategy failed with the Chinese decision to "teach India a lesson" in the 1962 border conflict which scarred India politically, militarily and psychologically.

The border issue is at the core of India's mistrust of China and the uncertainty about its future intentions. That two large rising countries should have an unsettled 4,000 kilometers plus a long border between them, is a recipe for instability, tensions and even conflict. China is deliberately keeping the border issue unresolved so that it can continue to serve as a pressure point on India. It has kept changing its position on possible solutions, entailing India into interminable discussions of principles and guidelines that it interprets as suits its interests.

Any realistic solution to the border issue has to be based on the ground realities. As the long border is not permanently manned, each side has its own view of the border areas it actually controls and this generates periodic tensions. The understanding reached between the two sides some years ago to exchange maps of their respective perceptions of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in order to identify the physical extent of the disputed areas was suddenly terminated by the Chinese side without explanation. During Prime Minister

Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003, India proposed a "political solution" to the issue, to which end Special Representatives (SRs) of the two countries were nominated and given a mandate to establish a set of guidelines (which they have done) for proceeding towards resolution. The SRs have met 19 times without any real breakthrough. On the contrary the Chinese have exploited the opening given to them to demand the transfer of inhabited Indian territory – the Tawang tract – not actually under its control to China for "political" reasons. China has in effect hollowed out the purpose of setting up the SR mechanism by expanding its agenda beyond the border dispute to the "strategic" relationship between the two countries. Meanwhile, in efforts to stabilise the relationship, the two sides have agreed to a hot line between the two leaders and a new mechanism at the Foreign Office level to contain any escalation of incidents at the border. India and China have also agreed to a maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean area with piracy in mind.

In 1962, China withdrew from Tawang and the rest of Arunachal Pradesh largely to what is the McMahon line, thereby de facto accepting its validity. In the western sector, it did not go back to the pre-1962 line and retained the fruits of its aggression. If it needed to hold Tawang for religious or security reasons or felt that its legal claim was rock solid, it would not have withdrawn. 50 years later to demand the cession of Tawang, exposes China's chicanery. China can, if it wants, solve the border issue on the same basis as it has done with Myanmar, Russia as well as with the Central Asian countries, with very nominal territorial adjustments.

The extent of Chinese cynicism is reflected in its specious claim on Tawang because of its Tibetan links and the fact that one of the earlier Dalai Lamas, an institution that it has tried to destroy politically, was born there. Its pretense that it raises the Tawang issue in deference to the Tibetan sentiments flies in the face of the Dalai Lama's public position that Tawang belongs to India as well as the 2008 Tibetan revolt against China's rule. The current incidents of self-immolation by Tibetan monks in the larger Tibetan region testify to the deep alienation of the Tibetan people with the Chinese rule. Instead of seriously negotiating with the Dalai Lama to resolve the festering issue of denial of political and cultural rights of a distinctive people and the

suppression of their separate identity, the Chinese are using Tibet as the platform to make territorial demands on India.

Unfortunately, India is unwilling to politically back the Dalai Lama out of concern for the repercussions of such a policy on India–China relations. There is no international pressure either on China to negotiate with the Dalai Lama. China can revile him as a “splittist”, even when he has publicly reaffirmed on various occasions his acceptance of the Chinese sovereignty and has limited his demand only to real autonomy. An honourable deal between China and the Dalai Lama is good for China, Tibet and India–China relations.

With China’s unwillingness to settle the border issue and our incapacity to force the issue, India has tried to stabilise the situation on the border as much as possible through the Agreements on Maintaining Peace and Tranquility and on Confidence Building Measures in the 1990s. These have contained but also frozen the border problem to India’s disadvantage. The status quo favours the side not anxious for change. India wants peace on the border but also wants a border settlement. It suits China also to have peace as it defuses the border issue politically and militarily for the period China needs to consolidate its rise while giving it a free hand to settle Tibet internally.

If China raises territorial issues with India provocatively, it is because China has the confidence of a stronger hand. Militarily, China has advantage on the border because of the easier terrain on its side and vastly better infrastructure that now includes a railway line to Lhasa for easier and quicker movement of troops and war materiel. In the western sector, it holds a line beyond its own claims. In the eastern sector, it withdrew voluntarily in 1962 to its present position and now claims more territory as part of “meaningful” territorial adjustments. It plays the Tibet card against us without any complex, as all its claims on us are on Tibet’s behalf. It is undeterred by the fact that its own position in Tibet is contested by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people.

Unlike Pakistan’s position vis-à-vis us, India has not made the resolution of the border dispute a pre-condition for normalizing bilateral ties with China. This gives China reduced incentive to reach a settlement. While we may see our approach as mature, constructive and contributing to peace, the Chinese could easily view it as yielding and conciliatory. China thus profits from our diffidence believing that

time is on its side. Its posture on the border keeps us off-balance politically and militarily, while imposing economic costs on us, all of which retards our nation-building effort.

Periodic reports of China making incursions into our territory raise jitters in India, recalling the trauma of 1962. To defuse the political fallout, the government defensively claims that the incidents are confined to areas where the two sides have differing perceptions about the LAC. The rational approach of delineating the respective perceptions on the map, identifying the pockets of overlapping claims and then proceeding to find a solution have been rejected by the Chinese. The “political” approach proposed by India in 2003 has perversely allowed China to increase its appetite by claiming territory not under its control, with the result that the SRs are not able to move forward. During his visit to India in December 2010, ostensibly to defuse mounting tensions, Premier Wen delivered the hard message that it may not be possible to ever resolve the boundary issue fully.

Rather than work to create a favourable political atmosphere for resolving boundary differences, China has poisoned it by asserting its claim over the whole of Arunachal Pradesh as a matter of principle and on Tawang in particular. The airing of this claim on the eve of President Hu Jintao’s visit to India in 2006 showed China’s scant regard for ground realities as well as Indian political sensitivities. China has upped the ante by broadening its bilateral differences over Arunachal Pradesh by raising them in a multilateral forum like the Asian Development Bank by objecting to the Bank financing a small irrigation project there.

India’s belated decision in the face of provocative Chinese territorial claims to improve the infrastructure in the border regions, activate air fields, position advanced aircraft as well as augment ground forces, has aroused reactions from Chinese analysts and newspapers. Even though it is claimed that the opinion in China is no longer monolithic, such articles cannot appear in defiance of party or governmental thinking. Some condescending commentaries have appeared in the Chinese press warning of a repetition of 1962 if India continues to provoke China by asserting its sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh. Even the break-up of India into several states has been advocated. Such writings have not appeared in China’s state controlled press for years

and some observers do not rule out China fomenting some border trouble, if only to deflect attention from mounting internal problems. If India has increased its military capacity along the border compared to the past, it is essentially defensive in character and calculated to avoid a repetition of 1962.

The water issue between India and China looms as a major point of contention in the future, given China's insistence over building dams on the Brahmaputra in Tibet and divert its waters to the water-deficit northern part of the country in what will be a colossal engineering feat. China's forays into the Indian Ocean, its efforts to establish port facilities in key strategic points there which later can be upgraded to naval facilities, its plans to obtain access to the sea through Myanmar and Pakistan in order to partially resolve its "Malacca dilemma", are all issues with a bearing on India's security.

Pakistan has been a willing pawn in China's hands to thwart India's ambitions and keep it boxed in South Asia. Without being seen as confronting India directly and generating an atmosphere of open hostility – which does not suit its strategy of presenting its rise as peaceful – it lets Pakistan do this. By making Pakistan nuclear and giving it weapon delivery capability, China has neutralised India strategically within South Asia itself. Pakistan has been given the means to continue its politics of confronting India without India being able to retaliate militarily even though it enjoys conventional military superiority.

By building up a countervailing military power in India's neighbourhood, China has used Pakistan to prevent India from exerting its leadership role even within South Asia. China opposed the India–US nuclear deal on the ground that it was discriminatory to Pakistan. The depth of its strategic commitment to Pakistan is demonstrated by the fact that contrary to its NSG obligations, it has announced the decision to build two additional nuclear power plants in Pakistan. It wants to give Pakistan the benefit of international civilian nuclear cooperation without going through the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) process and without imposition of non-proliferation conditions on it, even though that country has become the hot-bed of terrorism, Islamic extremism and clandestine nuclear proliferation. It is widely suspected that civilian nuclear cooperation with Pakistan is a convenient cover to continue assisting it in its strategic programmes.

While indirectly questioning India's sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir by issuing stapled visas to residents of the state or those associated with it officially (a practice China states it will discontinue but the political point has already been made), China deals with Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and the Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) area as if the Pakistani sovereignty there is undisputed and secure. It is getting involved in massive road-building and hydel projects, disregarding Indian objections. India cannot but see the increased Chinese footprints in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, which includes the Northern Territories, as a threat of military encirclement in the J&K, especially as India and China are already in confrontation in the Aksai Chin area. Our Army Chief has publicly expressed concern about the presence of three to four thousand Chinese, including the People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops, in POK.

With energy security and the unrest in Sinkiang in view, China has begun to look at this territory illegally occupied by Pakistan with even greater strategic interest than before. The Uighur separatists can be kept under a watchful eye from there, while through Gwadar oil and gas from the Gulf can be transported to the bordering Sinkiang. China can link up its interests in Afghanistan too through this contiguous area. China would therefore want Pakistan's hold over this region consolidated economically and legally.

While massive infrastructure projects help achieve the former goal, questioning and contesting India's legal status in J&K serves the latter objective as it puts India on the defensive and erodes its *locus standi* in challenging Pakistan's illegal possession of POK and GB. With its new stakes in mind, China aims to become an inescapable factor in any India-Pakistan final settlement of the Kashmir issue, with the objective, in such an eventuality, of denying India any future role in the Pakistani-held territory.

Moreover, by entrenching itself in this region firmly, China would want to be able to protect its strategic investment in it, should the Pakistani state slide increasingly towards failure. China will not make such large investments in the POK if it did not intend to eventually protect them diplomatically and, if required, militarily. China protests if international institutions fund even minor development projects in Arunachal Pradesh on the ground that it is "disputed" territory, but

does not apply its own logic to the development projects of magnitude that it is funding in the POK.

With its increased political, economic and military weight, China is stepping up its presence in countries around India. In Afghanistan, China intends investing heavily in the mineral sector and in a railway link. It is likely to accept an opening to the Taliban as an insurance for the stakes it is developing in Afghanistan within the framework of its strategic relations with Pakistan.

China has used a judicious mix of propaganda about Indian hegemony, the natural sense of insecurity of small countries under the shadow of a large one, religious and ethnic differences as well as economic and military assistance to add to the pressures on India from within the region. In Nepal, it is becoming more assertive in demanding an equal treatment with India in terms of our respective treaties with that country. With the Maoists now a powerful political force in Nepal, and given their ideological compulsion to be seen as drawing Nepal closer to China, coupled with their periodic statements calculated to inflame public opinion against India, the political terrain has become more favourable for China. This can only make India's task in handling Nepal more difficult.

China's position in Bangladesh is entrenched. Even Sheikh Hasina's friendly government would see it in its interest to maintain close ties with a rising China and the benefits that can bring, including giving India an incentive to woo Bangladesh more. China has earned the gratitude of the Sri Lankan government by supplying it arms that helped in defeating the Tamil rebels. Sri Lanka, along with Myanmar, Bangladesh and Maldives, are targets for China's naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean area to protect its vital lines of communication through these waters. The so-called "string of pearls" strategy, with commercial goals in view in the short term and military goals in the longer term, includes construction of new port facilities in select countries. To promote these objectives China is bound to step up further its engagement with these countries, especially with increasing material means at its disposal, posing further challenges to India's interests in its neighbourhood.

China's penetration of Myanmar, its expanded presence in Iran and economic domination of the Central Asian countries, all present a

regional scenario for India that would limit India's future margin of manoeuvre, politically and economically.

Analysing India's Engagement with China

China's policies and conduct tax the Indian government's effort to temper domestic reaction and maintain a friendly posture towards its northern neighbour. There is some disconnect between the government's positive, and even exonerating, discourse on China and the general public sentiment towards that country. The government may be right at one level to pursue an accommodating approach as India cannot afford to have tense borders with both China and Pakistan. If China needs peaceful borders for pursuing its development goals, India needs them even more. We have two inimical neighbours which are collaborating to contain India strategically. Tensions with at least one of them have to be reduced to the extent possible so that the military, political and economic burden on India is lightened. The government has allowed economic contacts to develop with China to the point that the country has become our largest trading partner in goods. China has exploited this Indian compulsion by pursuing a policy of containing India under cover of engagement, of touting a strategic partnership while gravely undermining us strategically, of inducing us to accept politically that it does not pose a threat to us and yet threatening our territorial integrity as well as our vital interests in our neighbourhood. If India's soft policies on China continue, China can conveniently treat India as a tactical piece in its larger design of deflecting concerns about its frenetic rise as a formidable power.

The settlement of the border issue would open doors wide for an across-the-board cooperation between the two countries, but China obviously does not see the need for combining our respective strengths to alter the global landscape to our advantage. China wants to keep India under pressure, give itself space to browbeat it when required and put it in a position where it has to appeal to Chinese goodwill for securing its international ambitions as was the case when India sought China's support in the NSG for international civilian nuclear cooperation and for its bid for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. China wants to slow down as much as possible India's rise to regional and global status.

Many arguments can be made in favour of not only normalisation of relations between India and China, but a strong entente between the two. Imagine the two most populous countries in the world, with two-fifths of humanity between them, growing energetically at close to double digit figures, integrating themselves rapidly with the global economy, with increasing claims on the world's resources to fuel their future growth, having a community of interest in tackling the problems at the forefront of international concern, – environment, climate change, terrorism, religious extremism, pandemics, UN functioning, etc. – working in tandem on the global stage. This would shift the global balance of power decisively towards Asia. But Sino-Indian differences have greater debilitating effect on India as compared to China as the gap in our respective national power has widened. China can offer economically more and it can intimidate more. It has a certain vision of its own preeminence and the romantic notion of two Asian giants working together to change the global landscape appeals little to the authoritarians in Beijing.

China's handling of its differences with India makes sense from the Chinese point of view. It has the upper hand on the border and its military infrastructure there is far superior. It already possesses large swathes of Indian territory. The economic gap between the two countries, already huge, is growing. China's economic integration with the world is far deeper than India's, giving others much greater stake in it as compared to us. It has successfully contained India by bolstering Pakistan against us with nuclear weapon and missile technology transfers. It has insidiously used other neighbours to prevent India from consolidating its leadership in South Asia. If it settles the border issue with India, it will release India from a two-front bind, supposedly expose Pakistan to increased Indian pressure at a time when it has become more vulnerable, lose leverage with other neighbours of India who will move into the Indian orbit more decisively and free India to pursue its regional and global ambitions more confidently. This would inevitably be at the cost of China's pre-eminence in Asia and at the global level. China may think it has more to gain than lose by a policy of thwarting India even as it engages it.

India too is engaging China but lacks the resolve to look for options for containing it. We cannot seek to contain China alone. We can of

course build up our military strength, especially our strategic capability against China. This in time will help to “contain” Chinese ambitions. But we need to immediately join hands with others who too fear China’s rise and the resurgence of nationalism in the country.

China reacted strongly to the attempt some years ago to build a quadrilateral arrangement between Asian democracies- India, Japan, Australia- along with the US, with Singapore thrown in. Australia retreated quickly, followed by Japan. President Obama began to talk of a better geopolitical balance in Asia. India has to play a sophisticated game of hedging its bets against China in a pragmatic manner. Apart from strengthening relations with Japan, South Korea and Vietnam, India has to reinforce its Look East Policy as much as possible. Increased cooperation with the US Navy in the Indian Ocean would be part of containing the disruptive consequences of a rising China that is territorially expansionist and one that is at times accused of having a 19th-Century balance of power outlook.

Formulating a policy towards China that finds the right balance between engagement and resistance is not easy. We are obliged to engage with China as it is fast on the road to becoming the world’s number two power. The balance of power in Asia has already shifted towards it in a significant measure in the last couple of decades. Its inroads into the Gulf area, Africa and Latin America are now giving it a higher global profile. It has become the world’s biggest exporting country; it has accumulated huge financial surpluses which it is using to secure access to raw materials across the globe, those that it needs to fuel its future needs. Its spectacular economic growth continues even as the advanced industrial countries are in the throes of a serious economic depression, tilting global financial power in its favour, especially as the US’s financial health has become unduly dependent on China’s investment of its surpluses in the US securities. It is not surprising that China’s position as a global manufacturing hub and its export overdrive have had a sizable impact on neighbouring India too, as China has become India’s largest trading partner in goods.

As part of its engagement strategy, India holds a regular high-level political dialogue at the bilateral level, including a bilateral strategic dialogue of sorts. India also engages with China in multilateral groupings such as the Russia-India-China dialogue and the Brazil-

Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) dialogue. At the last BRICS summit held in New Delhi,, consensus could be reached by India, China and the other three countries on a greater representation of emerging and developing countries in global governance; concern was shared about the economic and financial policies of the developed countries spilling over negatively into the emerging market economies. The slow pace of International Monetary Fund (IMF) quota reforms was criticised. The creation of a new Development bank for infrastructure projects in BRICS and other developing economies was discussed and an agreement on extending credits in local currency under the BRICS Interbank Cooperation mechanism was reached. All these are initial steps to obtain greater say in managing the global financial system and diluting the supremacy of the dollar, even as it is clear that progress on this will be slow and the biggest beneficiary will be China. Regrettably, Chinese reticence explains an absence of support from this group for India's (and Brazil's) candidature for a permanent UN Security Council membership. This reflects the as-yet unsettled political equations within the group that will detract from its global impact.

At the East Asian Summit and ASEAN-linked forums like the ARF, India and China are working together without mutual grating. China has now observer status at the SAARC, notwithstanding our past paranoia about China's intrusions into our geographical space. Peace and tranquility on the border are being maintained despite the periodic testing of our nerves by the Chinese in the "disputed" areas along the LAC. Bilateral Confidence Building Measures now include limited joint military exercises. The two countries cooperate on Climate Change and WTO negotiations.

China has become India's largest trading partner in goods, with bilateral trade reaching over US\$ 70 billion in 2011, expected to cross the US\$ 100 billion mark in a couple of years. The economic dimension of the relationship has acquired a new dynamic with the institutionalising of a Strategic Economic Dialogue between the two countries and the setting up of a CEO's Forum. China has become a powerful player in two vital sectors of the Indian economy – the power and the telecommunications sectors – despite security concerns. India wants to have a manageable relationship with China.

India–China trade relations have expanded phenomenally in the recent years, raising hopes that such an increase in mutual stakes may help resolve the outstanding political differences. This proposition has to be persuasively tested because the virtual economic and financial fusion of the US and Chinese economies has not ended serious political differences between the two, nor has the massive Japan–China economic relationship softened the undercurrents of the Chinese hostility towards Japan.

In our case, although bilateral trade has reached impressive figures, the ballooning trade deficit with China imposes a limit on trade expansion unless the trade becomes more balanced, which would mean China giving more opportunities to the Indian companies in its home market. Pro-China economic lobbies in India have, however, emerged with an economic giant rising next to us; there are those in India who advocate an enlightened policy of taking maximum advantage of this development for sustaining our own growth rates, with the least amount of restrictions consistent with basic security.

In many areas of manufacturing, China can now provide world class equipment – in the power and telecommunication sectors for instance – at much lower prices compared to the Western equipment. But there are security concerns about sourcing telecommunication equipment from China, though the pro-China business lobby in India feels that such concerns are exaggerated. There is wariness about allowing the Chinese companies to operate in “sensitive” areas, whether those close to our borders or near military centres and installations. China’s practice of using its unskilled and semi-skilled labour to undertake projects abroad has run into problems in India. The mounting trade deficit with China is becoming unsustainable, more so as China restricts opportunities for our IT and pharmaceutical companies in its domestic market. China’s dumping practices are another source of irritation in relations. China’s effort to corner a sizable chunk of the Indian market through artificially low priced products is threatening competition and endangering the domestic industry. China’s interest in a Free Trade Agreement with India is not looked at positively by us.

China’s strategy of integrating its provincial economies with the neighbouring regional economies, and creating the infrastructure to

make this possible, presents problems for us. China can strengthen its market presence in our neighbourhood at our cost, besides becoming a magnet for our own border regions.

At the international level, it is easier to work out cooperative strategies in Climate Change or WTO negotiations, for instance, because there is no direct clash of interests – on the contrary both countries can exert their joint weight to counter pressures from advanced industrial economies. But such cooperation in specific areas should not make us lose perspective on the total content of our relations.

Is China an Adversary?

China, as things are, is India's adversary, even if at the government level we avoid characterising our relations with our powerful neighbour in these terms. On the face of it, India has all the attributes to be in the same league as China, whether it is physical or demographic size, skills or civilisational depth. But China has outstripped India as a rising power, and the gap already existing between us will continue to grow in at least the decade and a half ahead. China is better organised, more purposeful in formulating policies and implementing them, and much less constrained by domestic public opinion.

Militarily, China has developed capacities that we will find difficult to match. China has rivalry with the US in mind, and the sinews it is developing to pursue, will take care of any developing Indian challenge. No doubt, China does not currently have access to Western conventional defence technology because of an arms embargo imposed by the Western countries on it after the Tiananmen events. It is not able to secure from Russia the kind of platforms and weaponry that Russia readily supplies to us. But it has developed an indigenous defence production base that is impressive. In both ballistic missile and nuclear weapon technologies, China has forged ahead of India decisively.

India has taken a substantial step forward in acquiring a credible nuclear deterrent capability against China with its successful Agni-V test launches. The Indian press played up unnecessarily, the China dimension of this missile, provoking Chinese press reactions to the

effect that China was much ahead of India in missile capability and warning India not to be arrogant, apart from seeking to incite Western opinion against Agni-V by suggesting that India was downplaying the actual inter-continental range of the missile. The reaction of the Chinese government has been unusually sober, emphasizing the cooperative nature of the India–China relationship and shared interests.

Agni-V should have in reality caused no surprise to the Chinese as India has been transparent about its Agni missile programme and the planned range of 5,000 kilometres. India is also developing a sea-based long range missile for its nuclear powered submarine under development. China, in any case, possesses missiles with an even longer range. Earlier, it was India that was vulnerable to the Chinese missiles and now the reverse will be true, creating a better balance in deterrence.

The US's reaction to Agni-V reflects the new quality of the India–US bilateral relations. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the US was pressing India to curb its missile programme because it was seen as destabilising. The thinking today is entirely different. While avoiding any specific disapproval of India's step, the US has lauded India's non-proliferation credentials and underlined its no-first use policy, which would suggest that India's missile advance is actually seen as serving US interests too in creating a better Sino-Indian strategic balance in the years ahead.

Even if China has a head start over India, and in terms of “national power” is much more potent than us, India's steady economic rise, its human resource, the dynamism of its corporate sector and the size of its domestic market are elements playing in our favour. India too has weathered the current global slump well. Indeed, India and China are seen as two countries that the global economy counts on for easing the strains of the ongoing economic depression by their continued growth.

India is planning to spend huge amounts in the coming years on infrastructure development, an area in which it has been deficient so far. This will erode the advantage China has at present with its highly modern infrastructure. As the labour costs in China go up, and other aspects of doing business in China begin to weigh more in the calculus of foreign investors such as the absence of a well-defined legal system, violation of IPR, lack of sufficient access to China's domestic market, etc., attention will move increasingly towards India, especially if India begins to address those physical and procedural deficiencies that

discourage the inflow of foreign investment in large volumes. Countries like Japan, which are the biggest foreign investors in China, are now looking at India.

China's export-led growth model is considered unsustainable in the long run. The question is to what extent China can control the transition to a different model without serious internal disruptions. China's mercantilist approach does not endear it to other competing countries. The West has begun to see China's rise with mounting concern. These international sentiments play in India's favour. As a democratic country, with ways of doing business with the West, it finds it more congenial, and with financial and managerial experts ensconced in Western corporations, banks and financial institutions who can mediate business and investment between India and these countries, India's growth is seen with less trepidation. In certain sectors of the knowledge economy, we have a head start over China and this advantage we will enjoy for some time. Experts are generally agreed that by about 2025, as China's economic growth slows down and ours accelerates, the existing gap between the two economies will get very substantially reduced. At the same time, India's hunger for raw materials, especially energy resources, will pit it increasingly against the Chinese competition in the years ahead. Our political leadership tries to minimise the prospects for such future rivalry by stating diplomatically that there is enough space for both India and China to grow without treading on each others' toes.

China's Assertiveness and Changing Geostrategic Scenario

In China, a politically closed system works alongside an open economic system. Political dissent is smothered, but not economic enterprise. China accepts that the West can help in the modernisation of its economy, but must not ask for the modernisation of its politics. Its politics must cling to an outdated ideology, though its economics can be heartlessly pragmatic. How can this kind of a contradiction endure in a country that is set to become the number two power in the world? When the rest of the world cedes so much space to China peacefully, is it not unreasonable for it to expect a reassuring change in how China governs itself and how it relates to its external environment?

Given China's size, its view of itself in historical terms, its claims on India, on Taiwan, in the South China Sea, its rancour against Japan, its rise has wide regional and international implications. While a policy of containing China would be imprudent, yet it cannot be given a free hand in Asia. Other players in the region have to caution China about political and other costs of seeking domination. Any initiative to that end serves India's interests even as its engagement with China continues. However, engagement does not mean acquiescence to the Chinese hegemony in Asia.

China is manifestly a revisionist power that, to begin with, wants to change the status quo in its periphery where it has the capacity to make its power felt more immediately. It has begun to flex its muscles, most notably, in the South China Sea, over most of which it now claims sovereignty. It is locked up in maritime disputes with Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines over the Spratly and Paracel Islands. It has upped the political and security ante by unilaterally declaring the South China Sea as constituting its core national interest. Its claims are based on its own version of history and legality, which, of course, is contested by its other maritime neighbours.

In the South China Sea, China has larger strategic goals. It has so far been bottled up in these waters by the chain of islands ringing it in eastern Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines. It cannot be a major naval power if it remains so confined. The blue water navy that it is developing needs unhindered access to the Pacific as well as the Indian Ocean, both to protect its vital trade and energy lifelines as well as to challenge the sway that the US Navy enjoys over these oceans, the Pacific in particular. China has plans to operate a number of aircraft carriers, the first of which has begun sea-trials. It is expanding its conventional and nuclear submarine fleet and modernising its destroyer and frigate fleet.

China must be able, initially, to deny the US the level of domination it has so far exercised in the South China Sea. The assertion of its claims in the South China Sea is a foretaste of its larger naval ambitions. As its military power grows, the balance with the US and its allies in the region will change automatically, making its neighbours more vulnerable to Chinese pressure and emboldening China to become more demanding. Already the US is concerned about the capability China is

developing to target the American aircraft carriers with anti-ship ballistic missiles, as that will make it more difficult for the US to deploy its assets close to the Chinese mainland. Consequently, the deterrence balance in the Straits of Taiwan will change.

Most recently, India has had a taste of China's claims in the South China Sea when its naval ship moving along the Vietnamese coast was warned by radio to stay away from Chinese waters. More seriously, China has objected to Indian oil exploration projects in two Vietnamese blocks by calling countries to refrain from oil exploration in maritime areas offered by Vietnam in the South China Sea on the ground of its "indisputable sovereignty" there. India has rebuffed these objections by stating that its cooperation with Vietnam or with any other country is always as per international laws, norms and conventions. India has also reiterated its position that it "supports freedom of navigation in South China Sea and hopes that all parties to the dispute would abide by the 2002 declaration of conduct" pertaining to it. At the recent East Asia Summit, India joined others in expressing concern about China's claims in the South China Sea interfering with the freedom of navigation. The Indian Prime Minister, in his talks with the Chinese Premier, has also stood his ground on our right to pursue our commercial interests jointly with Vietnam in the area of oil exploration. The Indian Foreign Minister too reiterated that the South China Sea is not the property of any one nation and is an international waterway, inviting criticism by the Chinese spokesman.

China's position on India's cooperation with Vietnam in the so-called disputed areas contradicts flagrantly its policies in that part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir under illegal Pakistani occupation, exposing the often unprincipled and bullying nature of its postures. In J&K, in an area which has seen actual military conflict, where a ceasefire is holding even though Pakistani-backed efforts to infiltrate terrorists in J&K continue, China has already undertaken strategic projects and is now believed to have signed up for a variety of infrastructure projects totalling over US\$ 50 billion. China has argued that these projects do not pre-judge the status of the territory which has to be resolved between India and Pakistan.

During his visit to India in 2010 President Obama exhorted India not only to Look East but also to Engage East, in line with the wishes

of the Asian countries to see India playing a more active role in the region. Now the call is for India to Act East. India is cautiously responsive to the US calls because it wants to avoid the risk of sharpening misunderstandings with China that developing joint strategies with the US may produce, only to find the US and China reaching bilateral understanding over India's head as situations evolve.

The US relationship with China is far more developed and mutually dependent than the India–US relationship, though the conflictual elements in the US–China relationship are much more present there than in the US relations with India, whether now or in the future. The US continues to hope that China will evolve and the potential clash of interests can be avoided. There is a counter-intuitive willingness to accept China's responsible behaviour, the legitimacy to some extent of its paranoia and the development of its military power to protect its globally spreading economic interests. The American China-watchers thus send mixed signals about the implications of China's rise.

India queries the relaxed view the US takes of the China–Pakistan nuclear cooperation. The US has chosen not to oppose the expanded China–Pakistan nuclear trade in violation of China's NSG obligations. Some US specialists explain that the US did not want to throw the gauntlet at China on this issue as it wants China's cooperation in dealing with the nuclear challenge from Iran and North Korea. The US experts in fact claim that China and India are responsible nuclear powers unlike Pakistan and North Korea. This is offensive to the Indian ears as India considers China's transfers of nuclear and missile technology to Pakistan as the greatest threat to its security – transfers that the US has deliberately kept below the its radar screen.

The US wants India to focus on the China threat in East Asia by prodding India to Act East, whereas for India, the more immediate and pressing Chinese threat is in South Asia. The US, however, remains either silent on this threat or actually distorts reality by projecting China as a responsible player in South Asia with which the US could work to promote regional peace and stability. If India had concluded that the Bush Administration's endorsement of this position and that of the Obama Administration earlier in its tenure had been repudiated, it was mistaken as Admiral Willard, the US CINCPAC Chief has spoken the same language again, even as he has referred to the reality of China's

developing capacity to target moving US aircraft carriers upto 2,000 miles away with anti-ship ballistic missiles.

India and the US are far from developing any shared view on China's stepped up claims on Arunachal Pradesh, the expansion of its military infrastructure in Tibet, its river water diversion plans there, its strategic moves in Myanmar and Pakistan to gain access to the Indian Ocean, the future of the institution of the Dalai Lama, etc. India's territorial integrity is under threat from China and Pakistan combined, but, unlike in the case of China where the US endorses the principle of China's territorial integrity, there is no similar expression of support for the territorial integrity of India.

While China's rise is a threat that has to be addressed constructively, it also has to be considered that China too has its options curtailed because of the export dependence of its economy. It needs world markets for maintaining its growth rates as well as internal political stability in view of the social fractures caused by grossly unequal distribution of wealth between the urban and rural areas that has accompanied the phenomenal expansion of its economy in the last decade in particular. To achieve their goal of modernising the Chinese economy and achieve middle-income status, the Chinese leaders claim they need a couple of decades more of peace. During this period, however, while maintaining the fiction of its peaceful rise or development, China can build up its military power steadily. With every passing year, the options available to others to restrain China would become fewer and a *fait accompli* being established under their very noses would have to be accepted. Western democracies, unlike China's closed door political system, have electoral cycles, public expectations and, most importantly, the bottom-lines of their corporations that make them more disposed to make concessions to China under the convenient garb of investing in peace and stability.

Concluding Observations

China presents the biggest strategic challenge to India in the years ahead. In Asia, India and China are the biggest countries geographically and demographically. On the face of it, rivalry and competition between the two seem inevitable. The two countries are rising at the same time, although China's rise began more than a decade

before India's and it has been faster. There is now a considerable gap in the economic and military strength of the two countries, and this gives China more options on the international stage and an upper hand for the time being in its dealings with India.

With such large economies registering sustained high growth rates, with India growing at high single digit figures and China enjoying double digit growth, access to resources has become important, and this importance will increase in the years ahead. China has moved ahead very fast in tying up international resources while India has lagged behind. There is no collision yet with China but this could occur as India steps up its efforts.

As India catches up with China in rates of economic growth, as many studies show it will in a decade or so when the Chinese growth levels are expected to go down, China's sense of rivalry with India is likely to become sharper. For the time being, China considers the US as its principal rival for power, undoubtedly in the Asian region, if not beyond. This implies that China is taking for granted its leadership of Asia. In such a scenario, China will resist any effort by India to contest its primacy. China's current disregard of India as a serious challenger is an indicator of its regional outlook. When India is seen as becoming one, China's thinking and intentions in relation to India will be stress-tested.

Notwithstanding globalisation and interdependence that call for cooperation rather than confrontation and a search for win-win situations rather than zero-sum games, a rivalry for power is unavoidable between states. China is particularly problematic on this score because it is nursing historical grievances and is territorially expansionist. The lack of democracy in China makes the situation more difficult for other countries in the region and beyond as the Chinese decision-making process remains opaque and the public sentiment about policies pursued by the government is difficult to assess.

China's spectacular economic growth cannot but be accompanied by growing military strength. China can well argue that its expanding international interests require it to develop the means to protect these interests by deterring interference by others, as otherwise it will always remain vulnerable to external pressures. Under cover of this rational argument China can expand its military strength, as it is in the course

of doing. It has powerful nuclear and missile capability, with more potent missiles being tested. It seems on course to build a blue water naval capability for force projection and to be able to protect its long lines of communication stretching across the Indian Ocean. It has now ample financial resources for expanding its military budget. Its growing military power has already begun to cause concern.

As part of its hedging strategy, India holds regular naval exercises with the US in the Indian Ocean as a joint effort to protect the sea-lanes of communication. Combined naval exercises are held with the US and Japanese navies too, the strategic import of which could not be lost on the Chinese. We now have a strategic dialogue with Japan. India has agreed to an India-US-Japan trilateral political dialogue. We are stepping up our relationship with Vietnam.

China's rise is a reality that India and others have to deal with. The challenge has to be met without confrontation or appeasement. India must create space for itself to target China's sensitive spots, even as we engage the country, for the strategy that China follows towards India. The ultimate answer for India's China challenge, of course, is to develop its own economic and military sinews as rapidly as possible, as well as strategies of cooperation with the US and others concerned about China's muscle-flexing in the future, while, at the same time, maintaining its independence of action.

For all the reasons outlined earlier, our dilemmas in dealing with China are particularly acute. As modern nations India and China have different conceptions about their international role. The two countries have marked differences in temperament and outlook, and these have a bearing on the future. Unlike the Chinese, we are not a competitive people, we do not think in grandiose terms, we are not power-conscious, we are tolerant of dissent, we are less dominated by the state, and we are not as regimented and disciplined. Our dilemmas with China, apart from stemming from power equations, reside also in the differences of mentality.

2

Have the Chinese Core Interests Increased?

Ashish Sirsikar

A Matter of ‘Core Interests’

The intense debate over China’s core interests is a 21st Century phenomenon as prior to that there was no/limited reference of the same. It is only in the last decade or so that, discussions on “Chinese Core Interests” have gained momentum. While the specialists on the subject have still not come to an agreement as to what exactly are the Chinese core interests, they are also debating the reason for China’s enunciation of its core interests and the strategy that it is employing for upholding of the same. In addition, what specifically should be of interest to India is, whether any of the Chinese core interests are in conflict with its own interests? This piece attempts to throw some light on these issues as well as tries to find some answer to these questions.

Before delving any further on this piece though, it is imperative that an understanding of the term “core interests” be developed. The same would be essential for an understanding of this piece in the right context.

Understanding the “Core Interests”

An attempt at defining the “Core Interests” would hugely limit the scope of the term. Instead of the same, it would be better to develop

an argument about what the “Core Interests” really are and thereafter, build the remainder of the piece based on this argument. Most analysts feel that core interests are those interests which are integral to a nation’s belief. They are so important to the nation that, they could at times, even affect the survival of the nation. Hence, to secure these core interests, a nation would use all the resources at its disposal including the military, and thus, could enter into a skirmish, conflict or even war with another country which threatens or actually violates these core interests. Such an understanding is largely based on the presumption that the core interests are largely associated with issues of sovereignty or territorial integrity, for their violation is easy to understand and thus respond to. For e.g., the ingress/transgress of a border constitutes a violation of territorial integrity and thus the violation of a country’s core interest. Such core interests could be construed to be defensive in nature.

This understanding though, is simplistic in nature. For what happens in cases where the territory itself is contested and the core interests of two countries are at cross-purposes with each other? In such a scenario, core interests are determined by perceptions/interpretations. Meaning, if a country perceives/interprets a territory to be its, it would treat it as a core interest and thus, contest the same. Further, what happens when the core interests are defined across a large number of subjects such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, national security, social development and stability? In such an eventuality, the core interests are difficult to decipher. As a consequence, these then have to be mostly inferred from official statements. Further, while the core interests concerning territorial integrity are easy to interpret, those concerning issues like social stability are not so easy. Added to this are other intangibles like the core interests are being associated with a “Loss of Face”. For e.g., take China’s case – post the humiliating loss to Japan, any concession on the Diaoyu Islands would be construed as a “Loss of Face” and thus, could this alone result in it becoming a core interest?

The next aspect to consider is whether the core interests are permanent or whether they vary with changing geopolitics and geostrategic realities. The moot point here being, if in real politics there are no permanent friends and enemies, could some core interests change as per the prevalent global strategic scenario? At this juncture, it is

important to understand that, some core issues concerning undisputed territorial integrity are permanent (unless borders are redrawn), but other core issues may or may not remain so over a period of time. Another aspect to keep in mind is that, while it is fine to have core interests, the ability to uphold these depends on the power that a country wields and its global stature at that time. The point being, the countries which become powerful enunciate the core interests openly and go about upholding these, while others, who are not, do not enunciate them on the count that it is futile to enunciate those core interests that cannot be upheld.

The enunciation of core interests also enables a country to draw red lines which indicate the amount of concession that it would make on a critical issue of interest. The interesting aspect herein being that, such an enunciation facilitates the achievement of one's core interest through deterrence. It goes without saying that deterrence is only possible when backed by capability. While we have discussed the defensive core interests earlier in the piece, another interesting aspect are the offensive core interests. As countries become powerful, their core interests grow larger in number. This is on account of the fact that to support their growing strategic requirements their areas of interest grow wider and, thus, their core interests shift off-shore or grow offensive in nature. What is important to note is that, defining a greater number of core interests gives the countries a greater elbow space on the global power table. Needless to say that all such core interests are covered under the garb of some basic defensive core interest like territorial integrity, the case in point being China's core interest of "territories of South China Sea". It goes without saying that such offensive core interests would be upheld by the use of force as the increasing amount of force available in itself, was one of the premises on which such a core interest was enunciated in the first place.

Having developed this understanding of core interests, let us now develop this piece further.

Inference: The Chinese Core Interests

Prior to the white paper on China's Peaceful Development published in September 2011 which clearly lists out China's core interests, the Chinese core interests (*hexin liyi* in Mandarin) had to be inferred on

the basis of an assessment of said/unsaid Chinese official statements. One such comprehensive interpretation of the Chinese core interests has been done by Michael D. Swaine in his 2010 paper on the said subject.¹ In the paper, the author has brought out that in the last century, the Chinese used to refer to their “core interests” as “major national interests”. The repeated and regular use of the term “core interest” was only done by the Chinese in the early part of the 21st Century around the year 2004. Before going any further, let us briefly have a look at the chronology of the development of the Chinese core interests.

It is seen that, starting around 2004, the Chinese officials, scholars and state-run news organizations increasingly began using the term “Core Interests” to refer to sovereignty issues. These references were initially attributed to Taiwan on account of the island’s purported demand for independence made by the former Taiwanese President Chen Shuibian, possibly with US backing. As concerns Tibet, the Chinese officials have over the years been claiming Tibet to be a part of China. The same is evident from the initial 1992 white paper on Tibet which states that “there is no room for haggling” on the fundamental principle that “Tibet is an inalienable part of China”.² However, the official use of the term “Core Interests” as concerns Tibet began in 2006, when the then PRC Vice President Zeng Qinghong used it in his meeting with Mr Wickremayake, the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.³ Similarly, Xinjiang was officially termed as a core interest for the first time in 2006 during President Hu Jintao’s speech in Pakistan.⁴ Hence till 2006, the Chinese use of the term “core interests” was primarily concerned with Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang only.

Then in July 2009, Mr Dai Bingguo, a top Chinese foreign policy official at that time, advanced a much wider definition of the Chinese core interests. Mr Dai Bingguo during his closing remarks at a session of the annual United States–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue stated that the Chinese core interests include three components: i) preserving China’s basic state system and national security; ii) national sovereignty and territorial integrity; and iii) the continued stable development of China’s economy and society.⁵ Despite this, Michael Swaine had argued in his 2010 paper that the Chinese core interests were primarily concerned with the issues of “sovereignty and territorial integrity” as Chinese officials had more often than not referred to the

core interests in reference to these issues only. Hence he maintained in his paper that the Chinese core interests were primarily related to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang only.⁶ He had thus in his analysis excluded other issues from the list of Chinese core interests, notable among them being the Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands and the territories in the South China Sea.

The Core Interests Enunciated by China

As already brought out, the Chinese core interests prior to 2011 had to be inferred due to the lack of them being clearly enunciated in black and white. It was only in September 2011, that the Chinese Peaceful Development policy paper formally for the first time officially enunciated the Chinese core interests. It states, "*China is firm in upholding its core interests which include the following: state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development.*"⁷ This definition builds on Dai Bingguo's definition and has a fairly large scope. It goes beyond the basic issues of "sovereignty and territorial integrity" argued till date to include issues such as national security, China's political system, social stability and the ensuring of sustainable economic development.

Subsequently in July 2015, China further enhanced the scope of its core interests by passing its National Security Law. Article 2 of this law states, "*National security refers to the relative absence of international or domestic threats to the state's power to govern, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major national interests, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security*".⁸ A linkage of the National Security Law with the Core Interests was given by Ms Zheng Shuna, Deputy Director of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress while speaking at a news conference.⁹ She said, "Our National Security Law is to maintain the core interests of the nation and other major interests. For safeguarding national core interests, China has repeatedly said that we adhere to a peaceful path of development but will never give up our righteous interests and sacrifice the core national interests".¹⁰

Hence, though the security law does not explicitly mention the term “Core Interests”, if we take its interpretation of National Security along with the elaboration of the same given by the Deputy Director and thereafter read these in conjunction with the white paper on China’s Peaceful Development policy, it becomes clear that the scope of Chinese core interests has further broadened substantially. This is so on account of the fact that, while the policy paper on China’s Peaceful Development terms “National Security” as a core interest, the National Security Law gives a wide definition of “National Security” which besides including a number of issues also includes the term “other major national interests”. Such a broad-sweeping term could practically include most things under the sun as and when required.

Hence, while the Chinese core interests have been enunciated in black and white, they have been done so in broad and ambiguous statements. For e.g., what do we construe as Chinese core interests from the terms “national security”, “social stability” and “the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development”? These are broad terms which cover a whole gamut of issues. These broad core interests are difficult to decipher and thus an attempt has to be made to infer the specific Chinese core interests from these broad terms. This would be done in a later stage of the piece.

China’s Strategy for Upholding its Core Interests

The Chinese strategy for upholding its core interests varies between that of taking an uncompromising and vocal stance, to that of maintaining an absolute stoic silence. For example, during 2004, when Taiwan was making noises towards achieving independence, the Chinese through high-pitched rhetoric managed to convey an impression that the issue of Taiwan’s independence was of paramount importance to them and it would be denied at all costs. Such an impression was created by the Chinese officials using phrases such as China will “never yield” or “will not haggle or bargain”.¹¹ Such a stance is also evident through Hu Jintao’s “Four Never” on Taiwan – “Never Sway, “Never Give Up”, “Never Change” and “Never Compromise”.¹² Another contemporary examples of such a strategy are the Chinese media statements post the DPP’s outright victory in the Taiwanese General Elections of 2016 which said, “Taiwan should abandon its

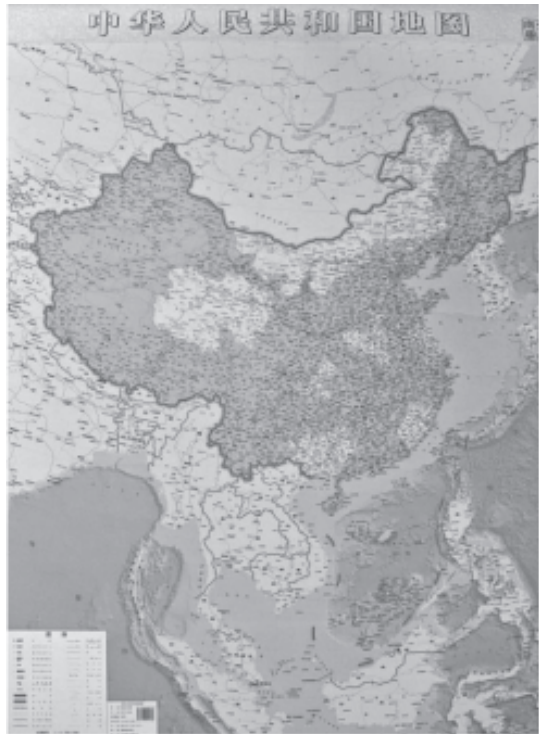
“hallucinations” about independence, as any push toward that outcome would be “poison” and “Tsai should keep in mind that if she revisits Chen’s dangerous path to cross the red line of cross-Straits relations, she will meet a dead end”.¹³ Contrary to this, right through the latter part of 2015, when the South China Sea dispute got heated up and there was a fear of the South East Asian countries aligning with the US on this issue, China backed off from its aggressive stance and started maintaining a stoic silence.

Interestingly, both these strategies present a significant pay off to China. An aggressive upholding of its core interests sends a signal that it is a major world player which cannot be taken lightly and will not allow any dilution of its core interests. It also allows China to direct the spotlight on the issues that matter to it and are in the danger of being compromised, like it did so with Taiwan in 2004. On the other hand, by keeping silent (neither providing a confirmation nor a denial) on an issue (the South China Sea dispute) that it had earlier pursued aggressively, Beijing is able to i) maintain flexibility in its approach to the dispute; ii) prevent any domestic accusations that China is adopting a weaker stance; and iii) deny that it is taking unilateral actions or escalating tensions.¹⁴

While this applies to the inferred Core Interests that are external, as regards internal “enunciated” and “inferred” Core Interests, China upholds these extremely aggressively. This aggressive intent can be clearly seen from the passing of the much-debated National Security Law¹⁵ and the controversial Counter Terrorism Law¹⁶. Both these laws have been passed to preserve national security as also neutralise the threat posed by the East Turkistan Independence Movement (ETIM) which is seen by China as a threat to its core interest of Xinjiang. Another example of such intent is the fast paced manner in which Xi Jinping is undertaking the modernising of the PLA, which as we are all aware, is going to be essential for the upholding of the Chinese core interests, both on and off its shores. What also comes out from the Chinese usage of the term “core interests” is that, from the beginning of the 21st Century, the Chinese officials have regularly used the term for achieving diplomatic leverage. The same is evident from the use of the term in the “Taiwanese” context. The principal intent of using this term was to pressurise the countries with a differing perception on Taiwan to accept

China's position on this important issue. Hence during the period post-2004, China continuously tried to include the term "Core Interests" in the US–China joint statements, so as to commit the US to accept in writing the Chinese position and sensitivities on Taiwan.¹⁷ A success on the same was achieved during President Obama's visit to China in 2009, when the US–China joint statement said, "the two sides agreed that respecting each other's *core interests* is extremely important to ensure steady progress in U.S.-China relations".¹⁸ Considering the fact that this statement was said in the context of respecting each other's "sovereignty and territorial integrity", as also, in the previous paragraph, China had stressed that "*the Taiwan issue concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity*",¹⁹ the Chinese position on Taiwan was well driven home. Consequent to this, having understood the nuanced Chinese approach on this subject, the US officials have been careful not to include the term "core interests" in any of the future joint declarations.

Having seen the enhanced scope and definition of the Chinese Core Interests as well as the Chinese strategy of upholding them, let us now seek answers to two questions – "Have the Chinese Core Interests Increased?" and "What exactly are the Chinese Core Interests?"



Source: Hunan Map Press/Xinhua.

Have the Chinese Core Interests Increased?

While discussing the impact and effect of China's National Security Law, Edward Wong in his *New York Times* article has pointed towards the fact that the Chinese Core Interests have increased by stating, "Under the new definition, as stated by Mr. Dai and reiterated by Ms. Zheng, the term does encompass the South China Sea and any other sovereignty issues of importance to China (think Arunachal Pradesh in India, and the islands in the East China Sea that Japan calls the Senkaku and China calls the Diaoyu)." ²⁰ One also has to keep in mind that prior to this in 2014, the Chinese authorities had unveiled a new map which showed the totality of Beijing's territorial claims. On that occasion, giving elaborations about the map, the People's Daily had stated that "citizens can fully, directly know the full map of China", while the editor of the map press that published it had said, "Readers won't ever think again that China's territory has primary and secondary claims". ²¹ In the above-quoted *Washington Post* piece, Ishaan Tharoor had brought out that China map included Taiwan, Spratlys and Paracels (the two main archipelagos of the South China Sea), a 10-dash line (as opposed to China's earlier nine-dash line) which encircled most of the South China Sea and the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh which China claims as part of "Southern Tibet". ²² While Arunachal Pradesh would be examined later in the piece, at this juncture, let us examine the disputes of the Diaoyu islands and the territories in the South China Sea slightly more.

Since 2010, Chinese claims to the territories in the South China Sea have seen periods of vociferous claims of sovereignty followed by periods of silence. However it is also seen that, since 1948, at different points of time, China, by issuing South China Sea maps containing 11 dash, 9 dash and 10 dash lines has also not given up its claims on the sovereignty of the territories in the South China Sea. This fact is also kept alive by high-ranking Chinese officials claiming at various points of time that the territories in the South China Sea have been an integral part of China. The same is evident from President Xi Jinping's speech in Singapore in November 2015 in which he said "...islands in the South China Sea have been China's territory since ancient times". A similar analogy applies to the Diaoyu islands. Following a period of silence, these islands have again been referred to as a part of Chinese territory

by the Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei who in a regular press briefing on January 12, 2016 said “The Diaoyu Island and its adjacent islets have been an inherent part of Chinese territory since ancient times. China’s determination to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity is unswerving.”²³

In view of all that has been discussed above, it strongly appears that the Chinese core interests have increased and are not limited to the three core interests (namely Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang) only, which have been generally referred to till date. If that be the case, what then can be said to be the Chinese Core Interests?

Summation of the Chinese Core Interests

On the basis of an examination of the existing literature on the subject, Chinese official statements and writings, and enunciated Chinese Core Interests (China’s Peaceful Development Policy and National Security Law) the author of this piece has attempted to infer the likely Chinese core interests. The same are listed in the following paragraph along with a brief explanation of the reasons for the selection of each of these as core interests.

Chinese Core Interests could be said to include:

- (1) The Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of China – which refers to the present territory of China to include the core interests of Tibet and Xinjiang. The same is inferred on account of the enunciated Chinese core interest of “territorial integrity”, as also, the fact that as far as Tibet and Xinjiang are concerned, it is now an undisputable fact that they are considered by most to be an integral part of China and China would do whatever it takes for them to remain so.
- (2) Taiwan – this core interest can be inferred from the enunciated Chinese core interests of “reunification” and “territorial integrity”. In addition, the Chinese officials have repeatedly referred to Taiwan as being a part of the Chinese Mainland as well as spoken of the unfinished agenda of its reunification with the Mainland. It is also a well-known fact that China has threatened to invade Taiwan if Taiwan declares independence.
- (3) Maintaining the Primacy of the CPC – this *ibid* core interest can be inferred from the enunciated Chinese core interest of

upholding "China's political system established by the Constitution".

- (4) The Diaoyu Islands and Territories of the South China Sea – The inclusion of these disputed territories as core interests has been hotly debated for some while now. However, it is felt that both these disputed territories are Chinese core interests on account of the fact that China has repeatedly and vociferously claimed these disputed territories to be an inherent and integral part of the Chinese territory right since ancient times. Further, due to China seeing these disputed territories as a part of its own territory, on account of the fact that it has enunciated "territorial integrity" as a core interest, it is therefore implied by China that, these disputed territories are also its core interest. Besides this, the enunciated Chinese core interest of "National Security" has an extremely large scope and could be used at an appropriate time to further justify the inclusion of these two as a core interest. For example, it could be justified that the loss of these disputed territories (i.e. Diaoyu and territories of South China Sea) is detrimental to the "Chinese National Security interests" and hence on this count too, they could be considered to be a Chinese Core Interest.
- (5) Maintenance of Economic Growth – This is inferred to be a core interest on account of the fact that to secure the enunciated Chinese core interests of "overall social stability" and "sustainable economic and social development" it would be imperative to "maintain economic growth". Also, the lack of economic growth could lead to social instability which in turn would threaten the other core interest of the "primacy of the Party". Hence it is seen that the maintenance of economic growth is crucial for the upholding of three of the enunciated core interests. Further, after seeing the benefits of maintaining an astounding economic growth for three decades, the Chinese have understood the inescapable need for the same. Another indicator that this interest is a core interest comes from the fact that, to uphold it, the Chinese state is controlling the economy as well as launching strategic initiatives like One Belt One Road (OBOR) in support of the same. It is therefore inferred that the "maintenance of economic growth" is a core interest and it has to be upheld at any cost.

The above list of the Chinese Core Interests is the author's inference and can by no means said to be decisive or conclusive.

The Chinese Core Interests and India

Having seen the likely Chinese Core Interests, we are faced with another obvious question—is there a conflict between the Chinese core interests and Indian interests?

The obvious first point to deliberate upon would be Arunachal Pradesh as it is inextricably linked with the Chinese core interest of Tibet. As concerns Arunachal Pradesh, China's blow-hot-and-cold policy towards it is nothing new. While there have been periods of silence on this contentious issue, these have been harshly broken by China calling Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet" and also undertaking other related objectionable incidents, all of which have concerned India no end. A prime example of such related objectionable incidents has already been brought out earlier in this piece, wherein, it was pointed out that a Chinese map in 2014 had shown Arunachal Pradesh to be a part of China. Whatever had been the justification of the same, it cannot be denied that by the printing of the stated map, China had staked a claim to Arunachal Pradesh on the premise that it was a part of Tibet and thus a part of China. Other examples of related objectionable Chinese actions are its representation against Prime Minister Modi's visit to Arunachal in February 2015,²⁴ blocking aid meant for Arunachal Pradesh development projects²⁵ and issuing stapled visa to two Indian athletes from Arunachal Pradesh.²⁶ What is also not a coincidence is that, on some occasions, Beijing has referred to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as a "Disputed Zone". This Chinese position on Arunachal Pradesh largely stems from the fact that the India–China border, as of date, has remained unsettled and hence is open to interpretation. If this be the case, then should Arunachal Pradesh also be included in the list of Chinese Core Interests?

While the Chinese actions related to Arunachal Pradesh are disturbing, the present assertions by the Chinese authorities on Arunachal Pradesh are not so vociferous and forceful as they are in the case of the Diaoyu islands/territories of the South China Sea. Terms like "Non Negotiable", "No room for maneuver" or "No room for compromise" have not generally been used in the Arunachal Pradesh

context. Thus, as of now, it would be fair to infer that Arunachal Pradesh may not be inferred as a Chinese core interest. This notwithstanding, the Chinese sensibilities on Tibet are well known. In addition, what stops the Chinese from changing their posture on Arunachal Pradesh in the future and construing it as a core interest? Therefore, until the India–China border is permanently settled, the Chinese posture on Arunachal Pradesh needs regular and careful monitoring.

Another Chinese core interest likely to affect India is the “territories in the South China Sea”. Though India has steered itself clear of the South China Sea dispute as it believes that the affected parties should resolve the dispute amongst themselves, it strongly believes in upholding the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. This it feels is extremely essential and vital to its interests. However, in light of the recent deployment of the Chinese fourth-generation HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) on Woody Island in the Paracels, as also, the fact that this spring, an international tribunal in The Hague will rule for the first time on the validity of China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea, future Chinese actions in the South China Sea are hard to predict for most. As a consequence, in the eventuality of any restrictions being imposed upon the freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, the Indian trade and other interests in the South China Sea would stand to be greatly affected. Hence, designation of “territories in the South China Sea” as a Chinese core interest does affect Indian interests and India should be rightly concerned on account of the same.

For upholding the Chinese core interest of “maintenance of economic growth”, energy security has to be ensured. Despite China launching a number of projects in order to reduce its energy dependency on the Malacca Straits, the same is unlikely to happen in the near future. In view of the same, to uphold this core interest, the Indian Ocean Region will remain an area of strategic interest to China and it would aim to secure the same by the addition of new pearls (such as Djibouti) to its already heavily laden string of pearls. The obvious implications of the same on India need no further reinforcing.

However, besides the above implications, the most important area of concern for not only India but the whole world goes beyond a simple analysis of the Chinese core interests. For the past few years, the Chinese

have been constantly talking about a new kind of “Major Power Relationship” and striving for recognition as a global power next only to the US. In view of such Chinese aspirations, the Chinese action of enhancement of the scope of core interests, inherent in which is the consequential increase in the number of Chinese core interests, should in itself, be seen as a case of “testing of the waters”. As the world accommodates a greater number of Chinese core interests, it is no secret that the Chinese strategic space and influence keeps increasing. The question therefore facing us is: by how much more would the Chinese enhance the scope of their core interests, and thus consequently, how many more Chinese core interests would the world accommodate? The answers to these questions are difficult to predict. As of now though, there is an inescapable necessity of questioning the wide scope of the enunciated Chinese core interests, as well as of constantly reading, interpreting and inferring the future enunciations of the Chinese core interests, so as to be able to join the dots and draw a picture of the future Chinese strategic outlook and behaviour.

Conclusion

“We judge ourselves by our intentions. And others by their actions”. This unfortunately is the bitter truth. At times, leave aside intentions, even actions are misleading. While, some of the Chinese core interests inferred/interpreted by the author in this piece could be argued against, what cannot be argued against is that, over the last few years, there has been a continuous enhancement of the scope of the Chinese core interests. The question which therefore confronts us is “What is the reason for the Chinese to continuously enhance the scope of their core interests?” The answer to this question would give us an indication of the real Chinese strategic intent for the 21st Century, which I am afraid as of now, is unknown to most!

*

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3

Understanding the Chinese One-Belt-One-Road

Prabhat Prakash Shukla

Mackinder Redux: Struggle for Eurasia after the Cold War

“Berlin-Bagdad, Berlin-Herat, Berlin-Peking—not heard as mere words, but visualized on the mental relief map—involve for most Anglo-Saxons a new mode of thought, lately and imperfectly introduced among us by the rough maps of the newspapers. But your Prussian, and his father, and his grandfather have debated such concepts all their lives, pencil in hand”.

– Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, London, 1919

The aim of this essay is to try and make sense of the developments that we have witnessed since the end of the Cold War, and the implications of the Chinese Belt-and-Road project. The central argument is that the driving force of the upheavals that have taken place is the re-arranging of the global order to take account of the waning of the old Powers, and to accommodate the new ones. The principal force behind the change is the United States, but it is not having an easy time of the re-arrangement. The Chinese proposal is one of the challenges to the US approach.

The primary focus of the re-arrangement of power is Eurasia, and that is where the historical sweep reflected in the Mackinder quote above and the current struggle for power is playing itself out. Sir Halford Mackinder, to give his full name and title, was among the first

to put forward the proposition that the Eurasian land-mass was controllable by land and by sea, but that in the 20th Century, the land powers would prevail over the sea-based ones, thanks to the advent of the Railway on a continental scale. This is the hypothesis that he advanced in 1904, and is what the Chinese strategy of One-Belt-One-Road gives effect to, and will thus be a test for Mackinder. Offshore from Eurasia, however, in the Pacific Ocean region, the maritime powers still hold sway and look set to continue their dominance. Nonetheless, here as well, the Chinese have a rival strategy, which is the 21st Century Maritime Silk Route.

This essay first looks at the theoretical and historical evidence concerning the land and sea powers. It then looks at the US strategies aimed at preserving the dominance of the maritime strategy, of which it is the guarantor. It then examines both the military and economic means by which this power is sought to be preserved. Next, it looks at the Chinese response, and tries to detail the One-Belt-One-Road plan that it has been promoting as a way of breaking the US global reach, based as it is on its maritime power. Finally, it considers the role of countries like India, Russia and Japan, which are among the countries most actively involved, and most directly affected by the outcome of this power-play.

To begin at the beginning, Mackinder advanced two important hypotheses in his original essay, "The Geographical Pivot of History", written in 1904. The part that is most quoted is the proposition that the dominant power in East Europe [or Eurasia, or the Pivot Area – these expressions are not coterminous] would dominate the Heartland [or the Euro-Asia continent], and would, in turn, dominate the world. This is clearly wrong, and a hundred years of history after the piece appeared bear witness to this reality: the former USSR dominated the pivot area, but did not succeed in dominating the world. But Mackinder's main point, related, and still relevant, was different. This was that, with the advent of the Railway, the superiority of the maritime powers would gradually be eroded. The maritime powers had held sway over global affairs since the end of the 15th Century, and this would be challenged in the Eurasian region by the land-based transport that the Railways represented. This has never really been tested; but the role of the Berlin–Baghdad Railway in the First World War – it was not completed in

time for use by the Germans – was clearly seen as a threat by the British. The territorial arrangement that they fashioned after the War ended provides evidence that they recognised that a land link from the heart of Europe, Berlin, to the heart of West Asia, Baghdad, would seriously undermine their maritime dominance of the area.

Breaking up the Ottoman Empire into mutually antagonistic smaller states meant that it would no longer be possible for the ruler in Istanbul to bring a vital territory under the sway of an enemy, as had happened in the years prior to the First World War. For good measure, the Hapsburg empire was also broken up, and a Serb-dominated state – the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes since 1919, Yugoslavia after 1929 – was established between Germany [and a neutralised Austria] to the north and Turkey to the south to further safeguard against the territory coming under hostile sway – hostile, that is, to the British. For long, historians have played down the importance of the Berlin–Baghdad Railway in the run-up to the First World War, and the emphasis has been on portraying it as the war that nobody wanted, but drifted into. This was never true, and countries, especially countries with centuries of statecraft behind them, do not simply drift into wars. Material now available corroborates that several of the main actors, Germany in particular, knew what they were doing in seeking to bypass the Suez Canal, and this was well understood by the British and the French. The opening quote from Mackinder shows that, once the War was over and the British had won, they could write frankly about it, and express the fears that they had about land links from Berlin to the east.

What has happened since the collapse of the USSR in 1992 is that the Pivot area of Eurasia is now open to power play by outside forces in a way it has not been since the late 19th Century, when the Russian Empire established itself there – to be followed by the former Soviet Union playing the same geopolitical role. In fact, from a historical perspective, Russia, as the former USSR, played two additional important roles since 1945. One was to keep Germany divided, and the military interventions in 1953 [Berlin], 1956 [Hungary], 1968 [Czechoslovakia] and even 1981 [Poland] had this as their aim. And we saw in 1989 how the British and the French sought to persuade the Soviets to continue to play that role, and keep Germany divided, once the Berlin Wall came down. The second was to keep the Balkans stable

under an arrangement that made Serbian power the dominant element in the region.

This is the right place to introduce a more recent study on the Berlin–Baghdad Railway. This is the book by Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin Baghdad Express*, which contains the following observation:

“A special report commissioned by the French army intelligence concluded the new Baghdad concession to be the work of Moltke the Younger at the German General Staff with a view to opening a German line of communication “from Hamburg to the Far East, by way of Berlin, without passing the Suez Canal, that is independent of British influence’.”

A footnote adds: “Much as the Germans themselves would have loved this to be true, the Russian and French complaints omitted a crucial fact. The Balkan ‘Orient Express’ section of the Berlin-to-Baghdad line had a long section winding through Russophile Serbia, as the Central Powers would be reminded to their chagrin in 1914.”

[From Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express*, Penguin 2010, p. 46].

This brings together the principal geostrategic elements of the narrative, and describes the elements of the geography of Eurasia that was established after the First World War, and refined after the Second – the principal difference being the physical division of Germany after the latter.

Historically, there have been three countries in Europe that have challenged the German drive for power. These have been the Russians to the east, the British to the west, and the Serbs to the south. The Russians kept Germany’s eastern ambitions in check, the British controlled the seas around Germany, and the Serbs prevented the territorial link with Turkey and beyond. This was the territorial arrangement that emerged from the First and Second World Wars, and this is what was shaken up by the emergence of a united Germany in the early 1990s.

What has happened since the fall of the Berlin Wall is illuminating. The most important outcome has been the destruction of the Soviet Union. This has had the effect of unfreezing the geostrategic space that it was occupying, most importantly the area that makes up the

heartland, particularly Central Asia. The China–Europe [Levant] land route was used in medieval times for trade purposes, and has come to be called the Silk Road, because one of the important items of trade was Chinese silk. It was displaced by the seaborne trade after the major voyages of discovery of Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus, and this ended the Silk Road traffic. To be more precise, the land connection was severed by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and hence began the search for the sea routes to India; even Columbus was searching for a route to India.

It is striking how, almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term Silk Road saw a major revival. The most enthusiastic proponents of this concept have been the Chinese, and they have offered the region not one but two Silk Roads, one on land and one at sea. The Russian power was much diminished, at least as long as Yeltsin was President. And this enabled the destruction of the Serbian power in the Balkans, with not just the destruction of Yugoslavia, but the splintering of the Serb populations throughout the region, and under alien control, in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular. The role of Russia under Putin is discussed later in this essay, but for now, it is enough to assert that the dictates of geography make it impossible for Russia to play the kind of role the Empire or the USSR could play, with both the European and Central Asian parts lost, and its links with the Balkans broken by the entry of Romania and Bulgaria into the NATO.

As for Britain, it is facing problems, economic and political, of a kind it has not had to deal with for centuries. There is the problem of Scottish independence, and there is no certainty that the issue has been settled with the referendum held last year. There is also the pending referendum of its membership in the EU. Since its entry in 1973, the UK has been a reluctant partner. In or out, it does not have any attractive alternatives. As far back as the 1960s, Dean Acheson had stated the dilemma – Britain had lost an Empire, and had not found a role. That challenge remains, and it, too, is no longer in a position to check the German power.

In other words, the geographic arrangements that have constrained German power since the end of the two World Wars have been whittled away. Austria is in the EU, most of the Balkan countries are now either in the EU, or are candidates, including Serbia itself. Turkey appears to

have given up on its European calling, and is focussing more actively on its Ottoman heritage, and on West Asia. This has the potential once again to complete the linkage from Berlin to Baghdad. It is worth adding that when Mackinder first expounded his views, he focused on the Railway as the alternative to the sea-based linkages. Since then, roads and pipelines have supplemented land-based linkages. The competition is still tough for land routes, since sea-based communication is much cheaper, especially for goods. As far as passenger traffic is concerned, air travel has trumped both the other modes.

The geopolitical unwinding since the end of the Cold War has set off different and rival attempts at a major re-ordering of the global power and linkages. First off the blocks were the Americans. They have, without much fanfare or publicity, begun the task of political, economic, and territorial re-arrangement.

The American Strategy

Economic Reintegration of the East and the West

First, the economic: there is a well-known passage from a 1978 speech of Paul Volcker on the “controlled disintegration” of the global economy. He was then the President of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, but was soon to become the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board in Washington. The idea of controlled disintegration was not new, and owed to the British economist, Fred Hirsch, who declared that controlled disintegration was a legitimate objective for the world economy in the 1980s. Volcker added his own view that, apart from the controlled disintegration, it was also necessary to bring about a “managed re-integration” of the global economy. This is what he did in his time at the Fed, first breaking up the oil–finance cycle, and the recycling of the petro-dollar. The reintegration was initially aimed at consolidating the western hemisphere, and then into turning the US into a Pacific economic anchor. Later – Volcker was gone by this time – in the 1990’s, the aim included integrating China into the global economy and encouraging its growth, a process that finally ended in 2008.

The new US strategy, post-2008, is focused in three directions. The first, and probably the most advanced, is the Trans-Pacific Partnership

[TPP]. This brings together 12 countries in the Pacific, including Japan, Canada, Mexico and Australia, among others; China and India are out. There is an invitation of sorts for India, which is dithering in its response – nothing new here. As far as China is concerned, even Obama, who was cautious in his choice of words when talking about that country, said in an interview to *The Wall Street Journal*, “If we don’t write the rules, China will write the rules out in that region. We will be shut out..”

The details of the negotiations were kept confidential, so there is little certainty as to what a final deal looked like. The integration is intended to be a very tight one, indeed without precedent. It will cover agriculture, services, environment, investment, labour; above all, as currently planned, it will contain a provision to enable foreign investors to take Governments to arbitration, outside national jurisdiction. This is the Investor-State Dispute Settlement [ISDS], and is under challenge from all quarters, including the US lawmakers themselves, but the final deal is not done yet. But, if it works out, it will cover some 30% of world trade. President Obama has got the Trade Promotion Authority from the Congress, and the expectation was that an agreement would have been done by the time he demitted office in January 2017.

A similar effort is under way with the EU. This is known as the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership [TTIP], and contains similar provisions as the TPP. This has made less progress than its Pacific counterpart, and it is the same set of problems, especially the ISDS, coupled with some food and cultural items, that are proving to be hurdles. But if it works out, this will cover another 30% of trade and investment flows. And in the case of the EU, there is some economic wobbliness on the part of the major EU countries with all the major ones opting to join the Chinese-sponsored Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This has been done even though the US has made its opposition explicit and public. For one thing, the Greek crisis is likely to mark some structural changes in the EU, and that may well play to the advantage of the US..

The upshot is that there is clear evidence here of what the economic aspect of the managed reintegration will look like. The effort is for the US to tie in North America with itself through NAFTA, which is already a few decades old. It will also, if the TPP and TTIP succeed, tie in the

better part [minus China] of Asia into another high-quality trade and investment arrangement. And, in similar vein, it will seek to tie in the EU as well. Altogether, this will then pull in close to 70% of the global economic activity with the US as the anchor.

There is a third – or fourth, if we include NAFTA – arm of this strategy. This is the US-sponsored New Silk Road initiative. This consists of linking South and Central Asia, and the most prominent project in this move is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India [TAPI] gas pipeline. This is an old project, and the first of the project agreements was signed in 1995, at the Head of State and Government level. The difficulty with this is that the insecurity in Afghanistan and Pakistan has made it impossible to implement. There is also the problem that, so far, Turkmenistan has not shared its seismic data with the rest of the world, so there is no assurance that there is enough gas with the country to meet its commitments to Russia and China, and still have enough to supply to India and other countries – and in quantities that make the project viable. There is, last but not least, the entirely rational unwillingness of India to have Pakistan sitting astride its energy supply lines – and without India as anchor, the project is not bankable.

That, in brief, is the US economic strategy for the coming decades. It is nothing if not bold, but the Americans have done this kind of bold re-structuring in the past, most notably after the Second World War. They have what it takes to pull it off, and most importantly, they have the markets that are deep enough to anchor all the partners. China cannot match this market depth.

Unshackling Germany

And now, a look at the security moves to match the above economic strategy. The first move concerns the revival of the German strategy that opened this essay. The reason for this move consists in two parts. The first is that the US is facing budget limitations on the amount it can spend on defence; under the last budget deal, defence spending is to be reduced by US\$ 500 billion over ten years. Even though it is the largest spender, by far, in the world on defence, there is a limit to how much it can spend. Given this ineluctable reality, and the threat of a powerful China in the east, it needs to make some changes in the West. The old NATO partners, led by the UK and France, are no longer able

to devote the same resources to military matters. Germany, on the other hand, is still growing reasonably well, and is in a position to shoulder more of the responsibility. This is what President Bush Sr meant when he addressed the people of Germany on their Unification Day and said that the US and Germany would be “partners in leadership” in the Atlantic Alliance.

This is where the restructuring of Europe fits in. Through the 1990s, it was the US and the Germans that drove the changes in the Balkans to destroy Serb power. It is well known that Germany led the process in Europe for the dismemberment of Yugoslavia with its recognition of independent Slovenia and Croatia. The choice of forces to implement this approach was also revealing; Tudjman was clearly identified with Fascist Croatia, and the national emblems, including the flag, bear a close resemblance to the Ustashi emblems. The fighting beyond, in the Middle East, is also linked to the lines of communication, among which, supply lines for moving hydrocarbons are prominent. Another striking fact is that there has been a change of guard, so to speak, along the waterways linking Europe with West Asia. In the Suez Canal zone, we had a Muslim Brotherhood Government for a while, until it was removed by the military, but the instability continues. Along the Horn of Africa and the Bab-el-Mandab, similar forces have emerged, and piracy remains a problem, though it is under better control than in the previous years.

In brief, we are seeing the land links being strengthened, and the maritime links more vulnerable than hitherto, but not yet seriously affected. The pattern resembles that of the early 20th Century, with a resurgent Germany striking through the Balkans to Turkey and seeking to go beyond, to Baghdad. The strategic rivalry over pipelines only strengthens this pattern. The pressure point is the pipelines now, not so much the rail links, and the Syrian fighting is as much over the flow of gas along pipelines from the Persian Gulf to Turkey and Europe, as over anything else. Turkey, under the leadership of Erdogan and Davutoglu, is openly boasting about reviving the Ottoman legacy. It is known to be using some of the extremist Islamic groups, specially the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant [ISIL] to try and establish the land linkage between Qatar and Turkey. In turn, it is known that Qatar is providing funds to the ISIL.

Rebalance to the East

As to the Asia Pacific, and complementing the TPP, is a security approach to the region, the Rebalance, or the Pivot. While the US has had a security arrangement with Europe for decades, the NATO, there is nothing matching that in the Asia Pacific. There are bilateral security arrangements with countries in the region, but that is proving insufficient now. The Rebalance is an effort at exploring a multilateral arrangement, which will allow different degrees of commitments; that is to say, with some countries, presumably India or Vietnam, a formal Treaty arrangement is not possible, and yet, they can and should be persuaded to play a more active role in maintaining the stability of the region. And just as the TPP does not explicitly rule out China from joining, but in effect does so, the Rebalance also keeps out China without expressly targeting that country. Of course, the US strategy suffers from a lack of concreteness, and that is probably deliberate. But that is also why countries like India have not been as forthcoming as they might otherwise have been.

There is also the doubt among several policymakers in the region as to the driving motive of the Rebalance. It is not that these countries are unwilling to work together to maintain stability in the face of a rising and assertive [not to say aggressive] China. The real problem is the lack of clarity as to where the Obama Administration itself really stands. There are, by way of illustration, some fears about whether the US is attracted to the Chinese idea of a “new kind of Great Power relations” that President Xi has been promoting. This is an undisguised appeal for a G2, and it would be good for the US to define its position on this. That would enable the other countries in the region to clarify their policy responses.

South Asia: New Silk Road

In the South Asian context, the strategy turns on Afghanistan. Here, the US plan is for Pakistan to dominate the smaller country through its proxy, the Taliban, and thus to stabilise the land routes, while ensuring that Russia is kept out. China appears to have been coopted for the time being, but the contradictions over the Uyghurs and other issues will not go away, and will not be easily resolved. Indeed, this is the strategy the Pakistanis and the Americans tried in the late 1990s

too, but keeping Pakistan and the Taliban working according to the US plans was frustrated by both those principal actors. It is not clear that things will be different this time, but this is where the US has committed its policy.

A note of caution is in order here. The stakes in these strategies are so high, and the outcome so uncertain, that there is no cohesion within any of the main countries concerned. Therefore, there will be contradictory policies occasionally, as is being witnessed with regard to the Taliban and ISIL from several of the main players, including the US. That is why it becomes important to take a long view, for then the tactical shifts and adjustments get eliminated. What has been given above is precisely such a distillation from the many policy actions that have been on display since the early 1990s.

To recapitulate briefly, the US geopolitical strategy for the future is to integrate the main economies of the Asia Pacific and Europe in a new and closer economic web; the military concomitants of this are the pre-existing NATO in the West, and the Rebalance to the East; and the pivot area of Mackinder, Central Asia is to be linked to South Asia. This last, in turn, demands better ties between India and Pakistan, and the US has strained every sinew to attain this – but without success. It will fail in this task, and needs to look at other options.

Capping this maritime strategy was a document put out by NATO in June 2011 to give effect to the new Strategic Concept. The sum and substance of this document is that the NATO will shed its land commitments after the Afghanistan pull-out, and be free to concentrate on the global level in maintaining maritime dominance, and to remain the arbiter of global affairs.

The Chinese Riposte – One Belt One Road

The most important countervailing force in the face of the above American strategy of reintegrating on a new basis has come from China. In keeping with the scheme of the earlier parts of this essay, it is appropriate to begin with another quote from Mackinder:

“In conclusion, it may be well expressly to point out that the substitution of some new control of the inland area for that of Russia would not tend to reduce the geographical significance

of the pivot position. Were the Chinese, for instance, organized by the Japanese, to overthrow the Russian Empire and conquer its territory, they might constitute the yellow peril to the world's freedom..."

[Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal*, 1904].

Barring the politically incorrect language – a failing in much of Mackinder's writings – what this implies is that China dominant in the Heartland would be as inimical to the Western interests as Russia, though he could not imagine China doing this on its own. What the last few years have made clear is that China does have its own understanding of the importance of the Eurasian region, and how it would like to see the communication lines restructured. This understanding has been converted into policy since the new leaders took power in 2012–13. After some initial efforts on the part of President Xi Jinping to establish a kind of special relationship between China and the US ["a new type of great power relations"], the Chinese have developed the One-Belt-One-Road strategy, to cover both the land and maritime domains. They are also promoting regional economic arrangements, though for the present, their efforts in this regard are confined to the Asia Pacific only.

To begin with this last, the Chinese were enthusiastic in support of several of the ASEAN proposals on regional preferential trade agreements. They did their FTA with ASEAN before any of the other major partners, and they supported the ASEAN+3 format, and even the ASEAN+6, though less gladly. But they were none too excited over the East Asia Summit, as that brought in the US [and Russia, though that was not a negative point from their point of view]. Similarly, they were happy to go along with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, as it excluded the US. But when it became clear that was not going to deliver the kind of leverage that the Chinese needed, they looked to the APEC forum for the economic leverage they sought.

Understandably, the US and Japan were less enthusiastic, as they already had their TPP discussions going then. Anyhow, using the host's privilege, the Chinese did get some forward movement on the FTA for the Asia Pacific at the last Summit in November, though it is not likely to move forward quickly. The Chinese media, including the nationalist

Global Times, admit that the future is with the TPP, and even at the official level, they have sought membership in the discussions. However, the rules of the TPP, especially with regard to the State Owned Enterprises, Intellectual Property Rights, and Labour laws, are so framed as to exclude China, unless it restructures its economy.

The reality is that the US is the only economy [the EU is too, but with more uncertain prospects] whose consumption levels are high enough to serve as an economic anchor, or locomotive. China has been trying – or at least talking about it at the leadership level – for over a decade to build up its own domestic consumption as an anchor for its growth. But the results have been disappointing, as they have been for all other East Asian economies which were export-dependent, and attempted the same restructuring. The effort to use its huge financial reserves did seem to show some early promise, but the last few months have been sobering ones for the Chinese – with the stock market crash, they have learnt that there are things money cannot fix. Thus, they have launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank with close to 60 members, including the major European economies, even though the US publicly opposed their joining in. But the economic troubles are crowding in for China, and its weaknesses and vulnerability, both domestic and vis-à-vis the global economy, are all too evident.

Moving away from the rival economic strategies, China has, in order to counter the US thrust into Eurasia, put forward the Silk Road Economic Belt, and in the Asia Pacific to counter the US Rebalance, they are promoting the Maritime Silk Road. And to confront the US-sponsored New Silk Road through Afghanistan, they are pushing the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, which cuts across the Central Asia–South Asia link.

The Economic Belt

The Economic Belt has been much talked about ever since President Xi advanced the idea in 2013, and they have put out a White Paper i to expound the details. It is ambitious, if nothing else: it envisions two land links, one through Mongolia to Russia and possibly on to North Europe, and the other through Central Asia to West Asia and on to West Europe. But it goes well beyond establishing land links. It also asks for coordination of fiscal, transport, and customs policies along

the Silk Road – as the White Paper puts it, it should “integrate the development strategies of the countries along the Belt and Road”. If this were to happen, it would exclude the US from the area and its economic activity – indeed, all through the Paper, the talk is only of Asia, Africa and Europe, and not a word about the US. There are also references in the White Paper to the need to respect the security concerns of the partner countries, and the import of these requires no elucidation. The same is also true of the Maritime Silk Road. There are also some maps, which do not lay down clearly what the land links are going to be; these maps, it should be clarified, are not part of the White Paper. There thus appear to be two complementary routes, one involving Russia, and one not. It is the southerly route through Central and West Asia and on to south and west Europe that excludes Russia, which is not, therefore, enthusiastic about these proposals.

China has also set aside a Silk Road Fund for building infrastructure as needed along these routes, of about US\$ 40 billion. The viability of the route has also been demonstrated by running trains from Xian in China [President Xi’s home town] to Spain and to Duisburg in Germany. It is said that the journey takes 7 to 10 days, or something less than half the time a ship takes. This is almost certainly going to improve as the infrastructure and customs facilities improve, and both will happen. But the trouble is with the volumes that a train can carry: the highest load so far in any goods train has been some 2300 TEU, and that is exceptional, and very rare. A large ship can carry almost ten times that number, so even if it takes thrice as long, it delivers a cargo-load that is ten times larger. Furthermore, as mentioned, the Russians have their own reservations about the proposals. The bifurcation of the two land links has already been touched upon; they also are concerned over the economic inroads that China is making into Central Asia. It is already a bigger trade partner for the region than Russia and the latter is conspicuously reluctant about the Silk Road and the AIIB – it was among the last to sign on to the Bank, for instance.

There is also the growing problem of unrest in Xinjiang. This could prove to be a serious hurdle in the implementation of these grand designs, and the 2015 Chinese White Paper on Defence candidly acknowledges the threat from Uighur separatism – as it does that of Tibet, and the drive for Taiwan’s independence. It acknowledges that

the “East Turkistan” [quotation marks in the original] forces have inflicted “serious damage” on China.

And finally, there is the question of the economics of these projects. If the EU is going to sign on to the TTIP, and/or is going to go through a period of slow growth on account of the Euro-related issues, all this investment of political and financial capital may turn out to be less than optimal. And China is entering a stage when it can no longer be profligate with its funds. Even though it has reserves of about US\$ 3.7 trillion, it is worth remembering that in just the past month, the stock markets have lost US\$ 3 trillion.

The Maritime Silk Road

The Maritime Silk Road is better defined. Much of it is no more than a recognition of the existing shipping routes, particularly so far as the Pacific area is concerned – Australasia and East Asia. But even here, there are problems brewing. Not only are there issues concerning conflicting territorial claims and overflight matters; there are also sharp differences between China on the one hand, and some of the ASEAN countries on the other. What is remarkable is that China has asserted its claim on the entire South China Sea on the basis of absolutely no verifiable claim. The Chinese’s assertion is that they explored the Sea some two thousand years ago, and it therefore belongs to them. In asserting this, the Chinese have taken over the 11-dash line advanced by the Kuomintang Government, and converted it into a 9-dash line, still claiming the entire Sea. This claim of the Chinese has been challenged by the Philippines in the International Court of Arbitration, but China has refused to accept its jurisdiction. A reading of the various versions of China’s white papers is very revealing. They have gradually moved away from endorsing the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, between 2008 and 2015. For example, in the 2011 White Paper, it said:

“China takes an active part in dialogue and cooperation in international maritime security. It strictly complies with the UN Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other universally recognised norms of international relations”.

This thought is completely missing in the White Paper released on May 26, 2015. It will not be easy for China to sell this idea if this is to be the guiding principle in its handling of maritime cooperation.

There is another interesting twist in the Central Asia–Afghanistan link. As mentioned, the US has adopted a strategy of linking the region with South Asia. This was reflected in its decision in 2008 to merge South Asia and Central Asia into one common Bureau for South and Central Asia. In pursuance of this approach, Afghanistan becomes the link between the two regions. And in establishing this link, we have had four so-called “Heart of Asia” meetings, which are also known as the Istanbul Process. The motivating idea here is that Afghanistan is to become the link between the two regions for trade, energy cooperation, and for cultural contacts. In US calculations, this serves the purpose of keeping out both the Russians and the Chinese from Central Asia. Among the more visible symbols of this strategy is the project for evacuating Turkmen gas through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India, the TAPI gas pipeline. And here is the striking thing: when China hosted the last meeting, in late October 2014, of the “Heart of Asia”, the reference to TAPI was missing.

No surprise here: if the US has a certain strategy for linking Central Asia with South Asia, China is having none of it. It sees itself as the primary potential partner for Central Asia, at least in economic terms – out of deference to Russian sensitivities, it would not like to go further for the present – and is not interested in the US linking plans either, but has its own strategies for the region.

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor

We have recently seen the announcement of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC] and this actually cuts across the links that the TAPI would establish. In short, Afghanistan is not to be the heart of Asia in the sense of linking South and Central Asia, but to be part of the joint China–Pakistan condominium, to be linked also to Pakistan–Occupied Kashmir, so as to form one continuum. Not only would this put China in a position to try and dominate South Asia, but would also, with Pakistan’s cooperation, enable it to pacify Xinjiang, and cut it off from all hostile outside forces. There is much scepticism in India and elsewhere about the viability of the CPEC, but the Chinese have

shown that where their strategic interests are concerned, they can deliver on projects that many would consider unworkable.

Other Influences – Japan and Russia

Russia

There are several other countries that will be affected by the interplay of the rival strategies for Eurasia. But two, in particular, are worth examining. The first of these is Russia. It is coming under pressure and having to make difficult choices under both approaches. The US strategy is aimed at isolating it from its European partners, economically and politically. If the TTIP and NATO enlargements go ahead, it will be a very negative outcome for Russia. Because of the pressures it is facing from the West – sanctions, isolation, low oil prices – Russia is being forced to draw closer to China.

But China also offers cold comfort. The Silk Road overland appears to have two distinct branches, as already mentioned, one that includes Russia, one that does not. This is why it has been unenthusiastic about the proposals. As recently as January, the Russian paper, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, noted that Russia was not just sceptical about the Infrastructure Bank [AIIB], but about the entire Silk Road business. The argument of the paper was that this proposal dented the Russian-sponsored Eurasian Economic Union, implying, in turn, Russian worries about its standing in the region. But because of the pressure from the west, Russia is unable to confront China. Many Russians believe that China is the real long-term threat to itself, but they have to bide their time, and hope for better days to come.

The Russians are nothing if not thorough in their strategic planning, and this applies in spades to President Putin. They, too, have a security complement to the Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. But again, the Russian military is not what it once was, and there is less to CSTO than meets the eye. There is neither the heft, nor the cohesion that would make it a factor to reckon with. In the absence of substantive benefits it can offer, the Russians have been seeking to revive another approach to Eurasia that has been tried in the past – an accommodation with Germany. Since the Russian Revolution of 1917, this bilateral relationship has caused much trouble

to the Western powers, through Rapallo and the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. But the Germans, especially under the leadership of the CDU, are not responding positively. The dispute over Ukraine serves to further isolate Russia from its Western neighbours. In turn, Russia is seeking to re-enter the Balkans through the Serbs, and there has been quite a lot of activity in the recent months between the two countries. But the results so far have been limited.

Japan

The other country is Japan. Under Prime Minister Abe, it has been up-front about its commitment to the maritime strategy as opposed to the Silk Roads. Not just opposed, it has also taken important steps to back up its assessment of the threat from the Chinese strategies. In the maritime domain, it has enforced its claim to the Senkakus, and has gradually loosened the constraints on its defence cooperation and sales of dual-use equipment. It has also openly backed ASEAN countries like the Philippines in their face-off with China. Japan was one of several East Asian countries that sent observers to the ICA hearings on the Philippines' plaint against China over the South China Sea.

Prime Minister Abe's focus on maritime issues shows clearly in his Joint Statement of September 2014 with the President of Sri Lanka. The sub-title of the statement is telling: "A New Partnership between Maritime Countries". Faithful to this charge, the two countries have set up a Dialogue on Maritime Security and Oceanic Issues, with the intention of safeguarding the shipping lines in the region and to enhance connectivity. Obviously, the Chinese are not the only ones driving this idea of maritime links. Prime Minister Abe has been open about his intention to make Japan a "normal" country. This principally means one that can play a role in defence and security matters as it sees fit. In pursuit, he has introduced changes in the legal framework that allow the country to sell dual-use technology to foreign partners, and to take part in collective defensive operations. To nobody's surprise, China has denounced all these moves.

The Indian Position

For some decades now, India and the US Pacific Command have been in dialogue with regard to maritime issues in the Asia Pacific. As a

result of the growing trade and other linkages between India and the region – since 2006, India's economic links with the East have overtaken its links with the West – it has done two things by way of policy changes. The first is what was once called "Look East", and is now called "Act East" – reflecting the changed reality. The second is a growing emphasis on the Navy.

On the first, India has increasingly shed its inhibitions with regard to its aims and motivations for looking east. Especially with Japan and the US, India has been open about preserving the freedom of navigation and overflights, as reflected in the Joint Statements issued after summit meetings between Prime Minister Modi and the leaders of the other two countries. With President Obama, Modi even went to the extent of linking Act East with the Rebalance.

With regard to the second aspect, there has been a clear effort in the last few years to concentrate on strengthening the navy. In the last few years, the navy has acquired new platforms, including a carrier, and a nuclear-powered submarine. More are under construction. The Prime Minister and the Navy Chiefs have made robust statements with regard to the freedom of navigation. India also now conducts navy-to-navy talks with a number of countries in the Pacific, while the scope and frequency of the multilateral exercises is growing. Budgetary outlays, though far from adequate, are focusing on the maritime dimension.

But there are some important issues that need to be addressed with regard to the Rebalance. On the one hand, the precise details of this, and its policy implications for partner countries, are far from clear. The Former US Defense Secretary Panetta described India as the "lynch-pin" of the Rebalance, but the whole thing slowed down since Obama's second term as President. As a result, there is no real clarity on this, although, as mentioned, the Indian and American leaders are drawing parallels between the Rebalance and India's Act East policy.

The other issue is that China has clearly placed itself in opposition to the Rebalance, seeing it as a means of countries ganging up on it to prevent its "peaceful development". For most countries in the region, it is essential that the US clearly define its position on China. And that is not happening. In fact, there are missed signals of US intent,

occasionally placing China in the position of arbiter in South Asia, occasionally suggesting that the idea of a G2 has some appeal.

And that is not all: it is easy to foresee that there will be one danger that India will be faced with in the event that it takes a more active role in the US-led Asia-Pacific strategy. That will be coercive military action on our land borders. What is more, with the de facto alliance between China and Pakistan, we shall face a two-front situation on our land borders. It would be important for our putative partners to address this contingency, before India can take the hard decisions required. The US has already recognised the McMahon Line, which it did in 1962, at the height of the 1962 War. There remains the question of the unsettled lines in our western sector, in Jammu & Kashmir. There are easy steps that our partners could take, such as depicting the Line of Control with Pakistan as per the ground situation, instead of extending the Line to the Karakoram Pass.

As to the TPP, here is a bit from the speech delivered by US Vice President Biden at the Mumbai Stock Exchange in 2013:

“There’s no reason, if our countries make the right choices, that we can’t grow together and more rapidly. The United States is negotiating major new trade agreements across both the Atlantic and the Pacific—so called TTIP in the Pacific (sic)—and here in the Pacific, an agreement that would encompass not only the Pacific Basin all the way to the Indian Ocean...”.

It could be read as an invitation to India to join the TPP, and several commentaries in the Chinese media did just that. By contrast, the Indian media more or less ignored the remarks, and continue to ignore the issue. There is little merit in the argument that the TPP is a high-quality agreement, with demands on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), labour and environmental standards; these standards will feed into our bilateral discussions anyway. The Americans have made it clear that the final agreement will be the template for future agreements. Moreover, if the TPP and the TTIP succeed, it will mean the India’s most important trade and investment partners will have joined in one huge free trade zone. India will be deprived, in that case, of export markets for its goods and services which today account for over half its total exports.

But there is a fly in the ointment, and this concerns the land routes. As the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan took place, the power play around that country is causing concern in India. Not only does the US remain inexplicably indulgent towards Pakistan, it is also actively helping to prod Afghanistan into the Sino-Pakistan orbit. There have been warning signs of this since the "Peace Process Road Map to 2015" first became public towards the end of 2012, and placed Pakistan in the position of determining the extent and role of its proxy Taliban in the future Afghan affairs.

Since then, the Afghan Presidential election of 2014 was virtually stolen, in order to put Ashraf Ghani in charge, and, through him, to drive Afghanistan and Pakistan into finding a settlement that would accommodate the Taliban. China has also been co-opted, so that the Murree Process now involves only these four countries. And yet, there are obvious contradictions between the US and Chinese approaches – as pointed out above, the Chinese CPEC negates the idea of the South-and-Central Asia link. Perhaps the Americans are waiting for time to clear up these differences, but meanwhile India is also making its moves. It has become clear during Modi's current visit to Turkmenistan that its preferred option is to bypass Pakistan and to use Iran as the vital link to Central Asia. In the process, the Indian Government has made a public commitment to the Chabahar option, and has even posed the alternative for Turkmen gas to come via land and sea, through Iran and the Persian Gulf.

Concluding Observations

In conclusion, it would be well to make some general points by way of *obiter dicta*.

First, what have been described above are the rival strategies. As with all strategies, none is predestined to succeed or fail. What is more, it is quite likely that neither strategy will achieve its aims in full. There may be some compromises depending on the way the different countries involved promote and defend their interests. It is said of military plans, that none survives first contact with the enemy; it is the same with strategies, though these two rival approaches have now been in contention for some time.

Second, although it appears at this point of time that the US and China are locked in a struggle for power in this vital region, it is not to be ruled out that they may find it worth their while, at some stage and in some places, to work together. The case of Afghanistan has been touched upon already, and the two countries appear to be working together to stabilise the country.

One of the crucial factors that will determine which strategies are likely to succeed is going to be the economic strength that the countries can bring to bear. Recent developments have shown that China is facing serious problems with its growth model, and it is not at all certain that it will emerge as the top economy in the near future, despite several prognoses to this effect. Some of the more optimistic forecasts will need to be constantly re-examined in the light of emerging data and trends.

Fourth, the above survey is conducted on the basis of the existing geography. It takes as given for now that the countries and the territorial boundaries will remain as they are. This is, in fact, unlikely. Already, some of the key areas are under strain, and nowhere is this more obvious than in West Asia. Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen no longer exist as functional entities. Several others are facing like challenges to their integrity. This territorial re-arrangement will also have important implications for the success or failure of the contending plans.

Fifth, and while still on the geography of the area, there are two possible changes that will need to be factored in if they happen. The first is the opening of the so-called Northern Route, across the Arctic. This will have significant impact on the geopolitics if it should indeed open permanently, as a result of global warming. And the second would be changes in the Korean peninsula. There are intimations of instability beginning to emerge, but at this stage all that can be said is that a change here, should it come to pass, will also affect the nature of the geopolitics in Eurasia.

A sixth point concerns the recent agreement between Iran and the E3+3. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been following a double-exclusion strategy: Russia on the one hand, Iran on the other. The consequence of this has been a debilitating dependence of the US on Pakistan and Turkey. Events since the late 1990s seem to have demonstrated that these two countries are not amenable to US interests beyond a point, and in some cases, are actually working against

American interests. Should the Iran agreement overcome the internal and external opposition to it, it would end the double-exclusion and open Iran as a factor in the power play in the region. This will also have long-term consequences for the outcome of the struggle described above.

And lastly, it would be wrong to overemphasise the rivalry between maritime and land-based alternatives – it is not clear-cut, because maritime powers need land-based assets, and vice versa for the land powers. As an illustration, the US needs an army to do the fighting in Afghanistan, and needs some shore-based assets to deploy the Army. Similarly, China will need a strong navy, as its latest Defence White Paper makes clear. It has interests and ambitions that require it to be able to confront the adversary at sea, and for its own outreach beyond the Heartland, into South America and Africa. This is why the Maritime Silk Road is an integral part of its thinking and planning.

The purpose of this exercise has been to place the Chinese project of the One-Belt-One-Road in some kind of larger strategic purpose. The facts show that there is purpose and thought behind the project, and it carries implications for the entire Eurasian region. The objective is to alter the global balance of power, no less. The outcome will affect the lives of billions for a generation or more.

A glance at the history of the last few centuries, since at least the seventeenth, indicates that the opening decades of all centuries are times of upheaval. New forces frequently emerge, new ideologies, or technologies. These take time to play themselves out. Without being deterministic about such historical cycles, it seems hard to escape the conclusion that we are witnessing one more turn, and that it will be a while before stability will return. The rival strategies described in the foregoing face India with unprecedented challenges, something we have not really had to deal with for centuries. All the same, it is now essential for the country to define its interests and work for the outcomes that are in our best interests.

4

China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Old String with New Pearls?

Gopal Suri

China and the Indian Ocean Region

China has been incessantly increasing its footprints in the Indian Ocean in the past decade by undertaking port infrastructure projects, managing and running ports, gaining port access for naval platforms, acquiring military bases and conducting naval exercises with countries in the region. China also has a great dependency on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for supply of its energy needs as also for a vast amount of its trade. In fact, at times, it has wrestled with its 'Malacca Dilemma' since more than 80% of its crude oil and almost 30% of its natural gas imports come through the Malacca Straits. The importance of the IOR in the Chinese strategy cannot be therefore understated and will dominate Chinese maritime thinking.

String of Pearls. The importance that the Chinese attach to the IOR was highlighted in the theory of the 'String of Pearls' which appeared in a report, "Energy Futures for Asia", prepared by Booz Allen Hamilton, a US think tank, in 2004 for the US Department of Defense.¹ According to the report, China was adopting a "String of Pearls" strategy of bases and diplomatic ties stretching from the Middle East to southern China that included a new naval base under construction at the Pakistani port of Gwadar. This report stirred an intense debate

in the strategic community, especially in India and the US, regarding Chinese intentions in the IOR. Subsequent actions by the Chinese have neither confirmed nor denied the theory, as suggested in the report.

Maritime Silk Road. The Chinese have since, albeit about ten years later, announced the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative. President Xi Jinping, in September/October 2013, announced the joint building of a Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road during a visit to Central Asia and Southeast Asia². The initiative is intended to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas in order to enhance the regional economic development. China has since set up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and pledged US\$ 40 billion for the initiative.

Chinese Navy in the IOR. The Chinese naval activity has also seen a gradual increase from the days of the first anti-piracy operations in 2008 to regular forays and exercises in the IOR. The Chinese submarines have also been deployed to the region in the recent past. China has recently acquired a military base at Djibouti for providing better logistics and for safeguarding Chinese peacekeeping forces in the Gulf of Aden and offshore Somalia as also to undertake other humanitarian assistance tasks of the UN.³ This heightened activity by the Chinese in the IOR points to a clear strategic aim which has to some extent been enunciated in their White Paper on Military Strategy in 2015 wherein it stated that “with the growth of China’s national interests, ... the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue”.⁴

The Indian Ocean is a major factor, maybe even an overriding concern, in the Chinese maritime strategy, especially when viewed against the Chinese perceptions of an inimical US and India in the context of raised tensions or an impending conflict and the Chinese dependency on the energy flow through the Malacca Straits. The former Chinese President Hu Jintao talked of the “Malacca Dilemma” and the need to secure China’s strategic and economic interests in the region. The Chinese dependency on oil imports from the Middle East and Africa coupled with the geographical realities of shipping routes imply that the Malacca Straits will be a vulnerability in their Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) during a conflict with the US or India. The

choice that the Chinese therefore face, for overcoming this vulnerability, is to either develop alternate routes to the Malacca Straits for their energy transportation or develop capabilities to protect their SLOCs in the IOR. It is this choice that has dictated many of their recent initiatives like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Maritime Silk route as also the development of port and pipeline projects in countries of the Indian Ocean littoral. This reality has therefore found prominence in Chinese military strategy and in the recent restructuring of China's armed forces. An examination of these important issues would be appropriate to understand the Chinese thought behind the slew of recent initiatives and the outreach to nations in its neighbourhood. This essay therefore attempts to examine China's interests in the IOR which caused the world to sit up and take notice of its activities in the region. It will thereafter examine the supposed 'String of Pearls' theory, take a look at the recent 21st Maritime Silk Road initiative and then scrutinise the recent Chinese maritime activity in the IOR so as to understand the intent behind the MSR.

China's Interests in the IOR

Securing Energy Flows. China's energy needs are expected to increase exponentially in the coming decades with forecasts predicting a doubling of this consumption in the next three decades. Consumption of liquid fuels alone is predicted to double from its consumption of 10 MMbbl/day in 2010 to about 20 MMbbl/day in 2040 according to the USEIA in its Outlook 2014.

Movement of China's Oil. The movement of China's oil imports shows that it depends largely on supplies from the Middle East, South and Central America, West Africa and the former USSR. The chart below shows the inter-area movement of oil to China in 2014.⁵ A large part, to the extent of about 75–80 per cent of China's oil imports transits through the waters of the Indian Ocean while another large chunk of about 10–15 per cent, transits the Pacific Ocean. The remainder is imported through pipelines on land which is not very significant. China's dependence on imports for its energy requirements is unlikely to reduce in the near term, implying that the pattern of trade movement is likely to remain the same for some time to come.

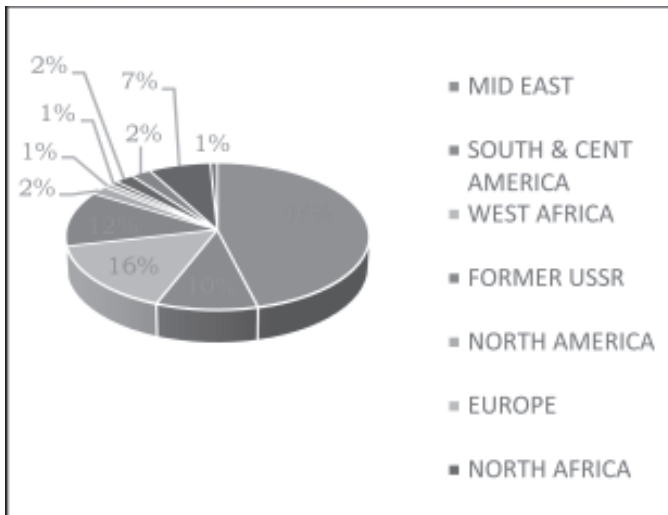


Figure 1. Oil Movement to China – 2014⁶

Sea routes for the Chinese Oil Movement. The sea routes for the transportation of oil through the Indian Ocean traverse the Straits of Hormuz, the Malacca Straits and the Lombok Straits which are all geographical choke points. Moreover, these SLOCs, both through the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, lie in waters where China does not have the required naval presence to deter threats. The Chinese are naturally concerned with this vulnerability and hence this issue finds mention in the military strategy as also in the various writings in this field. The Chinese maritime strategists like Col Liang Fang mention the Malacca Straits as an “important communication in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean sea lanes”.⁷ A look at the map below, which illustrates China’s import routes and maritime choke points will give the reader an idea of the importance and vulnerability of these choke points.

Consequently, these SLOCs and the energy flow through them are theoretically liable to interdiction by an inimical adversary in a possible conflict, notwithstanding the practicalities of such belligerent action in international waters. It is this reality that has forced a shift in the PLA Navy’s (PLAN) “focus from offshore waters defense to the combination of offshore waters defense with open seas protection”.⁹

The PLAN's deployment in the IOR since 2008 has been geared towards achieving this capability wherein the anti-piracy missions, involving escort of merchant vessels, have provided ample opportunity to its ships and their crews to hone the important skill of convoy protection. The PLAN has deployed almost sixty warships and replenishment ships till date for the anti-piracy escort missions, which is nearly half of the combat strength of the PLAN. These regular deployments have also enabled the PLAN to gain first-hand experience of the operating environment in the IOR which will be crucial in any conflict. It has also helped the PLAN in developing the capability to effectively support sustained distant operations over extended periods.

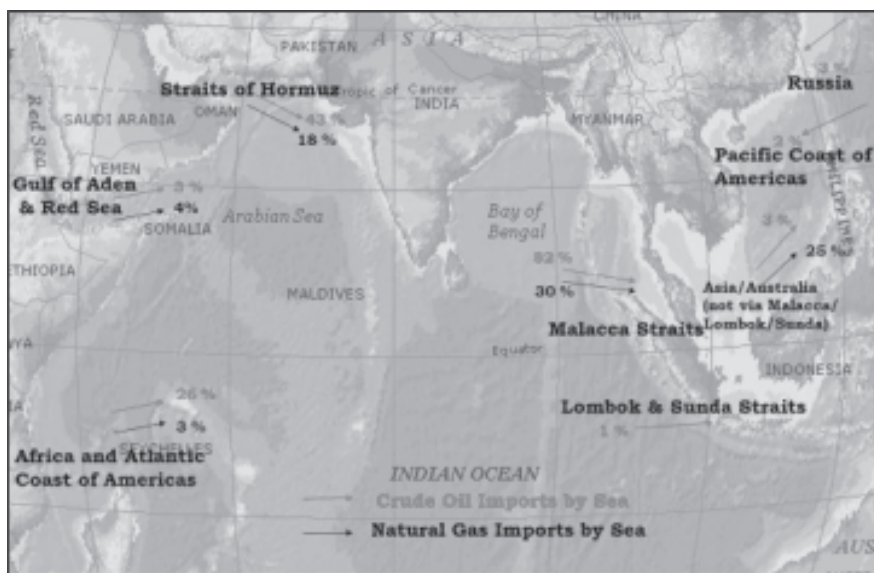


Figure 2. China's Import Transit Routes & Maritime Choke Points⁸

Piracy. Piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden has been the bane of international shipping since about 2005 though it has seen a reduction since about 2011. China has been an active participant in the international effort to combat this menace though it has not been part of any international coalition like the Coalition Maritime Forces (CMF) or the European Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR). The PLAN deployment was authorised by the Chinese government after the UN Security Council had adopted a resolution to fight piracy off the coast

of Somalia in December 2008. Initial PLAN deployments were intended to escort only Chinese merchantmen and ships carrying humanitarian relief material for international organisations such as the United Nations World Food Program.¹⁰ The Chinese anti-piracy missions have since expanded their ambit to include the escort of ships of other nations though they have desisted from battling the pirates in the territorial waters off Somalia. The Chinese have also coordinated their operations with other forces operating in the area and in the process, have gained invaluable experience in interoperability. The Chinese anti-piracy mission is therefore primarily intended to show their willingness in being part of an international effort to combat crime on the high seas and to maintain good order.

Commercial Interests. China has been consistently increasing its overseas commercial interests in the last ten years. It has increased its Outward Foreign Direct Investments (OFDI) from about US\$ 3 billion in 2005 to about US\$ 102.9 billion in 2014.¹¹ The distribution of China's OFDI in 2013 is depicted in Figure 3.

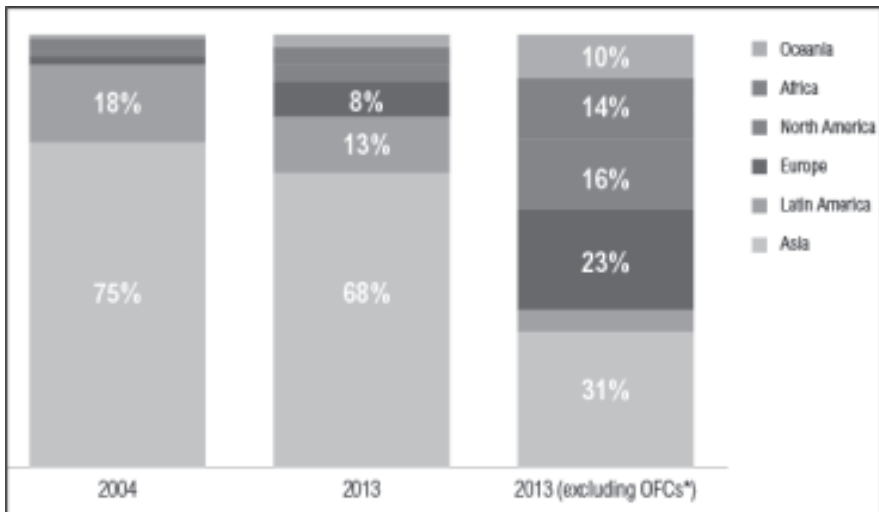


Figure 3. Geographical Distribution of China's OFDI Stock¹²

As can be seen, a large chunk of China's OFDI is concentrated in Asia and Africa. Apart from this, China is also partnering the various countries of the Indian Ocean littoral in the development of large infrastructure projects. The Chinese investments in infrastructure

projects have seen a sharp rise in the recent past. The Chinese have invested heavily in big transnational projects like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), oil and gas pipelines from Myanmar to China, port development projects at Hambantota and Gwadar and a host of others. The US\$ 2.5 billion invested in the China–Myanmar pipeline has been entirely covered by the state-owned oil company, China National Petroleum Company (CNPC), which also owns this key infrastructure.¹³ The Chinese have also been instrumental in setting up the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and have announced plans for setting up a Silk Road Fund with a contribution of US\$ 40 billion.¹⁴ China's trade with the ASEAN and South and West Asian countries accounted for approximately 30% of its Asian trade, totalling about US\$ 1250 billion, according to the figures put out by the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) in its last such statistics in 2010.¹⁵ What is important to note is that this trade has been growing at a faster rate than that with other countries. This trade increased by about 50% over the previous year as compared to 25% with the US, 35% with the EU and 41.5% with NE Asia (Japan, DPRK, ROK and Mongolia).¹⁶ China, therefore, has increasingly high commercial stakes in the IOR, possibly more than that of any other nation.

Power Projection. China has come late to the Indian Ocean but is attempting to fill the vacuum likely to be left in the wake of the perceived waning of the US power in the near future. China's growing economic stature, in the world at large and in the IOR in particular, necessitates power projection, albeit limited in the near future. China has invested hugely in a number of countries of the IOR littoral, especially in East Africa, to the tune of about US\$ 100 million to US\$ 1 billion in nearly all the states, barring Somalia. In fact, its investments in South Africa are more than US\$ 1 billion.¹⁷ As Chinese investments grow in these countries, many of which are politically unstable, the threats to these businesses are also likely to increase. Moreover, the governments in these countries look to China for support on a host of issues. Though China has been long averse to interference in the internal affairs of other countries, incidences of its nationals being kidnapped and killed in countries like Cameroon, Mali, Sudan and Egypt have forced it to reassess this policy. Liu Hongwu, Director of the School of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, says that security cooperation will be a key area in future cooperation between

China and the African Union, since for many years the African countries have been asking China to take part in their security processes.¹⁸ The recently concluded agreement between China and Djibouti for construction of “military supporting facilities” at Djibouti will also likely facilitate regular patrols by the Chinese Navy near Africa.¹⁹ The Chinese ships which take part in the anti-piracy escort missions make regular visits to ports in the region and conduct exercises with the navies of these countries. The Chinese Navy has also been involved in some high-profile missions to evacuate civilians from conflict-ridden regions, the most recent being the evacuation of about 225 civilians from 10 different countries in addition to Chinese nationals.²⁰ China has also entered into strategic partnerships with a number of countries in the region like South Africa, Egypt, Pakistan and the ASEAN which are aimed at shaping an international order suited to its long term interests. The ongoing modernisation of the Chinese armed forces is also aimed at developing a limited power projection capability so as to “create a favorable strategic posture with more emphasis on the employment of military forces and means”.²¹ The Chinese power projection in the region, through a host of diplomatic and military initiatives coupled with an outreach to various countries, amidst an ever-increasing economic engagement, will remain a cornerstone of its foreign policy as China graduates to a big power status.

Fears of American and Indian Intervention. The Chinese view the US ‘Pivot/Re-balance’ to Asia-Pacific as a “strategy targeted at China (which) has resulted in its endless moves aimed at building a circle of containment around China”.²² American actions like the dispatch of the *USS Nimitz* Battle Group to the Taiwan Straits in 1996 and the exercises conducted by the *USS George Washington* in the Yellow Sea have been perceived by the Chinese as the US being disrespectful of China’s security concerns and bullying China into concessions.²³ The Chinese are also worried about American initiatives like the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) and the US Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The former has called for the ASEAN countries to permit the US Marines to patrol the waters against piracy and terrorism, while the latter allows the US personnel to board a suspect foreign vessel to guard against the transportation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) on the high seas.²⁴ Some Chinese strategists also

worry about a scenario wherein the US, because of its domination in the Indian Ocean, could interdict China's energy supplies in the Malacca Straits.²⁵ Hardliners like PLA Colonel Liu Mingfu (Retd) go so far as to say that the US Navy is a major threat to China.²⁶ The US policy has also not helped in mitigating these fears but on occasion, has actually reaffirmed the Chinese perceptions. Admiral Scott Swift, Commander US Pacific Fleet, had this to say about the Chinese activity in the Spratly Islands, at the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Sea Power Convention in October 2015:

"Today the friction points may be at sea, over the horizon, seemingly held safely at a distance from our day-to-day lives ashore. But the foundation of coercion on which some states pursue the resolution of maritime differences, characterized by observers as 'might makes right,' should cause all us to pause and ask ourselves the question: "If we are not willing to commit to resolve these differences peacefully, leveraging the tools of the international rules-based system that has served us so well, for so long, in a multilateral, inclusive way; then are we willing to accept the likelihood that imposed solutions to these national differences at sea, will seek us out in our supposed sanctuaries ashore?"

China also perceives India as attempting to control the Indian Ocean and hence is inimical to its interests in the IOR. Some Chinese strategists like Zhang Ming believe that "the Indian subcontinent is akin to a massive triangle reaching into the heart of the Indian Ocean, benefitting any from there who seek to control the Indian Ocean".²⁷ This perception is further reinforced by the wariness that India displays in its relations with China, which is a result of persistent suspicion of the Chinese intentions. India's expanding navy and its increasingly frequent presence in South East Asia and recent forays into the Pacific has further served to raise Chinese concerns.

The much quoted 'String of Pearls' strategy had its birth in such Chinese concerns. In fact, many strategists look at China's attempts to develop alternative corridors to circumvent the "Malacca Dilemma" as a direct result of these concerns. It would therefore be worthwhile to revisit the supposed "String of Pearls" strategy of the Chinese so as to gain a better grasp of the recent Chinese initiatives in the Indian Ocean.

'String of Pearls'

Origin. The phrase "String of Pearls" had its origin in a report "*Energy Futures in Asia*", prepared by an American think tank, Booz Allen Hamilton, for the US Secretary of Defense in 2004. The report stated that China was adopting a "string of pearls" strategy of bases and diplomatic ties stretching from the Middle East to southern China that included a new naval base under construction at the Pakistani port of Gwadar.²⁸ The report further stated that "China is building strategic relationships along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in ways that suggest defensive and offensive positioning to protect China's energy interests, but also to serve broad security objectives".



Figure 4. String of Pearls²⁹

The 'Pearls'. China's interest in securing her energy flow, especially the SLOCs, is a major concern which is reflected in the Chinese military strategy as also in various other writings like the defence White Papers. The report stated that China was building up military forces and setting up bases along sea lanes from the Middle East to project its power overseas and to protect its oil shipments.³⁰ The string of pearls, as mentioned in the report, extends from the coast of mainland China,

through the littorals of the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean, to the littorals of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. The specific “pearls” in the “string”, as originally articulated, consist of the Hainan Island, with its recently upgraded military facilities; an upgraded airstrip on Woody Island in the Paracel archipelago; the deep water port under construction in Burma; a proposed container shipping facility in Chittagong, Bangladesh and the naval base under construction in Gwadar, Pakistan.

‘Raison D’être’. China has never professed this strategy nor has it been articulated by the Chinese strategists. This was largely an American concept to encapsulate the appreciated Chinese developments which appeared to be designed for undermining the American pre-eminence in the region. The Chinese initiatives which gave rise to this theory were intended to diversify the routes for transportation of energy so as to reduce China’s vulnerability in the Malacca Straits and to mitigate the ‘Malacca Dilemma’. China was also consolidating its strategic posture in the Indian Ocean by helping Myanmar in augmenting its naval bases as also building new ones. Reports had also surfaced of Chinese investment in the modernisation of the Chittagong port but the project has not seen much headway, possibly because of Indian pressure on the Bangladeshi government. The Chinese investment in the Gwadar Deep Sea Port is another ‘pearl’ in the strategy. Pakistan has been an all-weather friend for the Chinese and has a deep strategic bond which has underpinned their relationship. Gwadar has helped the Chinese gain a foothold in the Indian Ocean from where they can deploy their navy. In fact, a number of Chinese naval ships, especially those deployed for anti-piracy missions, have frequently called at Karachi, either on their way in or when returning from their deployment. The utility of Gwadar for Chinese strategic requirements therefore cannot be understated. The Chinese also helped Sri Lanka in the construction of a port at Hambantota giving rise to the perception of a possible deployment of naval platforms.

The perception of China developing bases and relationships around the Indian Ocean stems from the attribution of the Mahanian concepts of sea power and the need for overseas bases to secure the SLOCs, to the development of the Chinese navy. However, the same was not clearly apparent in the period following the predictions of the “Energy

Futures of Asia". Meanwhile, the Chinese military strategy has undergone a major change with an increased focus on matters maritime leading to a rapid development of its navy in the past decade which has added new dimensions to its war-fighting capability. Maritime policy in China has also undergone a paradigm shift with the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, in 2012, announcing that the nation would accelerate the development of its ocean resources, resolutely safeguard its maritime rights and interests, and develop into a big maritime power. This also coincided with the second phase of the naval maritime plan, from 2010 to 2020, previously outlined by the PRC's then Vice Chairman of the Military Commission, Liu Huaqing in 1982 that China would seek to establish control of waters within the second island chain that links the Ogasawara island chain, Guam and Indonesia.³¹ China's intention to step out beyond the First Island Chain and consolidate its maritime interests up till the Second Island Chain is clearly evident in this shift in policy. The announcement of the Maritime Silk Road by the Chinese President is in tune with this new shift in policy which is tailored towards a possible strategic goal of achieving a regional power status in the IOR. This policy also echoes the concept of the 'Three Warfares' (Psy Ops, Media Ops and Legal Ops) espoused by the Chinese which Commodore Uday Bhaskar (Retd) says could be used as a Trojan Horse to achieve a desired end.³² Examination of the Chinese initiatives of the Maritime Silk Road and other such moves by the Chinese in the military maritime domain would further shed light on the intentions of the Chinese in this important region of the world.

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road

Concept. The Maritime Silk Road initiative was first proposed by the current Chinese President Xi Jinping in an address to the Indonesian Parliament in October 2013. He proposed the building of a close-knit China-ASEAN community and offered guidance on constructing a 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) to promote the maritime cooperation. In his speech at the Indonesian parliament, Xi also proposed establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to finance infrastructure construction and promote regional interconnectivity and economic integration. The National Development and Reform Commission, in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, subsequently promulgated an Action Plan for the Belt and Road Initiative after authorisation by the State Council on March 28, 2015.³³ A graphical representation of the envisaged Maritime Silk Road along with the route taken by the famous voyages of Admiral Zheng He during the early part of the 15th Century is depicted below and illustrates the geographical similarity and could also be indicative of a possibly similar strategic intent. The geographical similarity between the supposed 'String of Pearls', as illustrated in Fig. 4, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is also hard to miss and it will therefore be worthwhile to delve deeper into the Chinese actions to gain a better understanding of their strategic intent in the military maritime realm.

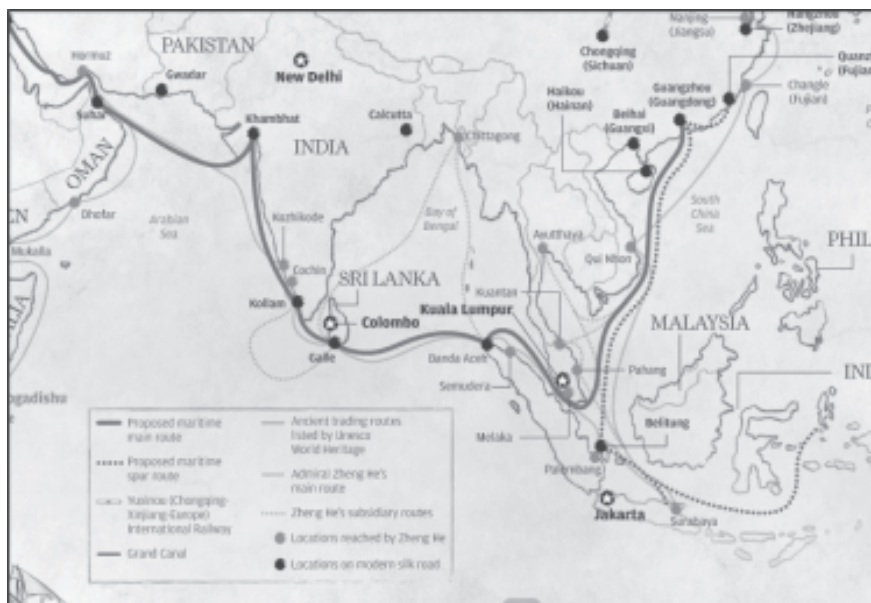


Figure 5. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road³⁴

Plan. The MSR is intended to increase economic connectivity and accelerate economic development across the countries in the region under consideration. Accordingly, it intends the building of transport networks to connect major ports in the region. The Chinese have also prioritised a host of issues for accelerating cooperation in diverse areas

between the various countries along the MSR like economic development strategies, improvement of transport connections and associated infrastructure, facilitation of smooth and unimpeded flow of international trade, integration of financial systems and increased people-to-people contact. The list is ambitious since the existing diversity between the countries of the region in these various fields is huge, but considering the trade links that all the countries have with China, most may be susceptible to Chinese pressure for taking action on many of these issues. The plan also calls for setting up a number of new mechanisms and working groups as also for enhancing the role of existing mechanisms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN Plus China (10+1), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), etc., for promoting this initiative. China has also identified regions which will take the lead in propelling this initiative. While the economic and communications connectivity aspects of the implementation plan call for a larger debate within the countries involved, the military maritime aspects connected with the Initiative do not obviously find mention in the Action Plan. The aim of the subsequent part of this essay is to scrutinise the issues related to this aspect which are inherent in the successful achievement of the objectives of the MSR initiative.

Chinese Thought. The MSR has been aggressively promoted by the Chinese strategic community with seminars and conferences being held on the subject. The Chinese city of Quanzhou, a port city in Fujian Province in south-east China, hosted the first international seminar on the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road from 11–12 Feb 2015 with the participation of 200 scholars from China, India, Thailand, Singapore, Myanmar, Egypt, the United States and 30 other countries.³⁵ The focus of such seminars and other writings has been the necessity for the development of interoperable financial policies and transport and communication networks. The maritime security aspects, however, do find mention in the writings of some Chinese strategists, albeit suitably camouflaged in the larger body. For instance, Liu Cegui, the former Director of the State Oceanic Administration, stresses on the safety of sea lanes as the key to sustaining the development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. He also talks of ports along the new Maritime Silk Road to act as “sea posts” for the provision of safe and convenient sea lanes.³⁶ He further goes on to say that these ports could be built or

leased by China in other countries. The debate on such facilities, especially in the military, not necessarily in the context of the MSR, has been going on in China for some time now with the need for the overseas bases having been endorsed by a number of Chinese military strategists like Major Generals Qiao Liang, Zhu Chenghu and Ji Minkui as also the Navy Colonel Liang Fang. While the Chinese have been largely averse to having bases on foreign soil till now, the recent acquisition of a military base at Djibouti marks a change in this philosophy. The Chinese have often expressed their objection to the so called 'world order' (read American pre-eminence) and advocated the necessity to change it in keeping with the rise of other nations, implying an obvious leadership role for China. It is this view that Zhang Yunling, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, advocates when he talks of the establishment of a "new ocean order" through the medium of the MSR.³⁷

The current focus on the MSR, therefore, should not overshadow the fact that it also represents China's most vital sea lines of communication which gives it access to all the major economic zones of Asia and is also the route to the Suez Canal through which it sends its exports to Europe and beyond. More importantly, it is the route for its energy supplies from the Middle East and Africa as also for a huge quantity of its imports of commodities and other materials. Hence, the security of this vital SLOC underpins all Chinese military maritime strategy.

Chinese Maritime Activity in the IOR

Development of Ports. China, through a number of state-owned enterprises, has funded the construction of new ports and also augmented and modernised existing ports in a number of countries in the IOR as part of the MSR initiative.

Myanmar. A consortium of Chinese companies has recently won two contracts related to a special economic zone including building a deep sea port on the Bay of Bengal in the Kyaukpyu Special Economic Zone in western Myanmar's Rakhine State.³⁸ Kyaukpyu is also the site of a pipeline which transports oil unloaded from tankers at the Maday island overland to China. It therefore fits in very well with the Chinese requirement to reduce the dependence on the Malacca Straits insofar

as the energy transit routes are concerned. It also suits Myanmar which stands to gain commercially as it slowly opens up to the world. It must also be noted that Kyaukpyu is also just about 700 nautical miles (nm) from India's east coast and the strategic harbour of Visakhapatnam.

Bangladesh. The modernisation of the Chittagong port by the Chinese is another 'pearl' whose details have been largely kept out of the public eye. It is understood that the Chinese will have preferential access, though India has pulled one back on the Chinese by signing a MoU with Bangladesh in June 2014 to grant the Indian cargo vessels the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports.³⁹ The strategic significance of Chittagong is not lost on the Chinese, and this is clearly evident when Zhao Gancheng, Director of South Asia Studies at the government-supported Shanghai Institute for International Studies says, "developing the port is a very important part of China's co-operation with Bangladesh, and China is aware of its strategic significance".⁴⁰ China is also funding the modernisation of the Mongla port and is in contention with Japan for the construction of a deep water port at Sonadia. The utility of these ports to China is not readily apparent since the Chinese plans to make a corridor from China to Bangladesh through India are still quite far on the horizon. Coupled with the growing reliance of Bangladesh on China for its military hardware over the years and now even submarines, the Chinese investment in these ports, which are in close proximity of Indian strategic installations, call for greater scrutiny.

Sri Lanka. The construction of the Hambantota port by the China Harbor Engineering Company in collaboration with Sinohydro, was one of the first 'pearls' in the IOR. Situated at the southern end of Sri Lanka, it is strategically located, overlooking the busiest shipping lanes of the region. The Chinese have also helped modernise the Colombo port and a Chinese company now operates Colombo's new container terminal. The Sri Lankan government has also recently cleared a proposal to develop a port city at Colombo with Chinese investment. The port visits by Chinese warships and specifically submarines have also added to the perception that the Chinese intentions in Sri Lanka may not be purely commercial. Though the current Sri Lankan government has assuaged the Indian concerns in this regard, the continued Chinese investment in port infrastructure cannot dispel the

notion of a possible use of these facilities by the Chinese navy in the future.

Pakistan. Pakistan has been a steadfast Chinese ally in the region and India often views it as a Chinese proxy, notwithstanding the historical animosity between India and Pakistan. Pakistan has been the recipient of massive Chinese aid and investment with major Chinese projects like the Gwadar Deep Sea Port (GDSP) and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The utility of Gwadar to the Chinese lies in its proximity to the Straits of Hormuz (about 450 nm), through which Chinese seaborne oil imports from the Middle East flow. It also provides the Chinese navy with a base of operations in the IOR. Pakistan's buying of Chinese submarines will further augment this capability since the same facilities, at the nearby Jinnah Naval Base at Ormara (145 nm), can also be used by the Chinese submarines.

Other Countries. The Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have also invested substantially in facilities at the various Suez Canal ports like Port Said East Port and al-Adabiya. The Chinese companies have also invested in East African ports like Bagamayo in Tanzania, which is expected to become the largest port in Africa.⁴¹ Kenya has also seen the recipient of the Chinese investment in new container terminals at Mombasa and the first three berths at the new Lamu mega port. The potential benefits to China, of the investment in Bagamoyo and its involvement at Lamu and Mombasa, may not be solely trade-related, especially at the new Tanzanian port. The Chinese are also known to have approached the Maldives and the Seychelles for port facilities for naval ships though no announcements have been made by either of these countries. The geographical layout of these ports around the Indian Ocean and their proximity to the various choke points clearly indicate a larger strategic intent than pure commercial gains. The map below illustrates the layout of ports with Chinese investment along with the choke points of the Indian Ocean as also the main trade route and the SLOCs. The string joining these new 'pearls' bears an unmistakable similarity to that propagated by Booz Allen Hamilton in 2004.

Military Bases. China has recently negotiated an agreement with Djibouti for the construction of a military base under the garb of "military supporting facilities".⁴² Though the details of the agreement

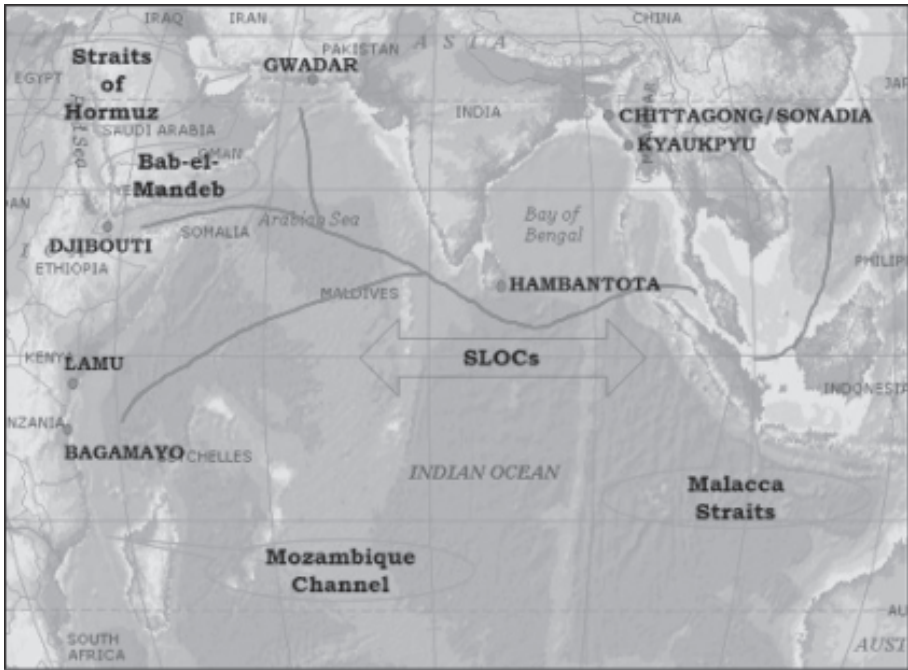


Figure 6. Ports in IOR with Chinese Investment

have not been published, it can be safely assumed that it is a semi-permanent arrangement, at least for the next 20-25 years. China has justified the requirement for this base, citing the requirement to “provide better logistics and safeguard Chinese peacekeeping forces in the Gulf of Aden, offshore Somalia and other humanitarian assistance tasks of the UN”. China has consistently deployed ships for anti-piracy missions since 2008 in the Gulf of Aden along the International Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC). China had also deployed troops to South Sudan in 2015 as part of the UN peacekeeping operations for the first time in its history. Liu Hongwu, Director of the School of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University, says that building military supporting facilities is just a start for China to carry out security cooperation with the African Union. Considering the continuance of the anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, it is likely that the base in Djibouti will be sufficiently large to cater for refuelling as also major repairs of naval ships. The availability of an airstrip will permit the deployment of Maritime Reconnaissance (MR) aircraft to aid the anti-piracy effort. In all probability, there will be sufficient

Chinese personnel for not just the operations, but also for security considering the instability in the region. All in all, the base will enable the Chinese to project sufficient military power to further their strategic objectives in the IOR. It is also pertinent to note that the Chinese ships on deployment to the Gulf of Aden have regularly called at Salalah in Oman, Aden in Yemen and at other ports for re-supply/Operational Turnaround (OTR) indicating an acquiescence of these countries for the facilitation of access facilities to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). Pakistan, of course, is a preferred destination with a number of Chinese naval vessels calling at Karachi in the recent past and on occasion, a submarine was also reported to have berthed there. The map below illustrates the various ports at which the PLAN ships have called at in recent times for carrying out replenishment when they have been deployed in the IOR as also in other waters.

The expanding Chinese naval footprint in the IOR is too visible to ignore and when viewed in conjunction with their investments, especially in port infrastructure in East Africa, indicates a clear strategic focus on the establishment of a permanent presence in the IOR in the not too distant future.

Naval Deployment. The Chinese navy first entered the IOR when it despatched an anti-piracy escort mission to the Gulf of Aden in 2008 as a part of the international effort to combat Somalia based piracy. The PLAN has since visibly increased its presence to become a fairly regular sight in the IOR.

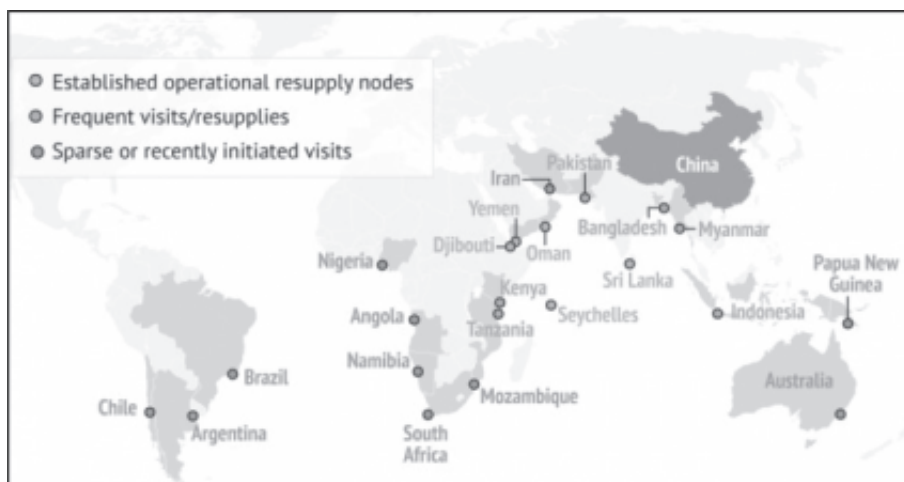


Figure 7. Ports used for OTR by the Chinese Navy⁴³

Anti-Piracy Missions. The Chinese navy has deployed more than twenty escort missions from 2008 till date, typically comprising two ships and a tanker. These missions have normally had a deployment duration of about three-to-four months with about two-to-three months on task in the area. They have reportedly escorted almost 800 convoys during this period. Between December 2008 and early 2015, over 16,000 PLAN sailors as well as 1,300 marines and special operations forces personnel served in the Gulf of Aden.⁴⁴ Some of these missions have also visited a large number of countries. In fact, one of the missions, TF 152, after its deployment to the Gulf of Aden in July 2015, undertook a round-the-world trip calling at ports in Europe, Scandinavia, USA, Pacific, and South East Asia before heading home – a deployment of about ten months. These deployments have provided unprecedented operational exposure to the PLAN and helped it develop and consolidate capabilities which it hitherto had not exploited. The PLAN now has one of the largest underway replenishment fleets in the world, after the USA. Its logistic supply chain and maintenance procedures would obviously have been honed to a high degree of operational readiness to sustain such extensive and prolonged deployments.

Submarine Deployment. Another interesting dimension of the Chinese naval operations in the IOR has been the deployment of submarines. The PLAN deployed a *Shang*-class submarine, ostensibly for anti-piracy, in end-2013. The submarine transited the Malacca Straits both during its outward and return transits from its home port at the Hainan Island in the South China Sea. The purpose of this deployment will not be lost on any naval tactician considering the near-zero capability of a submarine, nuclear or otherwise, for an anti-piracy mission. This deployment would have allowed the submarine crew an enviable experience of a long range deployment over an extended period and helped them garner intelligence of the operating environment in the IOR. The subsequent deployment of submarines to the IOR, of a *Song*-class which called at Colombo November 2014 and a *Yuan* at Karachi in May 2015, would have provided further experience to more submarine crews in the IOR. The data generated from these deployments, both oceanographic and intelligence, will help the PLAN in better preparation for further such deployments as also for preparation of a future battlespace. Considering the slow transit speeds of conventional submarines (about 5 knots/9 kph) and the

distances involved (about 9,000 nm from Hainan to Karachi and back), the endurance of these submarines would have been tested to the maximum. While a submarine tender would have accompanied these submarines, the challenge that these submarines would have faced in terms of materiel and maintenance will have provided the PLAN with unmatched operational planning experience for future deployments.

Multinational Exercises. Many of the anti-piracy missions have carried out exercises with other navies either en route to the Gulf of Aden or on their return trip. Additionally, these ships have also carried out exercises with other navies deployed in the Gulf of Aden whilst on patrol, most recently with the Danish navy in November 2015. The Chinese navy also conducts regular exercises with the Royal Australian Navy and the Pakistan Navy in the IOR. In fact, the PLAN is a regular participant in the annual '*Aman*' series of multinational exercises conducted by the Pakistan Navy. These exercises have ensured a high degree of interoperability with other navies of the world and have also given the PLAN the required exposure to generate scenarios for future combat.

Non Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO). The Chinese navy, in the recent past, has helped evacuate its citizens and other foreign nationals from Libya in 2011 and from Yemen in 2015. The deployment of one of the PLAN's most modern frigates, *Xuzhou*, in February 2015, to the waters near Libya to support and protect the evacuation of the Chinese citizens was the first of its kind for the PLAN. The Chinese government had also deployed four PLAAF IL-76 heavy lift aircraft for the operation in addition to a number of civilian aircraft and merchant vessels for this operation. The operation was highly successful and clearly shows the ability of the PLAN and PLAAF to co-ordinate major operations on distant shores. The availability of suitable places for refueling and stopovers also indicates the ability of the Chinese to obtain such places from foreign governments, especially in Africa, during the times of crisis. The subsequent NEO operation in Yemen in March 2015 was undertaken by the ships on deployment in the Gulf of Aden for an anti-piracy mission. Though it was much smaller in scale compared to that of Libya, the employment of the naval ships emphasised the will of the Chinese government to protect its people, even in foreign lands. This is especially notable, considering the increasing number of Chinese expatriates in the region.

The PLAN's operations in the IOR over the past decade have earned it international recognition as a blue water force capable of carrying out effective operations far from its home waters. It is of course, important to note that the PLAN does not have the capability to maintain a large and sustained presence in the IOR, like the US Navy, at least not in the immediate future. However, the PLAN is rapidly gaining operational experience in this important region which can be effectively leveraged to gain tactical advantage in times of adversity.

Chinese Naval Capability Accretion. The PLAN, in accordance with its vision to establish control of waters within the second island chain by 2020, is focused on acquiring capabilities to support this aim. It is in the process of major modernisation with new frigates, destroyers and submarines being added every year, in addition to about 60 submarines and an equal number of landing craft.

Surface Fleet. The PLAN inventory currently includes nearly 80 major surface combatants and an aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*. The entire surface fleet is in the process of being modernised with new ships replacing the old destroyers and frigates at the rate of almost 2–3 every year for the past 5–7 years⁴⁵. News has also surfaced of an indigenous aircraft carrier under construction, which could be completed by 2025. All this clearly indicates development of an out-of-area capability which will definitely find a more permanent presence in the IOR by mid 2020s.

Aircraft Carrier. Recent media reports have also indicated that work on China's indigenous aircraft carrier has also commenced. This carrier is intended to carry out the role of a true aircraft carrier and not a training one as currently being undertaken by the *Liaoning* as stated by Senior Captain Zhang Junshe of the People's Liberation Army Naval Military Studies Research Institute.⁴⁶ According to the Captain, China needs at least three aircraft carriers. A blue water navy with intentions to maintain a presence in distant water needs to have a force centered on aircraft carriers to project power. However, aircraft carriers of the size (65–7,00,000 tonness), as desired by China, are complex platforms to build. China's experience of refurbishing the Soviet *Varyag* into the PLAN *Liaoning* is sure to hold it in good stead while building the next carrier. However, it is unlikely that the PLAN will have its second carrier any time before 2025, assuming a construction and

operationalisation period of 10 years. This directly impinges on the PLAN's capability to maintain a strong and permanent presence in the IOR in the interim. This is not to say that the PLAN cannot carry out the required operations as dictated by a particular situation which the PLAN has amply demonstrated in the recent past.

Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft. The PLAN is also hampered by the non-availability of an airfield in the IOR from where it can deploy its MR aircraft for surveillance in the region. The availability of an airfield at Djibouti is sure to overcome this shortfall. Airfields in friendly countries like Pakistan can be utilised by the PLAN/PLAAF during critical situations but such missions have not been observed till date in the IOR. The PLAN/PLAAF's capability in this critical field of naval warfare is also circumspect, but is being addressed with new aircraft like the modernised Y-8 being inducted.

There have also been regular, though unsubstantiated reports, of Chinese electronic monitoring stations in the IOR, especially in Myanmar. All this effort shows the importance that the Chinese government attaches to the IOR and the development of the PLAN into a potent force for carrying out missions in the IOR to meet its strategic aims.

Chinese Arms Sales. China has become the third largest exporter of military equipment worldwide and many countries of the IOR have been some of the largest recipients in recent years. Pakistan, China's traditional ally, has acquired frigates and corvettes and is jointly developing and marketing a fighter aircraft, the JF-17. The F-22 class frigates and the *Aslat*-class attack craft form the cutting edge of the Pakistan navy. Pakistan is also in the process of acquiring submarines from China. Myanmar has, over the years, received a huge amount of military equipment, though outdated, from China. The Sri Lankan armed forces operate a variety of Chinese aircraft, patrol boats, tanks and infantry vehicles. Recent news reports had indicated likely acquisition of the Sino-Pak developed JF-17 fighters by the Sri Lankan Air Force, but the deal apparently fell through because of pressure from India. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh had recently declared that the Bangladesh navy was acquiring two submarines from China. These are discomfiting signs for countries of the region, especially India, since the Chinese military has now established a mutual dependency

with these countries which can be leveraged for strategic advantage, both in times of peace and war.

Chinese Military Thought. China's intensification of focus towards the seas was enunciated in the 18th CPC in 2012 when China's ambition to become a 'maritime power' was clearly stated. This marked change in outlook towards maritime issues has been reiterated in the proposed 13th Five Year Plan. However, the military had taken cognisance of the importance of maritime matters much earlier when the vision for the PLAN was outlined by the commander of the PLAN Liu Huaqing wherein the PLAN is intended to become a 'global navy' by 2050. This ambition is also in consonance with the Military Strategy promulgated in 2015 wherein China is intended to become a 'modern socialist country' by 2049. The perspective development plans of the Chinese navy have been attuned to these requirements and it is now in the process of establishing control within the Second Island chain. Taiwan and its unification with China remains a 'core interest' but the Chinese are aware that their security interests also lie in the shipping lanes of the Indian and Pacific oceans. The importance of naval power and its strategic role, especially when promoting initiatives like the MSR, figure prominently in Chinese military thought. Col. Liang Fang at the Department of Strategic Studies of the National Defense University (NDU) of the PLA says that "building a powerful navy is fundamental for the safe passage of the MSR".⁴⁷ She also talks about using 'strategic deterrence' for 'safe passage' of the MSR and outlines the means like sea control and overseas bases by which this deterrence is to be achieved. Admiral Wu Shengli, commander of the PLAN, in a talk also emphasised the necessity of guarding 'maritime rights', especially in a 'changing international strategic situation with increasingly complex and severe maritime threats'.⁴⁸ One of these threats, as viewed by the Chinese, could be India, as Zhao Ming, a naval analyst, says "India is perhaps China's most realistic strategic adversary".⁴⁹ Chinese thinkers are also cognisant of the American domination of the IOR and hence its ability to interdict the Chinese oil flow in case of a crisis in Taiwan.⁵⁰

It is in this background that the Chinese actions in the IOR should be read especially, where promotion of initiatives like the MSR are concerned. Consequently, the establishment of the base at Djibouti cannot be looked at in isolation but as part of an overall strategy as hinted by the normally guarded President XI Jinping when he referred

to “Djibouti’s participation in developing Beijing-proposed 21st-century Maritime Silk Road in proper ways” on the sidelines of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Johannesburg in 2015. Djibouti’s participation, if any, in the MSR has been pretty much non-existent except for the provision of the military base for Chinese forces. The *Global Times*, a pro-government newspaper in China, has also suggested that the Djibouti base signals a natural solution for the Chinese military strategy and that Chinese navy patrols near Africa will be a regular feature in the future.⁵¹

Prognosis

‘The String’. The Chinese interests in the IOR underpin the moorings of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative. China’s commercial interests can only continue to rise with ever-expanding destinations in Africa and Asia. China’s OFDI in Africa has risen from just about US\$ 1 billion in 2004 to about US\$ 24.5 billion in 2013.⁵² Most of this investment, to the extent of 31%, is in mining, for the provision of critical minerals like copper and zinc for industries in China. China’s dependence on oil, especially from the Middle East, is not about to go away anywhere in the near future. An uninterrupted flow of these commodities from various countries is critical for the continued growth of the Chinese economy. Many of these countries are underdeveloped and have unstable regimes and in many cases, unpopular ones. China’s policy of non-interference in a country’s domestic affairs suits the leadership of many such countries. Consequently, many of these countries, especially in Africa, look to China for investment which is otherwise difficult to obtain from more discerning countries in the West. China’s strategic ambition of becoming a global power fits well into this scenario. It has become the provider of not only investment but also arms and is now being looked upon as a provider of security. It has therefore made suitable changes to internal policies, permitting the deployment of troops abroad, as witnessed in South Sudan. China is also seized of the necessity of protection of the commodity flow from this region in the light of the threats that it perceives. It has therefore embarked on a time-bound plan for developing this capability in the IOR with the perspective plans of the Chinese navy dovetailed towards becoming a global navy by 2050. Supporting the operations of such a

navy in distant oceans is critical for furthering the strategic aim of becoming a global power.

The Pearls. The military facility at Djibouti provides China with a base from where it can establish an effective maritime presence in the western IOR, especially in the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. This will bring a quantum change to its operations in the Gulf of Aden against piracy and also provide it with a greatly enhanced capability to provide protection to its citizens and assets in this part of the world, which is currently beset with increasingly complex political problems and internal strife. The facility at Djibouti also allows the Chinese navy to undertake further operations along the East African coast whenever the requirement arises. It also enables the Chinese armed forces to conduct joint exercises and training with various African and Middle East countries with whom China has agreements. The African countries, especially, can look to support from the Chinese forces though there has been no change in the Chinese policy in this regard. However, changes in such policy are not impossible, especially where the Chinese interests are concerned. The utility of the ports being developed by Chinese firms in East Africa and the Middle East to the Chinese navy, cannot be understated since the Djibouti base will not be able to sustain operations further afield in the Southern Indian Ocean. China enjoys a high degree of political support in most of the nations where its firms are involved in port infrastructure and hence they are likely to acquiesce to the usage of these ports and facilities by the Chinese navy. Chinese diplomacy has also been rather aggressive in forging relationships with a host of countries in the region. The recent visit of the Chinese President to the Middle East and Egypt and his interaction with African leaders in the recent past is part of this strategy to further China's ambitions.

Conclusion

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road may not be the 'Trojan Horse' for a military strategy that it is made out to be, but definitely has a military component to support its economic aims. The MSR itself is a component of a larger Chinese strategy to achieve a great power status as asserted by many Chinese analysts and also subtly in some of its state policies. The role of the military in such a grand strategy cannot

be ignored. It may not be the dictating factor but is necessary for the achievement of these objectives as the Chinese analysts like Liang Fang have highlighted. While a Chinese presence in the IOR cannot be avoided, the strategic advantages that will accrue to China on account of acquisition of bases can be offset by following a counter-strategy for reducing the Chinese influence in the region and by containing the spread. This will require a synergy of effort between the various facets of state policy including foreign, defence and economic. Collaboration with other players in the region as also outside, will further mitigate the rise of China in the Indian Ocean Region. The 'String' can be loosened with some effort to gather the 'pearls'.

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5

The Communist Party-Army Equation in China

Gautam Banerjee

PREAMBLE

In a republican scheme of matters, *warfare* is the ultimate political recourse that is to be prosecuted to seek conditions for the advantageous settlement of external disputes. Conversely, in the communist ideology, military force is but an integral component of *external* as well as *domestic* political articulation, more of the latter in fact, for it to remain committed as the guarantor of the regime's autarkic endeavours. This is a major distinction which determines the relationship between the state and its military institution in the two contrasting political systems. It also governs the diversities between the civil and the military institutions in the two systems of governance, the fundamental difference being the communist regime's deliberate politicisation of its armed forces and banking upon political-military integration to perpetuate the communist rule.

To monitor the course of the communist regime of the People's Republic of China (PRC) therefore, it is mandatory to observe the dynamics of the Party-Military equation. With this purpose in mind, this paper has been devised in two parts, as follows:

- In Part 1, the discussion is centred around the recent trends of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in the PRC, and the

corresponding realignments that permeate into the political management of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

- In Part 2, the dynamics of the CCP–PLA engagement and its fallouts are discussed.

PART 1: THE CCP–PLA RE-ALIGNMENT

Situational Assessment

Principally, communist states require 'Party' representation, and therefore Party control, over the entire governing establishment and its executive arms. In the case of the people's army, this relationship is more deeply rooted by having the army as the Party's politically integrated component. This principle is best evidenced in the PRC, so much so that it is impractical to draw any distinctive line between the CCP and the PLA.¹ No doubt, triggered by the fundamental diversities between Party work and the profession of soldiering, there must brew disconcert among the two pillars of the state from time to time, but in communist tradition, such contentious issues are well reconciled through various 'standing committees' for policymaking. This is a system that is opaque and which functions behind a solid 'bamboo curtain'. It remains therefore an engaging obligation for China-watchers to arraign past trends and experiences of the Party–PLA engagements, and build upon these from observations of recent developments to draw out the concurrent situational inferences. The chronicle of the PLA's balancing acts against the failure of the 'Great Leap Forward' of the 1950s, the disaster of the 'Cultural Revolution' of the 1960s, the purge of Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four' factions in the 1970s, the turnabout of the proletariat-policies into technical-economic deviations in the 1980s, and the course of the PLA's own modernisation since the 1990s are some examples of such analytical endeavours.

During the recent years, at the initiatives of the CCP and its Central Military Commission (CMC), substantive revisions have been effected in the structure as well as policy pronouncements of the PRC's Ministry of National Defence. It may therefore be interesting to delve into the current trends of CCP–PLA engagement.² Towards that end, the highlights of the Party–PLA re-alignments have been discussed in this part.

PLA under a 'New Dispensation'

By the time the disastrous Cultural Revolution ended in 1969, a group of far-sighted leaders led by Deng Xiaoping could see the inevitability of the people's disillusionment with the anarchic political system bursting out some day. Thus, as the stranglehold of Mao Zedong's inner-circle weakened with his passing away, the advent of a *New Dispensation* was a natural way forward. Taking note of the periodic revolts that have rent the Chinese society throughout the history and the destructive fallouts of the resultant mayhem that had been perpetrated upon the Chinese society, the purpose of the *New Dispensation* was to adopt more agreeable paths to govern a stable realm – and so achieve the lofty national objective of reclaiming China's past glory under the solely competent ministrations of the Communist Party.

Till the mid-1970s, the CCP was the *de jure* as well as the *de facto* government; the existence of the constitutional state's 'Government of PRC' being confined to the purpose of legitimising the Party Rule. Thereafter, in a dispensation that was ushered under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, technocrats, many of them from PLA's combatant and political cadres, took over the reign of the country's march to modernisation. It is at that stage that the Government of PRC was allowed a more distinct identity and an exclusive structure, in form if not in substance, the development being aimed at assuaging domestic as well as foreign reservations in dealing with a Party rather than a sovereign state apparatus. The CCP's absolute control over the Government was ensured by having every rung of the latter's hierarchy supplanted with parallel CCP hierarchies. Obviously, in line with communist principles, all these CCP forums wield overriding authority over the Government bodies even if most of the top incumbencies may be common.

In the case of the PLA, the kind of arrangement discussed above had been in existence since the days of the 'Long March'. Constitutional appointments of venerated PLA Generals into the CCP's top policymaking bodies had formalised the PLA's participation in the governance of the state, just as it ensured its implicit obedience to the Party's promulgations. However, in contrast to the rest of the Government, the military brass enjoyed much autonomy when it came to the management of the PLA, as it was necessitated by the unique

professional imperatives of the military establishment. It was that exclusivity which allowed the PLA to build up a vast industrial empire, which, to begin with, was meant to generate revenue for its partial self-sustenance, but later developed into a distinct sector by itself, to the benefit, regular as well as shady, of elite groups within. In the overall context, no doubt, the regime of orthodox communism remained all-pervasive and the dexterity in its ideology continued to score over purely professional competence. In fact, marriage to communist ideology was viewed as the sole source of professionalism amongst, say, even the scientists and generals. That was the situation till the era of the aforementioned *New Dispensation* dawned.

The *New Dispensation* opened the doors for higher professionalism in all state institutions while easing out on the emphasis on the commitment to hard-line communism. Gradually, with the Party's foresighted understanding and endorsement, these changes led to propriety in the observance of rules, regulations and procedures in the PRC's governing establishment, and that in turn led to the empowerment of the temporal bureaucracy.³ This is one of the reasons that in spite of much obfuscation, cases of corruption at high places have come to be exposed during the recent years, the other reason being the innate communist fear of having to confront their own patented method of toppling the state, that is, outbreak of mass-movement against autocratic highhandedness and socio-economic disparity. A similar development has permeated the PLA; military professionalism is no more identified with ritualistic demonstrations of communist ideological vows and corrupt practices among the military brass are being called to question, with due subtlety of course.

PLA's Role in Perpetuation of Party Rule

At the end of the 1970s decade, with Deng Xiaoping at the helm, the PRC commenced its 'four modernisations'. Conceptually, the goal of military modernisation was listed at the fourth place, the precedence pointing to the interdependency among the four sectors of modernisation rather than any priority. The PLA heavyweights in the Party's apex policymaking bodies, the CMC included, had endorsed that concept because they understood that technological and economic modernisation was a prerequisite to restructuring the PLA in the form of a modern military power. As a result, the advent of the 1980s saw

the state proceed towards an achievement of the technological, industrial and economic breakthrough by means straight and crooked, while the PLA engaged in such structural and procedural reforms which would cascade its modernisation when its turn came. A fallout of this arrangement was the delegation of professional autonomy to the domain experts – technocrats and economists – relatively freeing them from the arbitrary impositions of Party apparatchiks. At the highest level at the Centre, however, the CCP continued to maintain, to the necessary extent, its ideological and executive stranglehold over all matters of governance – civil services, the judiciary, foreign trade et al., and above all, the PLA.

The *New Dispensation* has had its effect on the Chinese citizens of all hues. People have started articulating, even asserting, their perceptions on political dissension, religious observance, crony-corruption, exploitation of bonded labour, inducement of demographic migration to peripheral territories, etc. For the CCP to retain its authoritative supremacy therefore, it has become necessary to court the people's solidarity. To meet that end, the CCP is intent on fostering a regime of economic and societal progress, clamping down on corruption and disparate behaviour, and even growing tolerant to mild deviations from the Party-line. The orchestration of a new sense of assertive 'Chinese Nationalism' among the younger people is another scheme for the Party to find a cause of solidarity with the citizens, captive as they otherwise are to the autocratic communist system. The promotion of the idea of China's 'rightful' claim to Han supremacy over lesser societies and its 'historically undisputable' territorial rights is one part of that scheme, while raising people's ire over the "trouble makers" who are stated to have "lost their mind" to question China's 'sovereignty' over lands and seas far and wide, is the other part. Obviously, having ruling stakes over the state's civil society, economy and internal as well as external politics, the PLA has substantial roles to play in promoting these measures, and *inter alia*, ensuring a trouble free continuation of the Party Rule. Needless to state, should matters show signs of going out of control, as it happened during the 'Cultural Revolution', and as it is wont to happen again – should the masses go 'recalcitrant' to demand liberalisation, the PLA must be ready at hand to respond in favour of the CCP, as it eventually did at the Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Recently, in the context of national defence, a third factor of the *New Dispensation* has emerged. Described as 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces', the PRC's Defence White Paper of April 2013 mandates deployment of the 'People's Militia' in implementation of massive social, economic and engineering schemes and commitment of the 'People's Armed Police Force' (PAPF) in controlling the uprisings in peripheral provinces, while mandating the regular PLA to modernise, so as to be able to promote the nation's sovereign will. Thus the White Paper identifies the PLA with its Army, Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery, while the PAPF as well as the People's Militia are referred to as distinct entities, all under the combined terminology of 'armed forces'. Heretofore undistinguishable within the overarch of the PLA, these three grades of state power seem to have been bestowed with more clearly delineated identities thus – and mandated distinctly of course. Viewed in light of the distinct roles assigned through the above-mentioned White Paper, these statutory delineations are bound to be a part of the CCP-guided re-alignments within the military structure. Needless to state, this re-alignment would facilitate rightsizing, professionalising and modernising the PLA, while dedicating the PAPF towards the internal security role and engaging the PLA veterans on national development schemes through the People's Militia, particularly in distant regions. It would also facilitate a simultaneous commitment of all of these three force elements to preserve the PRC's national stability – and *inter alia*, perpetuation of the Party Rule over the realm.

As the CCP engages in a transformational role for the PRC's all-round development, so does the corresponding role of its military institution in guaranteeing a perpetual and stable Party Rule.

A Caveat on China's "Peaceful Rise"

It is known that having recovered from its past "hundred years of humiliation" at the hands of the Western Powers and Japan, and the anarchies inflicted by its own tottering Qing Dynasty, the intransigent 'warlords' and the Kuomintang 'nationalists', the post-1949 communist regime of PRC has vowed to not let that ignominy befall China ever again. It is so therefore that in the CCP's scheme for the future, the agenda of "recovery of lost territories" and "integration" of peripheral nationalities run concurrently with the scorching pace of technological,

industrial and economic advancements – each of these exactions converging to restore China to its super-status as ordained.⁴ In this context, the CCP propounds a *caveat*: that for such an objective to fructify, China's destiny must be steered under the Party's all-pervasive control. No doubt backed up with historical evidence, there is merit in that argument. Besides the invading marauders of peripheral ethnicities – Mongols, Turks, Huns, Jurchens, Kltans, Manchurians, etc., all viewed as "barbarians" by the 'superior' Han civilisation – the edifice of the Chinese state has also been damaged time and again by long and vicious internal revolts and instabilities raised by its numerous regional, ethnic and power-seeking constituencies. Even in the post-communist period, there have been bloody and forgettable turmoils like the 'Great Leap Forward' and the 'Cultural Revolution' which had been triggered, not by the CCP per se, but by the coteries of power-centres which hijacked the Party's authority by manipulating Mao Zedong's personality cult. In a nation so large, complex and demanding, the CCP's *caveat* against China's such innate societal tendency to invite disaster does make some sense.

The contemporary era has seen many far-reaching socio-economic changes in the PRC. No more mute sufferers, citizens are turning vocal in their demands and many times massing up to indulge in vociferous activism in defiance of the Government. To pacify the people's rising sense of entitlements against the finite reservoir of resources and so retain its grip on state power, the CCP is obliged to adopt a range of rough and ready measures. No doubt, care is taken to apply these measures in harmony with societal and environmental conditions, yet, in a country so diverse, these measures need to be protected with the backing of force – administration of bitter medicine by force for the higher 'good', so to say.

In a similar vein, for its burgeoning demand for raw material and resources to feed its development, the PRC cannot but look beyond its borders, and even to the regions beyond. Like all great powers, the PRC seeks to secure such steps to its greatness by laying sovereignty claims over certain areas, asserting usage rights over some others, negotiating leases, entering into contracts and buying friendships. As history points out, the political product of such economic compulsions and external dependencies can be a potentially harmful concoction. In that context, the PRC is live to the possibilities of provoking

international confrontation, and consequently, feels the need to build up its military superiority to protect its interests, should such a course becomes unavoidable.

Finally, the PRC understands that the extent of a secure empire is dictated by: one, the 'reach' of communications to its extreme peripheries; and two, military power to preserve the sanctity of its state policies against internal and external subversion. The upholding of that *caveat* of Party Rule therefore is contingent upon the CCP having at its exclusive disposal a fully committed military institution. The PLA's ideological subservience to the CCP and its deployment as a hard tool to promote the Party's interests is a corresponding fallout of that *caveat*.⁵ Indeed, the CCP's PLA-inclusive ruling structure is decreed to secure that purpose. Thus from both the internal as well as external considerations, the PLA is being geared up to being able to protect the PRC's concerns by disarming any possible – expected in fact – rise of inimical forces.

As stated, in its leadership's reckoning, China's rise is considered to be contingent upon the CCP ruling the roost, which in turn requires a complete mastery over an ideologically bound military structure. Indeed, that military structure must be committed to serve the Party's purpose and powerful enough to: one, enforce internal order; and two, to browbeat, or actually force into submission, those who may be seen as external "trouble makers".⁶ Going a stride further, China's Defence White Paper of 2013 has added to these roles of the PLA, the formal commitment of undertaking infrastructural developments in China's difficult peripheral regions. The CCP-PLA bonding is cemented thus.⁷

PLA – The Party Vehicle

In sum, to refer to a mythical example, the PLA is the Party's *Vahana*, dutifully carrying its 'lord' against all obstacles and keeping him out of harm's way even at the cost of its own life. It is a Party's army, mandated to keep the Party in power – so that China may reclaim its superior status. The CCP would therefore do everything to keep the PLA strong in terms of war-where-withal. More importantly, the traditional Chinese wisdom would ensure that the PLA is best served by military intellect and professional acumen.

The dynamics of such an inter-dependency is discussed in the next Part.

PART 2: DYNAMICS OF THE CCP-PLA ENGAGEMENT

Leadership Ideologies in the Contemporary CCP

As in any coterie-ruled regime, a factional sparring among the lead agents of the CCP to gain *inter se* influence has ever been an acquiesced practice. Of late, there have emerged three groups of participants in this dynamics of power posturing, each exerting reckonable influence, contrary in some ways and congruous in some, in the management of the PLA. In conformity to the communist practices, each of these groups is subscribed to by the military as well as the civilian membership.

One group consists of those leaders who have risen through the communist hierarchy the hard way. These leaders owe their success to conforming with the Party line. They therefore accord priority to the perpetuation of that system by maintaining the Party's grip over every endeavour of the state – on policymaking as well as on the policymakers themselves. Having a close feel of the ground and the common man's concerns, this group is sensitive to the growing economic disparity and the self-centred 'privatisation' of the social attitude that seems to be engulfing the neo-rich and wannabe entrepreneurs of 'rising' China, even some Party heavy-weights. The 'Party Committees', which are functional in almost every organisation – public or private, societal, industrial or economic – owe their relevance, if not dominance, to the clout exercised by this group. The scrutiny from the Party-angle of every major scheme – to gauge the resultant fallouts on socio-economic, personnel and promotion policies – is thus ensured. The influence of this group of proven Party functionaries is considerable, and is rising with their elevation to the higher rungs of Provincial as well as Central leadership.

This group, consisting of the conservative military as well as civilian Party members, is chary of rightsizing the PLA and its delinking from economic ventures for the fear of raising socio-economic turmoil among a vast multitude of beneficiaries of the existing arrangement. Besides, this group continues to believe that conformity to the communist

ideology must remain a firm criterion for the endorsement of the military brass.

The second group consists of the better-born, well-educated, articulate and highly connected 'princelings', so to say, who have the advantage of their family background and peer group support, besides proven competence in political leadership, in their rise to power. This group is more open to technological advancements, economic liberalisation and private sector performance to spread all-round development, starting from the 'hub' areas towards the poor and underdeveloped fringes. Networks of peer group support works to the common advantages of this group of military and civilian membership including facilitating their rise to powerful posts and advancement of each other's interests. Obviously, members of this group jealously nurture their peer group bonds – Xi Jinping's support base among his academic, military and Party peers is one example. Infused with contemporary ideas and professional backgrounds, this group is devoted to development through modern technical and economic dispensations backed up with high-skill professionalism. Members of this group are the driving force behind modernisation of the PLA – rightsizing and professionalising even in preference to the demonstrative subscription to communist ideals.

Recent pronouncements of the CMC Chairman Xi Jinping, published by the PLA Press in the form of a document titled 'The Selected Important Expositions on National Defence and Army Building', and distributed at the regimental level and above with instructions to organise its group study in the PLA and the PAPF, should be seen in this light. The document reveals that taking off from the Plenum of 18th Central Committee of the CCP, the CMC has undertaken a series of major exercises on strategic thinking, military theology and building a powerful military institution. Besides according primacy to realistic training, procedural and organisational reforms and professional military competence, the thrust of the CMC is also on organisational discipline, personal conduct, austerity and probity among the higher military leadership. Further, the CCP leadership envisions the PLA to serve the cause of the nation's scientific and infrastructural advancements in the course of its modernisation, the unorthodox process being qualified by the expressions "under the new situations" and "according to Chinese characteristics".

The third group, lesser in political clout but strong in societal influence, is made up of the prominent members of the CCP's 'Youth League', the cradle of its future leadership. It is an organisation that is taken very seriously by the CCP, particularly in guiding young minds along the socialist-nationalist path and keeping them from nurturing destabilising inclinations. This is a puritan group which believes in what is branded as 'Communism with Chinese Characteristics' and subscribes to the Party-sponsored call of 'proud nationalism'. Encouraged by the CCP to maintain its hold over the people who, under the *New Dispensation*, can no more be contained within the traditional communist cocoon, the surge of 'Chinese Nationalism' has therefore found equal footing alongside the official-sponsored socialistic rhetoric.

This rise of nationalism is prominent in its hawkish support to the PRC's growing assertiveness of its predatory territorial claims over the neighbouring regions. In fact, for the neighbourhood, this must be a dangerous trend that commits the rising global power to the use of its military force to reclaim what it propounds as its "lost territories", apparently under the compulsion of redeeming public opinion that grows critical of an autocratic regime. Thus, what had purportedly been a device of diplomatic posturing to start with, might turn into a passionate, inflexible national objective that pushes the PRC into political hot-rhetoric and military muscle-flexing. No doubt, that situation would be much to the misfortune of the regional countries, even the world at large, the ultimate outcome of which cannot be but detrimental even to the PRC's interests. This aspect nevertheless bears upon the PLA's mandate, hawkish expectations coming both from within its ranks as well as through popular obsession.

A discussion on the leadership of the CCP-PLA would remain incomplete without a mention of the PLA's Political Officer Cadre. These political-soldiers play the role of interface between the above-mentioned three groups of the CCP's policy-framers, and therefore, stand to garner the maximum advantages in the game of power-play. A good number of the top leadership of the PRC-CCP comes from this cadre. Presidents of the PRC, General Secretaries of the CCP and Chairmen of the CMC, past and present, have risen from that background and therefore have enjoyed a strong camaraderie base among the military hierarchy. The influence of this cadre in nurturing the CCP-PLA engagement has ever been overwhelming.

A point to reiterate is that each of the factions of the CCP-PLA leadership described herein has a mix of civilian and military stakeholders; common ideals and interests subsuming the diversities of civilian–military characteristics, particularly when there is solidarity among the new generation members who subscribe to the *caveat* of continuation of Party Rule. Having dusted off the traces of communist economy in the post-1980 era, all the three power groups are one in their commitment to perpetuation of the Party-Rule – “for the sake of China’s great future”, as they aver. Notably, having suffered no end under the Maoist cult, serious concerns of emergence of another ‘supreme leader’ or ‘power-gang’ continues to bother the CCP. All efforts are made therefore to nip in the bud the emergence of any such leader or coterie – the indictment of Bo Xilai for example – and select the ruling functionaries of the autocracy through consultations, grooming and consensus within the Politburo.

Thus, unlike the single-track approaches adopted in the past – as exemplified by the Korean War of 1951–53, operations across the Taiwan Strait through most of the 1950s, the attack on India in 1962 and the Vietnam War of 1979 – future ventures to be undertaken by the PLA are expected to be articulated by the ups and downs of factional equations within the CCP Politburo and the CMC. The PLA’s change of track from dormancy to assertiveness on the Indo-Tibet Border on the one hand, and the rising show of concern on maintaining border tranquillity on the other, is an example of such a differential approach. The ongoing Sino-Vietnam stand-off and enactment of soft-glove sparring near the Xisa (Paracel) Island in the South China Sea is another example – the list is long. Needless to state, this is just a trailer of the PRC’s coming activism that needs to be matched wit-to-wit by all such nations which figure in its cross-wire.

PLA’s Stresses and Challenges

With the dawn of the *New Dispensation*, it was only a matter of time before the communist Generals, besides having to make way for policies which had been formulated independent of the PLA’s endorsement, were required to rightsize the PLA’s vast empire of non-military, commercial and social ventures, bloated and inefficient as these were. Loath to let go of their well-earned privileges, this was an inquisition that they had been resisting. The Party too had been going

slow in fear of a large scale unemployment problem, complexities of asset redeployment, exposure of forgettable policy as well as executive aberrations and spread of disconcert among the powerful pro-military lobby. But even as many of these reforms invited partisan opposition from the entrenched beneficiaries of the *status quo*, lessons of the Gulf War I, 1991, drove the PLA to discard its 'people's war'-linked 'people's army' mindset, so to accelerate the pace of modernisation. The process of shedding the flab having been underway thus for two decades, the PLA now finds itself being asked to reshape itself according to the combat as well as non-combat strategies of the Party and to usher-in more profound reforms. President Xi Jinping's recent communiqué to codify the military covenants and practices has added to the human stresses and organisational challenges against the deep-rooted and partisan military-party coalition.⁸ Stress in the PLA, therefore, is expected.

By the middle of the 2000s, much of the first three of the planned 'modernisations' had been well on the way to fruition while the last one, military modernisation, had picked up a steady pace. This development made it difficult for the hawks among the PLA leadership and their equally hawkish Party cohorts to restrain their innate urge to brandish China's 'comprehensive national power' for the cause of 'restoration' of what is claimed to be China's 'rightful' territories and interests. Deng's advice to build up quietly and 'bide time' – no doubt with the ultimate objective of flexing military muscle, and using it if necessary to push through with expansionist and monopolist designs when the time was ripe – was thus discarded, and a torrent of brazen territorial claims, diplomatic arrogance and economic impositions started blowing the regional tranquillity away.⁹ To complement the effort, a new lot of 'nationalist' academicians and thinkers have taken to the stage who, duly encouraged by the establishment, have taken it upon themselves to find arguments, even if expansive, to promote the tenuous claims. As a corollary, the strong reaction that this 'assertiveness' has evoked in the neighbourhood is being responded with a contrived show of injured dismay by both the 'brazen-hawks' as well as the 'rationalist-hawks' – both 'hawks' indeed – in the Chinese establishment. The latter named is upset with the former group for baring their teeth prematurely; even if the ultimate hegemonic goal remains unanimous, of course. Historical evidence points to the

possibility that this act may be a precursor to military action – “counter-attack in self-defence” as the PRC puts it. Meanwhile, differences between these two factions, and a third one which is sanguine of the need to actually ‘rise peacefully’, is another point of consternation within the CCP–PLA combine.

Having come out of the shadow of the venerated leaders of the mass army that the PLA had been, its Officer Corps is shaping up in two categories. One category consists of combatant-soldiers who acquiesce, for conviction or convenience, to the communist ideals with ‘Chinese Characteristics’, while the second is made up of rank communists who join up to the soldier’s calling; both categories are united in their subscription to the common goal of perpetuation of the Party Rule. The modernisation of the PLA has therefore resulted in the rise of a class of military leaders – those who have little time for political ideology and prefer to be devoted to professional soldiering. These officers understand the complexity of modern warfare and know that there are many more steps to be taken before the PLA can be relied upon to bring certain victory in any kind of what is described as “Warfare in the New Period”. It is at their instance that the CMC had to reiterate the thrust on professional and technical rather than communist education, meaningful training rather than choreographed demonstrations and disentanglement from non-military, corruption-prone ventures. Some of these issues have generated controversy within the ruling establishment, with both the conservative as well as the enthusiastic schools, each of mixed combatant and civilian membership, articulating their conflicting stances. Thus, there are those who subscribe to the theory that PLA’s unique strength lies in the devotion of its soldiery to the communist ideals, while there are others who profess a profound supremacy of tactical and technological skills as the winning factors in modern warfare.¹⁰ That is the third point of stress.

As discussed in the early part of the paper, China’s Defence White Paper 2013 assigns to the PAPF and the People’s Militia the status of distinct services within the Ministry of National Defence. The rising trend of internal troubles among the citizenry having become a matter of deepest concern, the PAPF and People’s Militia have been specifically mandated to the roles of maintenance of internal peace and stability. Yet, there are fundamental dependencies of the regime upon the PLA – human and organisational resources, for example – for its articulation

of external and internal policies, besides the execution of infrastructural projects in areas far-flung with the help of the PLA's technical expertise, executive efficiency and organisational strength. Such inter-organisational demands and dependencies gives rise to shades of management and procedural concerns and impose the burden of expediencies and compromises among the policymakers in the CCP Politburo, the CMC and the PLA.

Lastly, backed up by the resolutions promulgated by the recent Plenum of the 18th Central Committee, the CMC has come down heavily on the issue of patronage, graft and extravagance amongst the military brass and their civilian cohorts, an issue that was considered taboo earlier. The PLA hierarchy has been advised to divest itself from such un-soldierly inclinations and concentrate on building an all-volunteer, well-educated, highly trained and cost-efficient armed forces that derives its strength from probity, professionalism and indigenisation to keep the flag of communism flying high. No doubt therefore, the pro-active anti-corruption, corrective and trend-changing measures which have been instituted recently would cause some turbulence in the close-knit PLA and its powerful stakeholders. That, in fact, is a major challenge confronting the PLA.

The State's Nurturing of the Soldierly

In continuity with the theme of the *New Dispensation*, the CMC has propounded its mission of building a powerful military. Enjoining it as a bounden responsibility of the servicemen of the current generation, the focus is on the meaningful combat training and build-up of modern combat power with 'Chinese characteristics'. The ultimate mandate, of course, is to have as a national – Party, actually – asset, a "strong military capable of supporting the progress for building a powerful China", as it has been described.

In the fulfilment of that mission, the CCP-Politburo recognises the necessity of maintaining the PLA's morale and nurturing the soldiers' loyalty. In the communist regime, soldiery has been held in high esteem while membership of the PLA has always brought relief from the vagaries of state-imposed restrictions. To preserve the PLA's status in the society in the *New Dispensation*, an added emphasis on the soldier's welfare has been laid in the aftermath of the CMC's recent

pronunciations. Towards this end, state guidelines on the protection of soldiers' rights have been promulgated, directing courts, procuratorates and various ministries to resolve the soldiers' legal, land and domestic problems in a coordinated and expeditious manner. Interestingly, the promulgation goes on to warn against compromising national security by "preventing theft of military secrets and supplies, sabotage of military facilities, or impersonation of servicemen". Obviously, there have been reckonable breaches in the conduct of the soldiery, which is sought to be corrected by linking welfare with responsibility.

CONCLUSION

There are points of stress among the groups of communist and combat generals and between the PLA and the Party apparatus. The tangle is further complicated by dynamic permutations and combinations of hawkish and rationalist approaches, and internal turbulence within the PLA's policymaking hierarchy. Meanwhile, the Politburo experiences pulls and pressures, either to accelerate China's diplomatic-military assertiveness or to defer it, and either to administer upon the regional players the consequences of trying to contain her sabre-dance or to mouth reassuring syllables to calm them down till the time to discipline the intransigence is ripe. The PRC's hot-and-cold stance on American involvement in the Asia Pacific, arbitrary claims over East and South China Sea, and territorial claims over neighbouring countries point to that situation. Of course, the PLA, in a true communist tradition, must be a major factor in such of the PRC's political and diplomatic articulations.

The PLA is under varying degree of influences: old communism, rising nationalism and professionalism. But the CCP has seen through such stresses before; it will do so in the foreseeable future too. Meanwhile, as the CCP-PLA engagement gets steady, the hapless victims of the PRC's brazen aggressiveness – termed as 'assertiveness' in deference to its ability to inflict economical and military punishment – might find the three-decade-old break from military arm-twisting coming to an end.

ENDNOTES

1. The Communist Party-People's Army combine was also evidenced in the Soviet Union and other Communist Block countries. But in PRC, the depth of that integration is remarkable.
2. With the passing away of the venerated old guard, and triggered by the necessity to modernise the PLA, the emphasis on professional soldiering has become stronger than the obligation of pro-active participation in communist politics. Of course, since the fundamental principle ordains that the people's army must be the sword arm of communism, to be nurtured or expended to that purpose, there is a debate as to what should be the desirable extent of that shift.
3. This change also allowed the PRC to delink from the CCP's past of virulent verbal assaults and brazen deeds in the international reckoning. It also allowed the bureaucracy to function in relative autonomy from the motivated dictates of Party functionaries.
4. Selectively culled out from historical narratives of variable authenticity, China seems to aim at 'restoring' to herself, all such territories over which any of the Chinese or neo-Chinese dynasties or petty warlords had exercised, at any point of time, any kind of formal or informal order or influence. Apparently, a section of Chinese scholars are engaged in justifying, and adding to, a catalogue of such claims which are announced as and when the "time is ripe".
5. Indeed, whether it was during the Civil War, the war against Japanese occupation, the Korea War, or the 'Border Skirmish' against Russia, the Party leaders have never been shy of consigning PLA troops to promote their aspirations, much to the discomfiture of their communist Generals.
6. PRC has used this term to point at its neighbours' recoil to its intrusive territorial and commercial demands.
7. China's latest Defence White Paper, the eighth one, issued in April 2013, speaks of 'diversified' employment of China's armed forces to support the country's 'peaceful development' through 'integrated civilian-military' schemes.
8. This is an apparent reason for limiting the involvement of PLA brass in steering the Party, even if their membership in the Party's apex political bodies remains stable.
9. During the time China was tied up in pushing through her 'four modernisations', Deng had restrained the Party hawks through his 'advise' to "Maintain a low profile, keep a cool head, bide your time and never take the lead". By the middle of the 2000's, with modernisation well underway, the hawks seemed to have lost patience to switch over to 'assertiveness'.
10. Notably, it was the rank communist-soldiers who had 'organised' soldier's conclaves in the run up to the intervention in Korea, to declare 'consensus' on 'acceptability' of two million casualties in a war against a vastly superior UN military force(!). Indeed, this is the best example of the communist principle of Party-Army bondage. But fanatic zeal of communism, which drove massed soldiers of the 'people's army' to buy victory at the cost of mass casualties, does not work in modern times; the Chinese know this.

6

China's Defence White Paper, 2013: The Assertions of a 'Superpower' in the Making?

Gautam Banerjee

Promulgations of a Superpower

In April 2013, the People's Republic of China (PRC) released its eighth *Defence White Paper*, titled as 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces'. This exercise has been undertaken biannually since the early 2000s. However, the White Paper of 2013 is of significance because it is directly and deliberately in consonance with China's inexorable claim to superpower status. That kind of aspiration brings with it an expectation among the international community that the contender would want to enunciate its visions and goals for them to take note of. The rise of PRC being an issue of global focus, this White Paper called for an in-depth analysis from various angles.

The PRC's past record of dealing with the other stakeholders of the Asia and Pacific Region instils amongst the latter, a considerable degree of apprehensions as to its future intent and initiatives. China's Defence White Paper is therefore a document to be studied and thoroughly analysed against regional considerations. This call is more addressed to India, a nation that has had the misfortune of being incessantly targeted by the PRC, as exemplified by its policy of propping up Pakistan as its proxy to undermine the Indian nationhood,

blatant nuclear proliferation, brazen territorial claims, undiplomatic gesture sometimes crouched in niceties sometimes not, and pincer movements astride the northern highlands and southern oceans that would invariably impose strategic constraints upon India.

No doubt, when viewed objectively, most of the PRC's agenda – discounting its anti-India machinations in covert as well as ominous mode – appear to be in tune with its economic compulsions. Indeed, China's inroads into Africa, Latin America, Myanmar, the Indian Ocean littoral states and in the Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, when shorn of the background experiences of its past behaviour, seem to be justified on pure economic grounds. However, when considered in the backdrop of the compulsive *pan-Han* sense of superiority and hegemonic demands of supreme entitlements, the contents of the White Paper turns complex and forbidding. It is therefore necessary that the articulations enunciated in the White Paper be tempered with the Chinese leadership's cultural instincts before factoring these into India's policymaking inputs. There may thus be a case to briefly recall China's ruling culture before delving into the pronouncements of the White Paper.

Accordingly, it is proposed to delve into the pronouncement made in China's latest Defence White Paper in the backdrop of the PRC leadership's cultural outlook. The matter has been discussed under the following Sections:

Section 1 : Cultural Dimensions of China's Statecraft

Section 2 : The PRC's Strategic Vision

Section 3 : The Government-Party-Army Interdependency

Section 4 : Analysis of the Pronouncements of the Defence White Paper

SECTION 1

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF CHINA'S STATECRAFT

The manner of conducting statecraft and formulation of defence strategy are determined by a nation's cultural construct, particularly when it is so sublime as China's culture is. Therefore, a discussion on certain aspects of its cultural inclinations would help understand the pronouncements of the Defence White Paper better.

A Sense of Superiority

China's ancient civilisation is distinguished by its elaborate record-keeping of nearly six millennia and consequently, a tradition of continuity that is not seen in other civilisations of the past. It was so that the successive generations of the venerated scholar-administrators (mandarins) of imperial China continued to subscribe to the neo-Confucian state-culture that saw itself as 'superior' among the 'barbarians' all around. The exaggerated *sense of superiority* over other peoples and its presumed *right of exclusive entitlements* therefore permeated as an innate characteristic of the Chinese state. This characteristics was evident not only under the neo-Han rule, but also when China was ruled by dynasties of alien ethnicity – pan-Chinese people, so to say, who, upon ascending to power, found it useful to adapt to the well-established tradition of Confucius-influenced, superior Han culture.

Notwithstanding the notion of communist equality, this complex remains at the core of the modern pan-Han psyche; if repudiated, the average Chinese finds it strange that others may not necessarily defer to his ordained status of exclusivity.

The Imperative of Peripheral Control

The territories ruled by the Chinese Empires have traditionally been categorised under two distinct parts: the '*core*' or inner areas and the '*peripheral*' or outer territories. The former is a vast landmass of ethnic Han and neo-Han homeland situated among the west–east river valleys – the Yellow, Wei, Huai, Han and Yangzi. Over the past millennia, this core area has been the cradle of the great Han civilisation while being ruled by the dynasties of Han as well as foreign ethnicities. Beyond that core area, the Manchurian Provinces, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Tibet and parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan constitute the peripheral territories, inhabited by peoples of distinct ethnicity and culture whom the Han considered as 'barbarians'; at some points in time, Mongolia, Korea and Vietnam too had been considered as parts of the Empire.

The relationship between the core and the periphery has ever been fluctuating between two extremes. The peripheral powers – the *Huns*, *Kitans*, *Jurchens*, *Turks*, *Uyghurs*, *Mongols*, *Manchus* and *Tibetans* – had

at times accepted China's suzerainty while at other times they professed independence, even hostility, inflicting frequent attacks and devastations upon the core areas. It was so that imperial China, from the time of the *Song Empire* in the 10th Century, learnt the lesson that enjoined the state to exercise firm control over these territories as an imperative for maintaining internal stability and order. Ever since, the struggle to exercise that control had engaged imperial China, till the situation stabilised somewhat in its favour during the early part of the *Qing Empire*.

That institutional memory is so deeply ingrained that successive governments in China continue to consider the 'integration' of peripheral territories as a fundamental plank of stable nationhood.

Fear of Internal Instability

Riven by an unending stream of 'barbarian' attacks from the nomadic inhabitants of the peripheries, internal revolts, infighting among the contenders of throne, reign of the warlords and civil wars, the breakdown of internal order has been a recurring feature in China. Besides, it has been subject to repeated invasions from Japan and European powers. All these events have been extraordinarily violent and destructive, repeatedly ravaging the society and the state. The Chinese consider those catastrophes to be the main cause of the weakening of imperial China and the 'centuries of humiliation' that it was obliged to suffer during the past two centuries.

Having vowed not to permit such helplessness to displace their march towards a destined super-status, China's communist leaders are wary of slackening control over their people, even if permitting economic liberalisation to keep them satisfied and engaged. Obviously, even hints of emergence of internal chaos, whether instigated internally or from outside, are to be responded with a firm clampdown – like it happened in the Tiananmen Square in 1989 and recently in Tibet. That is one principle that the PRC leadership would not compromise – its survival depends on it.

Rewarding Loyalists

The Confucian ideology ordained that having to use violence was anathema to China's blue-blooded cultural superiority and a failure

of noble statecraft. It was so that notwithstanding the near continuous chain of warfare imposed upon the Chinese heartland by the 'barbarians' of the northern steppes and western highlands, the Empire had been rather generous to these inimical stocks once these had submitted to the Empire's suzerainty. Indeed, it was a result of that tradition that there were times when the rulers of the neighbouring ethnic nations demanded to be accorded vassal status for the lure of the highly valued 'gifts' from the Empire, taking to violence if that demand was not met!

Today, that tradition is manifested in the PRC's solidarity with its client states, Pakistan and North Korea included, which wear their love and loyalty towards the PRC on their sleeves.

Regional Horizon

Unlike European powers, the US and Japan, China has not been reckonably successful in seizing a profound control over regions beyond its periphery – probably on account of its unending struggles to keep the core and peripheral territories in order. However, China's ruling establishment recognises that the present socio-economic dispensation entails that

- Firstly, economic uplift of the people is mandatory for the Communist Party to survive;
- Secondly, the path of economic progress is paved by control over outlying reservoirs of natural resources;
- Thirdly, a secure access to resources comes from super-status and military strength;
- And lastly, to secure the nation's destiny, the Communist Party of China (CPC) must remain in power.

Accordingly, the PRC's pressing urge to lay hands on territories beyond may be seen as a prerequisite that it is committed to enforce.

Comments

A succession of vicious internal conflicts during the past century or so caused the aforementioned cultural instincts to remain contained within the core of Han politics. Even then, these instincts did manifest in China's past dealings with Korea, Vietnam, India and Japan. Since the 1980s, when the PRC warmed up to its power potentials, the state

had been restrained by its supreme leader, *Deng Xiaoping*, from showing hegemonic tendencies; the statesman had enjoined the leadership to "...observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, hide our capabilities, and bide our time ...". The recent events, however, indicate that the period of "bide our time" may be at its last leg.

This situation brings into focus certain indicators of the PRC's strategic vision.

SECTION 2 THE PRC'S STRATEGIC VISION

The manner in which a nation chooses to build up and articulate its military power is determined by its native strategic vision. It is so that in the case of China, even as it transited through the periods of monarchical autarky, a short republican regime, the *Guomindang* governance and finally its displacement by the communist rule, the tradition of imperialist thinking and domineering statecraft has continued to flourish amongst the CPC leadership. As the confidence level and status of the PRC grows, these instincts are apparently crystallising into an overt strategic vision of a complexion that its neighbours may have reasons to be wary of. Wisdom therefore dictates that the indicators of that vision, as discussed in the following paragraphs, may be taken note of.

Integration

China's communist leadership has opted to subscribe to the imperialist urge of integrating the peripheral territories – Manchuria, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Tibet, Yunnan, the China Sea islands etc. – with the core of the Chinese mainland. There may not be reasons to dispute that quest. However, in the fulfilment of that self-ordination, it lays claim upon *any* piece of land that had *ever* been under *any* form of imperialistic control for *whatever* length of time, and then unfolding such claims at the 'opportune' moment as its 'persuasive' power grows. That such brazen ideas, if conceded, would destabilise the entire world, does not seem to matter to the 'superior' race and its sense of 'entitlements by right'. Even, it must be conceded that like any other state apparatus, there are different schools of ideologists within the CPC. At the present juncture, the hawks seem to dominate.

Expansionism

Since the millennia past, barring it relatively brief engagements with Mongolia, Korea, Indo-China, Nepal and Myanmar, China has traditionally confined its urge of 'unification' to its 'peripheral territories'. Among these incessant efforts, there were three prominent phases of the unification process: during the *Sui Dynasty* in 589 CE, the *Song Dynasty* in 960 CE and the *Qing Reunification* of the 17th and 18th Centuries. However, weighed down by incessant troubles caused by wars, revolts and recurring calamities, seldom ever in its history, has China found itself prepared to look beyond its northern steppes or the westerly Tibet–Turkmen plateaus to establish its control. Even *Kublai Khan* (Yuan–Mongol Dynasty)'s attempts to dominate the China Sea in the 13th Century and the 15th Century six-voyage maritime exploits of the Ming Admiral *Zheng He* did not change that focus. Presently however, the PRC has broken from its past imposition to lay claims over lands and seas well outside its peripheral territories. As a corollary, it is intent on building up its military might as it must befit a superpower, including a blue water navy.

Nationalist Surge

So far, the expansionist urge had been confined amongst the hawkish policymakers who were generally not accountable to the citizens. Being excluded from the right to question, the citizenry too was non-committal in the matters of state policies. Lately however, there has been an officially sanctioned surge of nationalist fervour among the common citizens – a fervour that may coalesce into a popular demand that the ruling regime may find difficult to control. Thus inter alia, the state may have to commit to expansionism even if it wants to be reclusive at any stage. As evidenced from the situation created by the state in Pakistan, this is a dangerous portent.

Committed Perceptions

Lastly, in the intermixing of the neo-Confucian, Sun Zsu-Bangfa and communist culture, the Chinese are smug in the perceived perfection of their versions of 'established facts' and 'logical conclusions'. Political manoeuvres and application of military power being synonymic to them, the contemporary CPC leadership is not averse in exerting force,

or many variations of demonstration of force that it adopts, to convince the intransigents to back off from confrontation, as it did in the China Seas and recently in Tibet. Besides, it may opt to view even non-military gestures of a targeted nation as 'provocation' which may leave it with 'no choice' but to launch military forces to execute what is termed as 'counter-attack'; and if that attack is resisted by the victim, to launch, 'reluctantly' of course, an all-out 'counter-attack in self defence'.

Similarly, taking liberty with the interpretation of established facts, a selective repudiation of international norms and reversal from past understandings are considered to be fair political strategy, to be unfolded "when the time comes". Indeed, 'peace' is professed by enjoining the target country to let the PRC take what it wants, while 'talks' are meant to display its 'magnanimity' in sparing some parts of the grab, provided the victim shows its ready appreciation. Interactions reveal that in all seriousness, the Chinese find it strange that most subjects of their 'friendly' overtures find their naturally 'simple and straight forward' claims to be contestable. No doubt, most powers subscribe to such machinations, but the communist regime beats them by its sheer arrogance.

Comments

Having discussed the state as well as the strategic culture of the PRC leadership, it may be worthwhile to discuss the status of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the overall objectives of the state. The necessity emerges due to the fact that under the Chinese dispensation, the state, the Party and its military institution are so inseparably integrated that for a comprehensive examination of the Defence White Paper, it would be obligatory to look at what the CCP expects of the PLA.

SECTION 3 THE GOVERNMENT-CCP-PLA INTERDEPENDENCY

Rarely, if ever, one comes across examples of a modern, powerful state in which the government–military integration is so intimate and overbearing as it is in the PRC. Of course, that is due to the monolithic bonding between the CCP and the PLA, wherein the PLA has ever been the CCP's *executive arm*, both in military as well as civic matters.

And with the CCP and the state having become synonymic, that bondage stands sealed. Indeed, in the Chinese scheme of matters, the military force is not only meant to fight a war *after* a stage when all other alternatives have failed to work, but it is also an intrinsic element of the entire politico-diplomatic process *right from the beginning* to send messages to the adversary through military postures and actions – firing missiles, concentrating troops, conducting exercises, etc., for example.

More than that, the PLA has been built up by the CCP-state as an asset that is to be unleashed to secure, by force or by enforcement, such political objectives that it has set for itself, stoically sacrificing its soldiery if that would promote the Party's cause – as it was evident in Korea, Vietnam, and even in the botched up Cultural Revolution. It is in this context that the deployment of the *People's Militia* in implementation of massive social, economic and engineering schemes, commitment of the *People's Armed Police Force* (PAPF) in controlling revolts in peripheral provinces and the modernisation of the *regular PLA* to promote the nation's sovereign 'will', have to be viewed.

Traditionally, a bonding of interdependency among the triumvirate of the state-Party-PLA has been nurtured by the PLA's informal right of access to top Party posts. As the following lines reveal, that situation has seen certain reckonable changes of inconsistent nature during the recent years.

Firstly, with the passing away of the iconic communist–military professionals of the Civil War era, the top Party posts are no more the exclusive domain of the military brass. In fact, military representation in the CCP Politburo, its Standing Committee, even the State as well as Party Central Military Commission, is on the decline. This development is in line with the following one.

Secondly, the state having discarded the classical communist agenda in favour of economic development, the rank of die-hard communism-dedicated military brass has been succeeded by a hierarchy that is thoroughly professional by modern standards. The contemporary military brass, while remaining communism-oriented at face, is of necessity, committed to cost-efficient management of a gigantic military establishment and its numerous military and civil mandates. That is an exacting task by itself, rendered further complex when the PLA's

committal to sweeping modernisation is factored in. Expectedly, their role in Party responsibilities may be singular no more, nor may they have the time or opportunity to be the exclusive 'pillars' of the Party in future. There is therefore a hint of the lord-serf kind of communist-soldier bondage turning into formal civil-military relationship.

Thirdly, survival of the regime – which is communist in form – being the primary agenda, the CCP leadership may have reasons to be wary of the new generation PLA's readiness to blindly submit to its ordinations. Since in practice, communist regimes ride on their military institutions, the military's reluctance to intervene in favour of such regimes – in Romania and Russia for example – may have made the CCP leaders uneasy. Evidently, the alarm had been palpable when seen in light of the widespread dissatisfaction, even protest, among the PLA officers before and after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. It may therefore be envisaged that in tune with global tendencies, the Party may not continue to take the PLA for granted – like a sheep to provide wool when alive and meat when dead.

As the society flowers, the display of ideas and actions outside the Party Line would not remain confined to what today is called as 'dissidence'. The CCP therefore would do everything to keep a firm grip on the PLA. One means to do so would be to accommodate the PLA top brass in the policymaking bodies and accord due respect to the PLA's concerns. The other means is to divest the PLA of its gargantuan civil industry and its part-soldiers, and right size it into a professional military force. Indeed, this effort has been going on since the past two decades or so, but as it happens in dealing with human concerns, the process remains tentative and distracted. The first solution may strengthen the school of hawks while the second requires the PLA-Militia to be kept meaningfully committed till the PLA transforms into a purely military force. The concept of 'diversified employment' may be rooted in the second condition.

Fourthly, in contrast to the aforementioned trend, the state-CCP continues to be dependent on the PLA, one, to attain a global super-status, two, to maintain internal stability, and three, to make the civic-economic developmental schemes progress. In fact, the execution of projects and implementation of schemes under the military norms of conduct is found to be preferable in the distant underdeveloped areas,

and to keep to fast-track schedules, limit corruption and foster accountability. This preference manifests in the practice of enrolling project-dedicated professionals and technical experts into the PLA–People's Militia and subject the project implementation to an overarching of military law. Indeed, the PLA appears to be the lead institution in giving shape to the CCP's national vision, at least till parallel civil institutions are firmly in place. No doubt, the civilian institutions are being built up and strengthened to implement all aspects of state policies, but the time when the military will confine itself to what it is supposed to – just train, and fight when necessary – is yet a long way off. It is in this context that the pivotal role of the PLA and the People's Militia under the stewardship of the regular officers comes to prominence.

In the overall context, the Government-CCP-PLA matrix seems to be in a flux. Consequently, international observers, particularly those of the wary neighbourhood, are concerned as to the military charter of the emerging superpower. The PRC recognises that concern and as it behoves an emerging super-power, assuages the stakeholders through open dissemination of the state's mandate to the PLA. The Defence White Paper is a demonstrative expression of that mandate.

SECTION 4

ANALYSIS OF THE PRONOUNCEMENTS OF THE DEFENCE WHITE PAPER

Honed over thousands of years of statecraft, the messages of the Chinese state, to be comprehensively understood, have to be factored with their postures, gestures, timings and linguistic synonyms. The Defence White Paper therefore may be better dissected in the backdrop of the cultural and strategic dimensions of China's policy formulations, and tempered with the CCP–PLA linkage which must have played a part in its articulations. Having discussed that backdrop, the stage is set to evaluate the pronouncements of the Defence White Paper.

Notably, the White Paper specifies the PLA, PAPF and the People's Militia as distinct entities, the 'armed forces' being the combined terminology to refer to these. Obviously, the PLA Army (PLAA), PLA Navy (PLAN), PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) are clubbed under the nomenclature of PLA.

The Title

The White Paper is titled as 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces'. Indeed, given the Government-CCP-PLA interdependency, the title needs no revelations, except that the armed forces may be expected to play a greater role in the implementation of the concept of 'integration through stability and development' in the troubled regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. It could also point to the role to be played by the PLA Navy in gaining an incremental grabbing of over thirty-odd islands in the China Sea which the PRC considers to be in the 'hands of foreigners' (sic), besides helping out with exploration in its claimed expanse of continental shelf and making sure that its overseas investments are not tampered with.

The Preface

In the Preface, apart from a 'diversified' employment of China's armed forces to ensure 'security guarantee', assistance in national development and contribution to 'world peace' and 'regional stability', the White Paper professes the following intent

- Reiteration of PRC's strategic choice of 'peaceful development' and a 'defence policy that is defensive in nature';
- Repudiation of hegemonism and military expansion, and pursuit of comprehensive, common and cooperative security through mutual trust, benefit, equality, etc;
- Build-up of powerful armed forces in conformity to China's status, security needs and development interests.

The White Paper then goes on to elaborate upon the aforementioned matters in five parts. These elaborations and comments thereof are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Part I: New Situation, New Challenges and New Missions

This part points to 'increasing hegemonism' and emergence of complicated security challenges. Interestingly, it complains of 'some neighbouring countries' of forging military alliances to 'make trouble' against China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. Mention in passing has also been made of the threats posed by 'three forces, namely, terrorism, separatism and extremism', existence of security

risks to China's overseas interests and an international competition to gain 'strategic superiorities' in outer space and cyber space.

Needless to state, at the first instance, this part of the narrative appears to be mindboggling in its hypocrisy and conforms to the innate characteristics of the Chinese state, as discussed in the earlier Sections. At the same time, it raises hope that unlike other superpowers of the past and the present one, China will actually rise to that status peacefully, without having to destabilise the neighbourhood.

The narration then moves to China's 'dramatically' growing national strength 'to safeguard her national unification, territorial integrity and development interests'. This description is covered under four headings, as follows:

- *One*, a broad vision of China's 'national security strategy and military strategy' is enunciated, which aims at '*winning local wars* under the conditions of informationisation, joint employment of all services and arms and *active* planning for the use of armed forces in *peacetime* to deal effectively with various *security threats*' (sic);
- *Two*, a firm resolve to is expressed to 'unswervingly' implement the strategy of 'active defence', prevent aggression, contain *separatist* forces, safeguard border, coastal and territorial air security, protect national maritime, outer space and cyber space rights and interests;
- *Three*, mention is made of enhancing the quality of national defence 'mobilisation' and 'reserve' force building';
- *Four*, a 'diversified' employment of China's armed forces to support the country's 'peaceful development' through 'integrated civilian-military' schemes, is touched upon.

The description is signed off with a statement, "*We will not attack unless we are attacked; but we will surely counterattack if attacked!*"

At the end of this part, the state-CCP's dependence on the PLA as the lead institution to push economic interests and development in the outlying regions is asserted. Besides, the commitment of China's armed forces in disaster relief, security of its overseas interests, 'merchant vessel protection' (the term may be an innocent version of 'Sea Lines of Communication'), and UN-mandated coalition operations, including joint training, to foster world peace, is reiterated. These

commitments are to be undertaken in conformity to the 'universally recognised norms of international relations', to ensure the 'legitimacy of operations involving foreign countries and militaries' (sic).

Comments

To the target readership of the White Paper, this part is the most significant. The matters to take cognisance of are as follows:

- The narration confirms the regime's deep-seated fear of *internal instability*. However, the CCP may reconcile to the fact that the remedy may be in its, and not the outsider's, hands;
- The moot point to ponder is as to what threat to its security, territory, rights, etc. might China envisage, and why, and in what manner; whose *aggression* does it intend to *win* against in a *local war* by its strategy of *active defence* which calls for *national mobilisation* and deployment of *reserves* over and above the world's largest armed forces? Of course, it must be conceded that every sovereign country enjoys the right to build up its military institution in the manner desired, but surely, that build-up may not rob the neighbourhood of its joy;
- The brave pronouncement of "...will surely counter-attack..." may also be aimed at China's reputation of engaging with superior powers regardless, and so foster a psychological deterrence to 'self-deter' the chosen adversary(s).
- As for the PRC's pronouncements regarding its global commitments, these are understandable matters in light of China's superpower aspirations. Hopefully, unlike the preceding insinuations, these pronouncements may not chill the neighbour's spine if the PRC leadership desists from its habit of professing its unique interpretations of the universally recognised norms.

Viewed in light of its past behaviour with those nations which do not subscribe to subservience to China's bidding, the narration in this part may be forbidding.

Part II: Building and Development of China's Armed Forces

This part of the Defence White Paper lists out the broad features of the current organisation of the armed forces of the PRC which includes

the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) and the 'People's Militia'. These details, and much more, are already known to the strategic community. Indeed, the evaluation of the defence force structure of the PRC is a separate exercise in itself. Therefore in the present instance, it may suffice just to underline some of the organisational aspects which find the PRC's formal acknowledgement through this White Paper. These aspects are:

- Commitment to build an 'informationised military force structure' and new types of lean, joint, multi-functional and efficient combat forces, obviously with Chinese characteristics;
- The 8,50,000 strong PLA Army (PLAA) stands organised into seven Military Area Commands (MACs), with 18 Combined Corps, additional independent formations and reoriented from theatre defence to trans-theatre mobility;
- The 2,35,000 strong PLA Navy (PLAN) stands committed to maintaining PRC's sovereignty over its territorial seas along with its maritime rights and interests. Towards this end, the endeavour is to accelerate its modernisation to develop blue-water capabilities that would impart capabilities of strategic deterrence and counterattack;
- The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) consists of 3,98,000 officers and men who form part of one 'air command' integrated with each of the seven Military Area Commands. The PLAAF focuses on reconnaissance and early warning, air strike, air and missile defence, and strategic projection capabilities;
- The PLA Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) forms the core of China's strategic deterrence. Capable of carrying out nuclear counter-attacks and precision strikes with conventional missiles, its purpose is to deter other countries from using nuclear weapons against China;
- The People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) deals with emergencies, combating terrorism and participating in and supporting national economic development;
- The Militia is a back-up force of the PLA. It is structured to undertake a supporting role in joint air defence, intelligence, reconnaissance, engineering, communications, transportation and equipment repair, as well as to provide reserve units for combat, logistics and equipment support. At usual times, it engages in a socialist modernisation drive, maintenance of

social order and emergency rescue and disaster relief operations.

Comments

This part alludes to the PLA's success in breaking free of its ideological burden of 'protracted people's war' with mass armies. Initiated by China's military thinkers, this was a process that commenced in the 1960s but was soon diverted from its course by the domineering 'Long March' leadership. The thinkers could find their feet again only in the aftermath of their Vietnam experience, and then the theoretical inquisition began. The new military doctrine was finally adopted after the jolt the Chinese strategic community suffered when it realised in the wake of the Gulf War in 1991 as to how incapable the PLA was in relation to its strategic goals and how inferior it was terms of modern war-fighting capabilities.

Though the topic is beyond the scope of this paper, it would be in order to mention the key doctrinal parameters that the PLA has adopted. The PLA accedes to the fact that it will have to fight a superior enemy (unmistakingly, the United States) and the theatre ('War Zone') could be the China Sea (*localised*). Thus motivated by its proven military wisdom, the PLA aims to gain an early initiative in fighting off a technologically superior force in a fast, short and intense war (*active defence*) as far *forward* as possible. In that, PLA intends to deploy lean, modern, and highly trained 'packet of excellence' formations in conjunction with 'information warfare' enabled (*informationised*) forces (*Chinese characteristics*, to wit) to exploit the vulnerabilities of the high-technology-dependent adversary and thus create an asymmetrical advantage. Knowing themselves to be nowhere near catching up with the sole competitor, the Chinese strategists bank on missile units to find some sort of parity in a *localised* exchange. Finally, it is implicit that even if catching up with the United States military remains a long way off, the PLA has already become a military power of disproportionate capabilities in the Asia Pacific neighbourhood.

The resolve to structure a lean, highly professional and efficient PLA, the commitment of the PLAP in fostering internal stability and the Militia's role in infrastructural development are also reiterated in this part. The new nomenclatures used to define the higher defence organisation and field formations are noteworthy.

Part III: Defending National Sovereignty, Security and Territorial Integrity

This is a rhetorical part. It calls upon the PRC's armed forces to defend China's land borders and sea areas against 'foreign invasions, encroachments, provocations'. Towards that end, pronouncements are made regarding recourse to 'resolute nuclear counter-attack' if China 'comes under nuclear threat' (sic). The importance attached to inter-Military Area Command training and exercises, the fulcrum of PLA's current doctrine, is also highlighted.

Comments

Notably, the rhetoric gives rise to two considerations. These are:

- The rhetoric is directed, not just at the PLA, but also at the PAPF and the Militia, all combined being referred to as the 'armed forces'. May be, like the PLAN and PLAAF, the PAPF and the Militia are also coming of age. This development could be in tune with the new relationship between the CCP and the PLA, as discussed in Section 3 above;
- Viewed in the backdrop of recent statements made in various forums, the narration may be a reiteration of the PRC's stance that it would not give up its territorial claims while expecting that the victims would stay away from seeking protection by 'ganging up'. Thus, the claims must be resolved peacefully – in favour of China, of course.
- There have been some discussions on the White Paper not reiterating China's commitment to the principles of nuclear 'no first use' and 'no use against non-nuclear adversary'. This is significant. However, with the PRC's propensity of interpreting situations in its own unique way, this omission does not really matter. A target may always be pronounced as 'own territory occupied by playing tricks by villainous forces', and an 'attack' may always be invented to 'justify' launch of 'resolute counter-attacks'.

The experience so far is that the excellence of the Chinese statecraft would ensure that the PRC does what it intends to do. The elements of doubt over that excellence, however, emerge when considered that firstly, by its nuclear proliferation, China has undermined its own

status; and secondly, by its brusque mannerisms, it is driving the lesser powers to seek protection in alliances.

Part IV: Supporting National Economic and Social Development

As the heading suggests, this part elaborates upon the armed forces' 'subordination to national reform and development'. This role is to be achieved through 'participation in infrastructure projects, ecological-environment conservation, new socialist rural area development, and by taking solid steps to support poverty-alleviation initiatives, give financial aid to education and provide medical service support' (sic). Citing notable examples, the armed forces are enjoined to *participate* in national development, emergency rescue and disaster relief and to *protect* national development interests, while being mandated to *maintain* social harmony and stability according to law.

The narration then proceeds to allude to the new law, promulgated in 2009, which mandates the PAPF with 'maintaining social stability' against emergencies and 'counter-terrorism', besides reiterating the PLA's mandate of safeguarding maritime rights and overseas interests.

Comments

The narration in this part is in tune with the cultural backdrop as discussed in the earlier Sections. The reckonable inferences are:

- One, the state's dependence on the armed forces in governance over peripheral regions, already an established communist practice, has substantially increased. With the armed forces subordinated to 'maintenance of social stability', that is actually a political role, the dependence seems to be complete. This express dependency may be on account of an urgency to integrate the separatist influenced regions through development, and absence of effective civil institutions to secure that end;
- 'Counter-terrorism' referred to is the PRC's description of violent expression of ethnic or cultural dissidence among the non-Han people; there is nothing more to it;
- The purported 'safeguard of maritime rights' may be nuanced with, firstly, identifying with territorial claims, and secondly,

muscle-flexing to usurp control over these;

- Having acquired vast overseas ventures, it is natural that the intent of protecting these, particularly in the event of the host states turning hostile, must be made clear. Further, it may be inferred that in so doing, those international obligations which may be in consonance, would be fulfilled.

This part shows that China is yet far from its goal of global super-status and that its civil institutions are but nascent, contrary to the hallmarks of that status. It also indicates that China intends to march on resolutely – it will.

Part V: Safeguarding World Peace and Regional Stability

Citing an impressive list of its participation in global military peacekeeping, disaster relief and medical assistance, this part conveys PRC's resolve to use its armed forces to 'staunchly' uphold world peace and regional stability. It declares its intent to participate in regional and international security affairs, including safeguarding the sea lines of communication, and play an active role in the international political and security fields. Towards this end it seeks, by means of joint training, to increase cooperation and mutual trust with the armed forces of other countries.

Comments

The narrative of this part is in consonance with China's outreach for global superpower status and the expectations that status generates among the comity of nations.

Overall Impression

The White Paper is the latest elaboration of the 'Historic Missions' of the PLA as it was spelt out by the President of PRC and Chairman of CCP and CMC in December 2004. The mission was enunciated as follows:

- To perform the role of an 'important force' in safeguarding the Party's 'ruling' position;
- To 'guarantee' the safeguard of the period of 'strategic opportunities' for national development;

- To provide 'strategic support' in safeguarding national interests;
- To play a role in upholding world peace and 'mutual development'.

The issuing of the Defence White Paper is an act of grace, so to say, for a great country that must emerge as a global power soon, up on the strength of its vision, capabilities and resources. Looking at it in isolation from the doings of the past seven decades of communist rule, it is a document that could assure the lesser powers in the neighbourhood of China's noble intent, letting them chart their destiny in the manner they may choose to. The perceptible experiences of the PRC's external policies, however, cast a shadow upon such hopes. After all, it is difficult to reconcile with that state's institutional practice of propagating lies and misrepresentations crouched in abusive language, export of violent rebellion, territorial aggression, illegal nuclear proliferation, etc. – the list of outrages is long.

Even as the PRC's climb to the super-status is levelling out, there is no easing out of the arrogance and mal-intent, as exemplified by the announcements of outlandish territorial claims, acts of brazen diplomacy and intermittent needling to show as to who is the 'boss'. It seems that the Chinese leadership is on a mission to seek retribution from the neighbouring countries against the inimical acts that China's past tormentors had inflicted upon it.

It is certain that China's deeply ingrained wisdom would tell it leadership that causing alarm among the middle-rung powers in the Asia and Pacific Region may not be the best way to stardom. Tormentors do not make superpowers.

7

Trends in Chinese Military Modernisation: Implications and Responses

Vinod Anand

The Geopolitical Context

The Chinese White Paper on Defence of 2015 and the papers issued earlier have been emphasising that their “*national defense policy is defensive in nature... and will never seek hegemony or expansion*”. Yet, countries that have been at the receiving end of China’s assertive policies in South China or the East China Sea would tend to think otherwise. China remains critical of the US rebalance strategy and its post-World War II military alliance mechanism. According to the paper, China does not foresee a major war but says that local wars are possible.

On the other hand, America’s National Military Strategy (NMS) 2015 document says, “*Today, the probability of U.S. involvement in interstate war with a major power is assessed to be low but growing*”.¹ The US NMS goes on to add that “*China’s actions are adding tension to the Asia-Pacific region. For example, its claims to nearly the entire South China Sea are inconsistent with international law. China has responded with aggressive land reclamation efforts that will allow it to position military forces astride vital international sea lanes*”. These contradictions only indicate that the security environment in the Asia Pacific would continue to remain complex as the competition between a rising and declining power intensifies.

The drivers of RMA in China, as in the case of other countries,

emanate from its national security concerns and its strategic ambitions. In any case, military modernisation occurs in a geopolitical and geostrategic context and is impacted upon by fiscal pressures. Notwithstanding the current downturn, China's economy has been growing, and so have been its security interests. The fundamental goal of China's National Defence Policy as outlined in 2004 is "to modernize China's national defense in line with both the national conditions of China and the trend of military development in the world by adhering to the policy of coordinating military and economic development, and improve the operational capabilities of self-defense under the conditions of informatization".² The term informatization in fact transcends the purely military aspects and acquires larger dimensions at the national level. In 2006, Director General Xiaofan Zhou of the State Council of Informatization Office, PRC, had outlined the essential goals of informatization as to progress all the way from an industrial society to an information-age society as also to accelerate all the means to move towards this end objective.³

While there has been some additional emphasis on fighting informationalised wars in the recent White Paper on Defence of 2015, there has been no fundamental change since then, especially those that impact on the goals of military modernisation. Way back in 2004, China had outlined its strategic objectives as achieving 'regional military ascendancy' and extra-regional influence.⁴ In fact, the PLA seems to have achieved considerable success in realising the stated objectives.

In China's military and strategic writings, the first two decades of the 21st Century are termed as period of 'strategic opportunity' when the environment would be conducive for development in both military and non-military spheres. And 'two centenaries goals' refer to "building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021 when the CPC celebrates its centenary; and the building of a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049 when the People's Republic of China (PRC) marks its centenary". The modernisation of the military is also being done that is in consonance with these two centenaries' goals. By 2020, the PLA plans to make major progress in its efforts in the RMA and by 2049 it expects to achieve the strategic goal of building informationised armed forces that would be capable of winning information-age wars. These twin objectives are expected to contribute to the achievement of

the 'Chinese Dream' as articulated by President Xi Jinping in November 2012.

Chinese Military Strategy After 2015

The Chinese have clearly reiterated their national strategic goal, in the Defence White Paper (DWP) of May 2015, of completing the building of "*a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021*".⁵ The paper goes on to reiterate the importance of a strong military in making the country safe and strong, especially in the context of the country's growing strategic interests and the 'new situation'. It further states that combat effectiveness is the sole standard for judging the military. The Chinese armed forces are responsible for "*creating a favourable strategic posture with more emphasis on the employment of military forces and means*".⁶ The DWP also highlighted that the armed forces are also responsible for the 'active participation in regional and international security cooperation and effective securing of China's overseas interests'.

On the question of maritime territorial disputes, China's approach as the White Paper avers would be to 'strike a balance between rights protection and stability maintenance' and work towards 'preventing crises'. This is what China has been doing in the South China Sea as also along the Sino-Indian border where its forces have been putting increasing pressure on its opponents through aggressive and assertive activities. The Chinese have been testing the capacity of the opponents in standing up to their coercive activities and as the pattern suggests, they pull back at the last moment before the incident leads to an unmanageable crisis.

Strategic Guideline and Preparations for Military Struggle

The PLA's military strategic guideline of 'active defence' continues to dictate current strategy. The 'Preparation for military struggle' (PMS) is to be carried out based on the construct of 'winning informationised local wars highlighting maritime military struggle and maritime preparations for military struggle'. Apparently, this is different from '*winning local wars under conditions of informationization*' that has been in force since 2004. This seems to indicate that the PLA is working towards acquiring capabilities for information-age wars where 'information dominance' would be the most essential factor in winning

a war. Therefore, one cannot say that it is merely a play of words as the new formulation reflects a response to the existing battlefield conditions as also likely changes in the coming years.

Informationisation, according to White paper of 2015, continues to be the centerpiece of military modernisation. The Paper observes that “world major powers are actively adjusting their national security strategies and defense policies, and speeding up their military transformation and force restructuring. The aforementioned revolutionary changes in military technologies and the form of war have not only had a significant impact on the international political and military landscapes, but also posed new and severe challenges to China’s military security”.

Further, the guideline of ‘active defence’ does not rule out pre-emption. In case the adversary is seen as making preparations for any hostile action then an offensive action against him is not precluded. For instance, if an adversary was seen as making preparations for an offensive action then attacking his logistics or other communication networks or for that matter carrying out cyber-attacks on his critical infrastructure would fall within the concept of active defence. In the areas where China claims sovereignty, for instance in the South or East China Seas or along the Sino-Indian border, any offensive action *ab initio* by the PLA would be termed as part of its active defence formulation.

In Chinese military thought the conception of the people’s war still finds an important place; the White Paper advocates giving ‘*full play to the overall power of the concept of people’s war, persist in employing it as an ace weapon to triumph over the enemy*’. This concept is, however, no empty slogan as it has found reflection in the Chinese concept and practice of people’s war in the information domain where a million of Chinese people armed with computers would take part in a people’s information warfare. India, amongst others, has been at the receiving end of cyber-attacks said to be originating from China that gives substance to the practice of such a concept.

Salient Features of Military Modernisation

A2D2 Capabilities: As part of its military modernisation China continues to develop its capabilities for Anti-Access/Area Denial

capabilities. Building its space and counter-space capabilities, improving its capabilities in information operations and cyber operations, adding to its long range precision strikes, nuclear assets and supporting infrastructure besides developing its Integrated Air and Missile Defence, are the other aspects of China's ongoing military modernisation that have found their due place in the current White Paper. China has again repeated its 'No First Use' nuclear doctrine but it still comes with certain caveats and from all accounts, it does not apply to, say, Arunachal Pradesh, which it claims to be its own territory.

Enhancing Power Projection. Adding to its power-projection capabilities has been the driver of China's military modernisation which has been underway for now over two decades. The PLA Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force have received special attention since the turn of the century and especially after their Commanders were made members of China's Military Commission (CMC). The current White Paper has highlighted the need for 'maritime military struggle' and therefore the requirement of preparing for such a struggle. According to the paper the PLA Navy (PLAN) will gradually shift its focus from "offshore waters defense" to the combination of "offshore waters defense" with "open seas protection". Protection of the strategic SLOCs and overseas interests and building of maritime power for such a task have been underscored. The defence White Paper also indicates that the Chinese expect heightened conflict and competition in the maritime domain and therefore the exhortations in the paper that "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned".

Developing a Powerful Navy: the PLA Navy has not only expanded its presence in the Indian Ocean Region, it has also acquired an aircraft carrier and announced that it is building another one and the Chinese military writers have forecast a requirement of at least three to start with. Some analysts have argued that eventually China may need to establish four aircraft carrier groups with the North and East Sea Fleets going in for one group each and the South Sea Fleet going in for two carrier groups.⁷ And the PLAN with its expansion plans would have the necessary number of surface ships for its future strike groups. The PLAN's ambitions can also be gauged from the submarine activity of the Chinese navy that has increased exponentially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) since 2013.

Further, the space and cyber domains are other significant areas of military modernisation where the Paper says that both have become the new 'commanding heights in strategic competition'. Here again, the capabilities to be achieved are with reference to the American prowess in these areas. Both space-based assets and cyber capabilities would be necessary to support long range precision weapon systems, smart, unmanned and stealthy platforms as also for integrating all elements of C4ISR and targeting.

At the national level, the National Security Law of July 2015 and a Cyber Security Law are geared towards expanding the powers of government to control and restrict online information and activity. As for as India is concerned, it has been experiencing China's capabilities in the cyber domain since 2008 when China's cyber warriors launched attacks against the National Informatics Centre, the National Security Council and the Ministry of External Affairs.⁸ There were reports, recently, of continuing cyber attacks from China against Indian targets. A separate Chinese hacking team, APT30, is believed to have been spying on the governments and businesses in South-East Asia and India, uninterrupted for over a decade.⁹

It is not only the PLA but also the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of State Security that are involved in the cyber operations. It is also well established that China has a number of well-organized units and associated structures to undertake information warfare activities. *The Science of Military Strategy*, a PLA book with its 2013 and 2015 editions, covers the entire gamut of cyber warfare. Other than the PLA's special network warfare forces, there are PLA-authorized teams of cyber forces in government organisations. In addition, there is a third type of cyber force which may comprise of private sector personnel, a kind of civil militia.

As part of the ongoing military reforms, China unveiled the formation of a new PLA Strategic Support Force on December 31, 2015.¹⁰ President Xi while announcing the structural reforms said that "the PLA Strategic Support Force is a new-type combat force to maintain national security and an important growth point of the PLA's combat capabilities".¹¹ The mission of the force has been described as to support the combat operations with a view to gain advantages in the network war, electromagnetic space war and space war. Apparently, the new

force is meant to streamline and coordinate cyber and space operations though its structure, organisation and processes are yet not very clear. It is expected to provide 'information umbrella' to enable both defensive and offensive information operations. Obviously, this would enhance the quality of jointness and integration during combat operations.

Defence Spending

The current modernisation of the PLA can be said to have commenced in the 1990s¹² with the defence spending being increased to double digits, a trend which continues till this day. China's official defence budget has grown at an average of around 10 per cent per year in inflation-adjusted terms from 2005 through 2015.¹³ In non-inflation adjusted terms, it has increased by an average of 12.9 per cent annually since 1989 when Beijing launched its ambitious modernisation programme. The Chinese announced an increase in their defence budget for 2015 by approximately 10 per cent. This roughly translates to 890 billion Yuan, or about US\$ 145 billion. The previous year, 2014, had seen an allocation of about 808.2 billion Yuan or US\$ 132 billion, i.e. a 12.2 per cent rise from 2013. While 2015 witnessed a decrease from this rise in percentage terms, it nevertheless marks the fifth consecutive year with a double-digit increase in official military spending. The Chinese military budget, at official exchange rates, is one-seventh that of the United States. But on a more appropriate purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, the Chinese military expenditure is about US\$ 500 billion, about three-quarters that of the United States. External estimates of the defence budget are much more as the defence expenditure occurs under numerous other heads which are excluded from the main defence budget. In any case, the Indian defence budget or for that matter that of Japan, is a fraction of the Chinese defence budget.

The availability of such levels of budgetary funds has enabled the PLA to increase its capabilities to a remarkable degree and achieve the goals of its military modernisation in the laid-down time framework. The growth of the budget has been largely consistent with its economic rise, especially so in the last two decades. The percentage of the GDP spent on defence, i.e. approximately 2 per cent is also considered low when compared to the countries like the US, Russia and South Korea, etc. However, in the case of India, the percentage of the GDP spent is

less than two even when the requirement to modernise the defence forces is very high considering the neglect that they have faced for the last two decades or so.

PLA Ground Forces (PLAA)

Structural Reforms: In end-November 2015, President Xi addressed a three-day conference of the Central Military Commission where he stressed on the restructuring MRs with a setting up of unified combat commands. While the new Theatre Commands will be responsible for military operations, the new Headquarters of each service will take charge of managing and training troops. The PLA Ground Forces have become a separate force with a HQ and given a separate flag.¹⁴ This was along with Second Artillery Force being given a separate identity and a Strategic Support Force for the PLA being created. The PLA was being controlled and looked after by four headquarters – the General Staff Headquarters, the General Political Department, the General Logistics Department and the General Armament Department. The formation of the Army General Command or Army HQs in other words, places it directly under the Central Military Commission.¹⁵ This has been done with a view to improve the command and control mechanism over the PLA ground forces as also to enhance combat efficiency. While the new structure becomes responsible for the overall administration of the PLA, the Chinese People's Armed Police and the militia and reserve forces, the theatre commands/battle zone commands would focus on combat. Roughly, this would be in line with the command and control structures of the US Forces for training, logistics and operations.

Currently, the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Corps have their own HQs but the ground force had no such organisation.¹⁶ Formally, the MRs were reorganised into Battle Zone Commands or Theatre Commands on February 1, 2016 with President Xi Jinping handing over flags to the five newly appointed Theatre Commanders. The new Commands are the Eastern Theater Command, Southern Theater Command, Western Theater Command, Northern Theater Command and Central Theater Command that have replaced the erstwhile seven MRs (Beijing, Shenyang, Ji'nan, Lanzhou, Nanjing, Chengdu and Guangzhou).¹⁷ Apparently, the boundaries or division of responsibilities of the new Theatre Commands are not very clear

but the Western Theatre Command would be looking after Tibet and Xinjiang borders which indeed is a very vast area of responsibility. Xi outlined the task of the five theatre commands as 'they are responsible for dealing with security threats in their respective strategic fields, maintaining peace, containing wars and winning wars'. That is, the Commands would deal with both internal and external security threats based on the likely nature of war and conflict.

Giving Practical Shape to the War Zone Concept: For several years, there had been talk of reducing the number of MRs but due to the resistance from the old guard and many vested interests, this had been difficult to realise. The MRs have converted into theatre commands with streamlined joint command and control structures and are better suited to present and future nature of wars and conflicts. This effort is a practical implementation of the War Zone Concept which envisaged evolving a joint HQ for the relevant theatre when the hostilities were imminent. With one Theatre Command looking after the Tibet and Xinjiang borders, the quality of jointness, integration and flexibility is likely to be greatly enhanced. An integrated and joint response to any adverse situation developing in the region is likely to be quick and timely. There would be streamlining of functioning and efficient utilisation of resources for operations. Possibly, India has to work much more on a joint and integrated response to any adverse situation developing on our borders, given the nature of our organisations and processes.

Organisation and Training: As for the PLAA's training and other capabilities are concerned, it has been paying stress on trans-theatre mobility, improving combat effectiveness through forming multifunctional and modular units and enhancing its capability to undertake joint operations. For instance, it is in the process of converting some of the Division-sized formations to Brigade-size formations with added firepower and capabilities. The PRC's White Paper on Defence of 2013 had emphasised that the PLAA "is accelerating the development of army aviation troops, light mechanized units and special operations forces, and enhancing building of digitalized units, gradually making its units small, modular and multifunctional in organization so as to enhance their capabilities for air-ground integrated operations, long-distance maneuvers, rapid assaults and special operations". From mid-2011 onwards, it had begun

the process of transforming parts of its forces into 'modular combined arms brigade'-focused force structure. The objective is to have a flat organisational structure with streamlined command and control mechanisms and the integration of information systems that would be suitable for information-era wars. The smaller-sized formations will pack more firepower punch with long range precision artillery and rockets combined with vastly improved mobility, helicopter and air support. A variety of smart and precision munitions with integrated C4ISR (Command, Control, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) that ties in ISR means, decision-makers and delivery means, would add vastly to its capabilities in a local/regional war in informationised conditions.

Reducing Numbers and Streamlining Functions: One of the objectives of military reforms, as outlined by the Chairman of the CMC is that the proportion of each service will be adjusted to optimise the operational capabilities. Good administration, setting up of a disciplinary committee auditing, removing corruption and reducing the PLA's commercial activities to nil are other targets of the newly announced reforms. Restructuring and other aspects of reforms are expected to be implemented by 2020.

In conformity with the above objective, the PLAA is also improving the ratio of enlisted men to the officers by having more NCOs and less Commissioned Officers. The reduction of non-combat positions such as political entertainment units, headquarters staffs and streamlining of logistics staffs are some of the other measures of reform. President Xi while addressing the parade on September 3, 2015, celebrating the "70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War" announced a cut of 3,00,000 from the present estimated PLA strength of 2.3 million.¹⁸ Out of this, the PLAA has a combined strength of 8,50,000 according to the White Paper of 2013. The PLAA mobile operational units include 18 combined corps, plus additional independent combined operational divisions/brigades. The Group Armies (GAs) of particular concern, in so far as India is concerned, are the ones at Lanzhou (21 and 47 Corps) and Chengdu (13 and 14 Corps). However, since the PLAA has been practicing trans-regional mobility, the rest of the Corps can also be brought to bear on the Sino-Indian border in an appropriate framework of time.

Nevertheless, the reduction in number of troops is aimed at improving the teeth to tail ratio and is designed to improve the quality of forces by utilising the costs saved to induct RMA capabilities into the PLA. Many of the logistics and non-combat units/personnel are being either downsized or totally eliminated with possibly some of their essential functions being handed over to civil agencies.

Rationalising of equipment including inducting both modern and state-of-the-art equipment, expansion and integration of Battle Labs, simulation and wargaming centres, and improved training methods including the establishment of new training bases are part of the ongoing modernisation efforts. The standardization and improvements in unit training, training evaluation and military education are other salient features of the PLA modernisation.

An emphasis on jointness and joint training has been the other important aspect of PLA's efforts towards becoming a modern force. In the last two years, there has been stress on high level joint exercises. All four services participated in Joint Action 2015,¹⁹ a series of exercises from August to October which involved 1,40,000 troops. Chengdu and Lanzhou Military Area Commands have consistently taken part in such exercises. Joint Action was designed to integrate all the services to undertake joint operations along the entire spectrum of war and conflict. A use of the C4I2SR was made during the exercises to train the command, staff and troops. There were also the Fire Power 2015 exercises conducted from July to September 2015 for artillery and air defence which were aimed at linking sensors to the targets as part of a joint and integrated target system.²⁰ All this also involved the simulation of 'informationized conditions'. Similarly, a series of brigade-level exercises (Stride 2015)²¹ to test the PLA capabilities were conducted from June to September 2015 to test the combat effectiveness and operational capabilities.

The other thrust areas are the development of army aviation units, special operations forces, and air-land mobility that would increase the agility of the force and add to its expeditionary capability. The PLA has also increased its participation in the UN missions not only as an image-building exercise, but also to protect its expanding interests (for instance, in Africa).

PLA Rocket Force

Similarly, the PLA Second Artillery Force now reorganised into the PLA Rocket Force in January 2016 was described by President Xi as a “core force of strategic deterrence, a strategic buttress to the country’s position as a major power, and an important building block in upholding national security.” In his address Xi urged the new unit’s personnel to “enhance nuclear deterrence and counter-strike capacity, medium- and long-range precision strike ability, as well as strategic check-and-balance capacity to build a strong and modern Rocket Force”.²²

The missile force has thus been given a separate identity and HQs which would help the force to develop further and its commander would be able to perform his functions efficiently. Even before President Xi’s current exhortations, the force had been strengthening its capabilities for strategic deterrence and nuclear counter-attack, and medium- and long-range precision strikes. It has a wide variety of cruise missiles, short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. The PLA is developing and testing new intermediate- and medium-range conventional ballistic missiles, as well as long-range, land-attack, and anti-ship cruise missiles that extend China’s power projection capabilities.

The PLA Rocket Force has long been a special area of attention by both the political and PLA leadership. Even earlier in November 2012 when Xi had taken over as Chairman of the Central Military Commission, he observed that “*the artillery force is the core strength of China’s strategic deterrence, the strategic support for the country’s status as a major power, and an important cornerstone safeguarding national security*”. Developments over the last few years indicate that the current leadership in China would continue to underscore the importance it attaches to continually upgrade its missile forces.²³ The PLA has been modernising its short range ballistic missile force by continually fielding advanced variants with improved ranges and payloads. China’s capabilities in both short and medium range ballistic missiles have improved, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. It also needs to be noticed that in contrast to China, there is generally an absence of well-articulated political guidance for the development of India’s missile capabilities.²⁴

Ballistic Missile Development: According to the US National Air and Space Intelligence Centre,²⁵ at present,

“China has the most active and diverse ballistic missile development programme in the world. It is developing and testing offensive missiles, forming additional missile units, qualitatively upgrading certain missile systems, and developing methods to counter ballistic missile defences. China’s ballistic missile force is expanding in both size and types of missiles. New theatre missiles continue to be deployed in the vicinity of Taiwan, while the ICBM force is adding the CSS-10 Mod 1 (DF-31) and CSS-10 Mod 2 (DF-31A) ICBMs. The Second Artillery Corps would have additional CSS-10 Mod 2 by end 2015. The new JL-2 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) is also under development. Future ICBMs will include some with multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles, and the number of ICBM nuclear warheads capable of reaching the United States could expand to well over 100 within the next 15 years”.²⁶

Insofar as New Delhi is concerned, the PLA’s inventory of SRBMS and MRBMS/IRBMs poses a considerable challenge to India’s nascent capabilities. Over 1200 SRBMs (a Rand Report of 2015 puts the number of short range ballistic missiles at 1,400)²⁷ though meant for Taiwan, can be easily switched for any regional contingency including what might arise on the Sino-Indian border or in the South China Sea region. The circular error of probability which used to be hundred metres in the last two decades has been reduced now to five or ten metres. The DF-21 MRBM, in any case, with a range of 1,500 km, can be used for a regional contingency. The DF-21D, said to have anti-ship capabilities, will pose a threat to Indian assets operating, say, in the Bay of Bengal. Not only the ballistic missiles but also the cruise and Hypersonic Glide vehicles of China (Beijing tested a hypersonic vehicle in December 2014) have the capabilities to defeat our nascent missile defence and dilute the value of our evolving nuclear deterrence.

Ballistic Missile Defence: While pursuing determined efforts to improve the survivability of its land-based ballistic missile deterrent, China has never been lax on the potential of and requirement for the BMD systems. On January 11, 2007, China surprised the entire world by successfully testing a direct ascent Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapon. Again on January 11, 2010, it tested its ground-based midcourse missile

(GMD) interception technology. In an article, Col. Wu of the PLA emphasised that the success of China's ground-based mid-course missile defence (GMD) test demonstrated significant progress by China in the development of "hit-to-kill", rapid precision-strike, guided and missile identification technologies.²⁸

After the March 2010 GMD test, some analysts suggested that it could also be a message to India in response to India's continued testing of the Agni-III and an eagerness to develop the Agni-V ICBM (the testing of Agni-V was only at the planning stage then) whose logical targets could only be in China. The second GMD test by China in January 2013 came after India's Agni-V test of April 2012 which could be partly seen as a response to India's increasing capabilities in the missile field. The Chinese media had even suggested that India has under-reported the range of the Agni-V. Further, there was also some speculation that India is developing the Agni-VI with a longer but as yet unspecified range. Though prominent Chinese officials have publicly downplayed or discounted any credible strategic missile threat from India, they have continued to strengthen their missile defence capabilities. Again in July 2014, China, according to its Ministry of National Defence, carried out a "land-based anti-missile technology experiment", which was said to have "achieved the desired objectives", without divulging much about the specifics of the test.

So far as India is concerned, the reported deployment of the DF-21s in Tibet, and the assessed plans for the deployment of the JL-1 and JL-2 SLBMs in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) point to an increased readiness of China to move from a minimal deterrent posture to a more aggressive one. The docking of Chinese submarines in Colombo in September and October 2014 was indicative of the PLA Navy's expanding footprints in the IOR.²⁹ Whether this capability development is directed at sending the appropriate messages to the US or is the precursor of a robust operational capability is a moot point as far as Taiwan and India are concerned because China already has a sophisticated offensive capability against them when using the SRBMs (mainly against Taiwan, but can also be shifted and used against India in certain contingencies), IRBMs and MRBMs. Still, the typical Chinese silence on the possible employment of its emerging capabilities leads to significant uncertainties in modelling them.

The PLA also tested a hypersonic vehicle, the Wu-14, in December 2014 (it was the third test after the first in January and the second in August 2014) that can penetrate the US BMD as also the limited defence missile capability which India is endeavouring to achieve. The ultra-high speed vehicle was able to achieve a velocity that was ten times that of sound, thus giving it capabilities to penetrate missile defences.³⁰ Evidently, India needs to pursue such technologies that would be cost-effective and add to its strategic deterrent. The DRDO is testing a Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle; however, the research in such areas needs to speed up.³¹

Not only has China developed its counter-space capabilities as indicated by the series of ASAT tests as described above, it has acquired Russian-made jamming systems and high-powered dual use radio-transmitters that can be used against communication and ISR satellites. In addition, China has ground-based lasers that can be used against space-based assets. According to estimates by RAND Organization, China had 132 operational satellites as of January 2015; its average rate of satellite launches in the period 2009-2014 was more than double that of 2003-2008 and more than triple that of 1997-2002.³² Out of 132 satellites, 48 have been earmarked for operation by the PLA,³³ though there could be some overlap in the tasks and missions of the satellites. The Report also estimates that both the US and China would have an approximate parity in space and counter-space capabilities in case of Taiwan and Spratly Island conflict scenarios by 2017.

PLA Air Force (PLAAF)

Developing a Strategic Air Force: As in the case of the PLA Navy, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) is shifting its focus from territorial air defence to both defence and offence, and is building an air force structure that can meet the requirements of informationised operations. The PLAAF has embarked on strengthening its capabilities for strategic early warning, air strike, air and missile defense, information countermeasures, airborne operations, strategic projection and comprehensive support. The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) is the largest air force in Asia and the third largest in the world with an inventory closer to 2,000 combat aircraft (including fighters, bombers, fighter-attack and attack aircraft).³⁴ According to some estimates, the PLAAF has an

inventory of around 700-plus modern aircrafts that include jet fighters like J-10, Su-27/J11, Su-30 MKK and five J-15. The PLA Air Force has been improving its inventory in cutting-edge fighter aircraft as also developing a variety of aircraft to perform several roles for both defensive and offensive tasks. It has also improved its capabilities in C4ISR, electronic warfare (EW) data links. According to one study, by 2017, 60 per cent of the PLAAF fighter inventory would comprise of fourth-generation aircraft.

Training on the Tibet Plateau: The PLAAF pilots have been training on the Tibet plateau in bad weather conditions and in conditions of darkness; they have carried out joint exercises with the PLAA units in Tibet to hone their joint capabilities.³⁵ For instance, the PLAAF has practiced ground attacks in conjunction with the army and artillery units. It has also been revealed that the PLAAF has modified its J-10 fighter aircraft to operate in the higher altitudes of Tibet which severely restricts its performance in many operational parameters. The Tibetan plateau, in winters, is freezing cold when it becomes difficult for the PLAAF jet fighters to fly, therefore usually it had been exercising in favourable weather conditions of summer. This exercise was also aimed at testing out the new improvements and modifications made to the jet fighters and their associated equipment to operate in sub-zero temperatures. The degree of advantage enjoyed by India because the PLA jets have to take off from a 10,000 to 12,000 feet high airfield (thus with less payload), would be narrowed. Further, the PLAAF is modernising rapidly and the air fleet size could be almost triple of our Air Force fleet.

Accelerating the Transformation: In April 2014, President Xi Jinping, while visiting the PLAAF HQ tasked the air force to speed up its transformation into a strong power with an integrated air and space capability and stressed that the air force plays a decisive role in national security as well as military strategy.³⁶ He has also underscored the need for the PLA Air Force to have a balanced strength in defensive and offensive operations. Similarly, Senior Colonel Wu Guohui of the PLA National Defense University had indicated earlier that the PLAAF had undertaken a series of research projects aimed at keeping pace with the latest space technologies. According to him, space-based information can reshape air combat and space vehicles and the same

would be the key to forming an air-and-space weaponry system. Further, the construction of a modern air-defence and anti-missile apparatus could be achieved through the integration of air and space capabilities. As in the case of other arms and services of the PLA, the US armed forces seem to be their peer competitor that needs to be emulated. Through this kind of approach the militaries of the regional competitors would eventually present not much of a challenge, though they also need to be reckoned with.

China has developed the J-10B follow-on to its first indigenously designed fourth-generation fighter and it is expected to enter service in the near term. To further bolster its tactical aircraft forces, China has signed a contract in November 2015 to acquire two dozen Su-35 advanced aircraft from Russia along with its advanced IRBIS-E passive electronically scanned array radar system. The Su-35 is a long range fourth-generation-plus aircraft that is expected to bridge the gap between the J-10 and underdevelopment fifth-generation fighters with stealth capabilities. China has been pursuing fifth-generation fighter capabilities for some time and is the only country in the world other than the United States to have two concurrent stealth fighter programmes i.e. J-20 and possibly the J-31, in progress. Many analysts believe that a small order for the 24 Su-35 points towards China's intentions of reverse engineering and copying some of the advanced technologies including its advanced engine (Saturn AL-117S) that could be used for its stealth jet fighter programme, like it did for the Su27SKs which were rechristened as the J11B.

China also uses a modified version of the H-6 aircraft to conduct aerial refueling operations for some of its indigenous aircraft, increasing their combat range, and has received three IL-78s from Ukraine outfitted as air refuellers with negotiations for additional aircraft ongoing. It has H-6K strategic bombers that can now launch all-weather, long range, precision strikes. In 2014, it took delivery of the first of the three IL-78M tanker aircraft from Ukraine.

The PLAAF is adding to its air defence capabilities with the conclusion of an agreement with Russia to acquire the first round of the S-400 modern anti-aircraft missile systems within the next 12 to 18 months.³⁷ In addition to providing improved air defence protection, such systems also have a missile defence capability that would impact

India's strategic deterrence. The S-400 ABM capability is said to be comparable or superior to that of the US Patriot and thus would provide China with a quick missile defense upgrade. The system includes an active electronically scanned array (AESA) radar and can target aircraft, cruise missiles, as well as tactical and ballistic missiles at ranges up to 400 km. The smaller 250 km-range 48N6 and 120km-range 9M96E2 missiles are also equally lethal against fighters, bombers, early warning and electronic warfare aircraft, as well as cruise and ballistic missiles. They are expected to be deployed for protection of major bases like the Hainan submarine pens and important cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, etc.

PLA Navy Expanding its Reach

The PLA's ambitions in the Indian Ocean can be gauged from the fact that some of the Chinese think tanks and analysts have suggested the need for the PLA Navy to acquire bases. Huanqiu Shibao writing in the *Global Times* on May 25, 2011, had observed that if the world really wants China to take more responsibilities in the Asia Pacific region and around the world, it should allow China to participate in international military cooperations and understand the need of China to set up overseas military bases. Recently, Senior Captain Zhao Yi of China's National Defense University stated that the Indian Ocean should not be viewed as India's backyard. He also mentioned that possibility of clashes could not be 'eliminated' if the Indian Ocean continued to be viewed as India's backyard.

The development of the PLAN has been in keeping with a three-step development strategy that dovetailed into extending its maritime control of the concept of the 'Three Island Chains'.³⁸ The PLAN has been inducting the Luyang class of destroyers from 2004 onwards with the latest of the class, the Luyang-IIIs, being inducted from 2014. The PLAN had also inducted three Sovremenny-class destroyers from Russia in the early 2000s. Consequently, the average age of the destroyer fleet is about 10–12 years. A large number of frigates have also been inducted, with the Jiangkai-II class being inducted from 2008 onwards. Other classes of ships like ASW corvettes, supply ships and refueling tankers are also being continuously inducted with progressive replacements of older vessels. The intensity of this induction programme can be gauged from the fact that 2013 alone witnessed the

induction of two destroyers and three frigates.³⁹ These inductions will give the PLAN the required long legs to pursue extended operations beyond the Second Island Chain. The continued deployment of the Piracy Escort Groups in the Gulf of Aden from 2008 underlines the capability of the PLAN to conduct protracted operations at extended ranges from its home ports.

The PLA Navy has over 300 surface ships, submarines, amphibious ships and patrol craft. According to Pentagon's report on China's Military of 2015, China is rapidly retiring legacy combatants in favour of larger, multi-mission ships, equipped with advanced anti-ship, anti-air and anti-submarine weapons and sensors.

The last decade has seen the PLAN inducting two new classes of nuclear submarines, namely the Shang-class SSNs and the Jin-class SSBNs. The same period has also seen the PLAN inducting the Yuan and Song-class conventional submarines. The PLAN is also believed to be developing another class of SSNs and SSBNs which will incorporate the latest advancements in stealth technology forces.⁴⁰ The Yuan-class submarines are also to be exported to the Pakistan Navy in the near future. The recent docking of the Chinese submarines in Sri Lanka is a pointer to the increased endurance of these submarines. Not only is the purpose of China's submarine deployments in the IOR to collect intelligence but also to train the crews in operating far from their shores and home bases. Travelling to the East African ports as part of the counter-piracy missions adds to their operational capability for executing military missions if the need so arises. Thus the current and future acquisitions of submarines are likely to give the PLAN a potent sea-denial capability which gives further credence to the A2AD concept.

The Pentagon Report also indicates that the PLA Navy places a high priority on the modernisation of its submarine force and currently possesses 5 nuclear attack submarines (SSN), 4 nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), and 53 diesel attack submarines (SS/SSP). By 2020, this force will likely to grow to between 69 and 78 submarines.

The facility at the Yalong Naval Base at the Hainan Island has been developed to base not only ships but also to house underground pens for berthing submarines. The location of the base, in the South China Sea, will permit the PLAN to rapidly deploy its assets to disputed

territories as also into the strategic sea lanes to the south and west emanating from the Malacca straits. Further, the development of airstrips on the Subi, Fiery Cross and Mischief Reefs in the Spratlys will permit the employment of maritime aircraft. This will greatly extend Chinese capabilities of surveillance in these contested areas.

The aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, was commissioned into the PLAN in September 2012 and has added a new facet to the evolving capabilities of the PLAN. For the time being, the *Liaoning* is expected to be utilised for training personnel including the crews of the J-15. Towards the end of year 2015, China's Defence Ministry's spokesman had confirmed plans to build a second aircraft carrier indigenously in Dalian.⁴¹ The carrier with a displacement of 50,000 tonnes will have four J-15 fighters stationed on it besides other aircrafts/helicopters. In comparison, India's aircraft carrier *INS Vikrant* is 40,000 tonnes and the next in series, the *INS Vishal*, would be around 65,000 tonnes. The availability of carriers will give the PLAN the much-needed ability to carry out operations with integral air defence against adversaries for safeguarding their maritime interests. The Carrier after its construction and operationalisation is likely to be based in the Hainan naval base. Further, the PLAN has enhanced its amphibious lift capabilities with the indigenously built Yuzhao (Type 071)-class amphibious transport; the new Yuyi air-cushion landing aircraft along with a variety of other naval assets would enable the PLAN to send out an expeditionary force. This would have implications for the Indian island territories like the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

China has developed an ASBM capable of attacking aircraft carriers in the Western Pacific with a range of about 1,500 km.⁴² Combined with suitable long range detection systems like Over the Horizon (OTH) radars and surveillance aircraft, the Chinese will have a unique capability to dissuade the US carrier groups from venturing into the proximity of the First Island Chain. Under certain contingencies and after the development of its space-based surveillance and target acquisition capabilities and honing its precision skills, the ASBMs; use against hostile naval platforms in the Bay of Bengal cannot be ruled out. In fact, in the first two weeks of February, several exercises involving a simulated use of the DF-21 D ASBM have been conducted.⁴³

Added to the above is the development and training of the PLAN Marine Corps on lines similar to that of the US Marine Corps. In January

the Marine Corps carried out a Trans Theatre Command exercise that involved movement and power projection over a distance of 6,000 kilometres. The marines were part of the South China Sea Fleet and they moved for their mission to the cold climes of the Gobi desert. While denying that the PLAN was developing expeditionary capabilities in the Western sense, the Chinese spokesmen stated that such a capability was meant for carrying out UN-mandated peace and stability-maintenance missions.⁴⁴ the Marine Corps for the last three years or so have been carrying out training exercises in a variety of terrain to be ready for special operations, amphibious missions and for any such contingencies that would need elite power projection forces. It is also interesting to note that the PLAN Marine Corps had conducted a joint exercise with Tanzania in November 2014⁴⁵ with counter-terrorism as the main theme. Developing such capabilities has implications not only for the regional powers but also for the countries that are far away.

Civil–Military Integration

Another significant feature of China's ongoing military modernisation has been the Civil–Military Integration (CMI) of capabilities and resources. The defence White Paper 2015 underscores the need for an enhanced integration and coordination between the civil and military efforts and states that the PLA will “set up a system and a working mechanism for overall and coordinated programming and planning’.

All along the Sino-Indian border, China has created infrastructure that has dual use for both military and civilian purposes. Similarly, based on the logic that naval warfare requires mobilisation and deployment of a large number of ships, China's government has passed new guidelines in June last year requiring civilian shipbuilders to ensure that their vessels can be used by the military in the event of conflict. The regulations require five categories of vessels including container ships to be modified to “serve national defence needs”. The costs of conversions are to be borne by the government. One wonders whether such preparations point towards an increased likelihood of a naval conflagration.

The CMI effort has a much larger ambit that aims at speeding up the military industrial development to support its military

modernisation efforts. In March 2015, President Xi while speaking to a PLA delegation had remarked that the 'CMI processes were in need of reform in order to break new ground in developing the PLA's capabilities'.⁴⁶ According to him, 'efforts must be made to ensure "coordinated, balanced and compatible development" of the country's economic and national defense capabilities'.

The dual-use of the airports on the Tibetan plateau is part of such a strategy of the integration of the civil–military airports to "strengthen aviation safety and combat support capabilities". The integration will include a joint maintenance of airport support facilities, joint flight safety support and joint airport management. The Lhasa Gongkar Airport in Tibet and the Sunan Shuofang International Airport in Wuxi in the Jiangsu province have been designated as the first two-pilot PLA/civil airports to implement the 'integration'.⁴⁷

The projections for completion of such an integration for Lhasa and Sunan airports were at end of 2015 and for all others, at 2016. Similarly, the construction of an extensive network of roads and railways in Tibet would both serve the civilian and military missions. Not only will it facilitate tourism and exploitation of natural resources but also enable the speedy induction of military forces for both internal and external contingencies.

PLA Modernisation and OBOR Initiative

China has been pushing its Maritime Silk Road (MSR) as part of its 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) strategy since the fall of 2013. President Xi Jinping has outlined the major thrust of China's foreign policy 'to make peripheral countries kinder and more intimate to China and meanwhile more recognize and support China, thereby increasing China's affinity and influence'. This 'periphery diplomacy' is expected to address China's need for a stable external environment, which in turn would be conducive to domestic economic reform. The goal of this policy is to enhance China's overall influence in its periphery, and at the same time, assuage the concerns of the neighbours about China's assertive foreign and security policies.

The OBOR strategy is believed to be China's answer to the American 'rebalance to Asia Pacific' strategy which has political, economic and

strategic contents. With the expansion of China's interests overseas, it is yet to be seen how the PLA would operate to protect its burgeoning interests abroad. Though the modernisation of the PLA and the enhancement of its power projection capabilities would certainly enable it to secure its interests overseas when so required, yet the moot point is whether it will follow the American example of procuring military bases abroad or will it devise some new methods with Chinese characteristics? The building of dual-purpose ports like Gwadar in Pakistan and some others in the IOR encompassing its MSR initiative seems to be one such alternative which China has apparently adopted to suit the current strategic environment. Favourable geopolitical conditions would help the PLA Navy to enhance its presence and holding capacity in the IOR in an incremental manner in the coming years.

Gen. Zhu Wenquan, former Commander of Nanjing Military Area Command, in an interview, has highlighted that *"Actually the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China, which is not only an economic issue, but also a political and military issue. It is a successful breakthrough achieved by China after more than ten years of strategic deployments."*⁴⁸

Liu Cigui, Director, State Oceanic Administration (and now Governor, Hainan Province) in an article has stated that "like posts along the ancient Silk Road, ports along the new Maritime Silk Road will act as "posts on sea" that handle cargo and resupply ships and people. Such "sea posts" also must provide safe and convenient sea lanes for all countries to make use of. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road will thus be able to cover and drive more countries to create sea posts."⁴⁹ Acquiring a logistics base at Djibouti by China for its naval and other maritime platforms could be viewed as a 'sea post' or a naval base in the making depending upon the strategic environment and other considerations. China has justified it stating that it needs a logistic support for anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden as also for the support of its UN missions.⁵⁰ The strategic importance of Djibouti is well known because of its location, since it is a choke point at the mouth of the Bab-el-Mandeb connecting the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Needless to say that such a 'sea post' would boost China's power projection capabilities.

Even before the OBOR initiative was unveiled, the Chinese scholars and naval officers have been arguing for the need to establish overseas

bases for protecting their growing economic and other interests. *“Setting up overseas military bases is not an idea we have to shun; on the contrary, it is our right. Bases established by other countries appear to be used to protect their overseas rights and interests. As long as the bases are set up in line with international laws and regulations, they are legal ones. But if the bases are established to harm other countries, their existence becomes illegal and they are likely to be opposed by other countries”*⁵¹ observes one scholar in an article of 2010. Earlier in 2009, Senior Colonel Dai Xu of the PLAAF had argued for acquiring overseas bases to safeguard commercial interests and world peace, in an article.⁵²

Regional Implications/Responses

China’s military modernisation and its assertive activities in the South China Sea and elsewhere have motivated the ASEAN members, especially those affected by Beijing’s aggressive policies, to seek outside support as a part of a balancing exercise against China. For instance, countries like Vietnam and Philippines are strengthening their strategic relationships through political, security and defence cooperation with outside powers like the US and others. On the other hand, the US as a response to China’s rising profile, has been attempting to stage a comeback in this region through its pivot to Asia or rebalance to Asia strategy that has political, military and economic components. In addition, the SE and East Asian countries through multilateral structures like the ASEAN are also attempting to engage China to address their security concerns. The geostrategic implications of China’s OBOR initiative need to be determined especially for the ports of Gwadar, Hambantota and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean littoral.

China’s military modernisation and its aggressive activities have also spurred other important powers in the Asia Pacific region like India, Japan, Australia and others to evolve their own responses to maintain a strategic equilibrium in the region.

Further, as part of internal balancing, the SE Asian countries have been increasing their military deterrence capabilities. Thus the defence budgets of the SE Asian countries have been rising since the last decade which is also driven by China’s military modernisation to an extent. The region has seen a steady growth in military expenditure between 2010 and 2014. There were net increases for all countries, averaging

37.6 per cent. Southeast Asian countries spent US\$ 38.2 billion on defence in 2014.

The Southeast Asian nations are spending more on their navies and coastguards due to the rising tensions in the South China Sea. But as their capabilities grow, so does the risk that any confrontation in the contested waterway will be harder to contain. According to one analysis, the annual defence spending in Southeast Asia is projected to reach US\$ 52 billion by 2020, from an expected US\$ 42 billion last year; the emphasis is on the modernisation of their navies where the creation of artificial islands and other activities of China have caused concerns and added to the risks of conflagration.

India needs to assess China's expanding presence in the IOR and how it might affect India's maritime interests. Though the Indian Navy has come out with its version of the Indian Maritime Security Strategy of October 2015 with the expanded areas of strategic interest that cover seas from the Western Pacific to the western coast of Africa, yet it is not clear how will it be able to protect its interests in such a vast domain, given the inadequacy of the resources. There are also no indications regarding long term projections for acquisition of such capabilities to match its much-expanded mandate. Further, as has been the bane of the individual services' strategies and perspective plans, there has been a lack of integration despite the fact that a 15-year Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan exists, but only in name. All the services do not have a shared perspective in the absence of a well-articulated national security strategy or a national military strategy.

Similarly, the problems of lack of adequate infrastructure along the Sino-Indian border and a very slow build-up of the facilities in the border areas are well known. Shortages of equipment and induction of much delayed weapon systems into the Army; bringing up of the Indian Air Force to the required strength of fighter squadrons are imperatives. Enhancing strategic deterrence capabilities in order to maintain a strategic equilibrium in the region and to safeguard our national interests is an imperative. An efficient C4ISR system along with adequate space-based assets and capabilities in the cyber domain would be additional factors that would enhance the quality of our deterrence. The Indian RMA which is proceeding at a glacial pace needs

to speed up with the provisioning of an adequate defence budget and the integration of modernisation plans.

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8

Growing Muscle of the PLAAF

V.K. Saxena

“Let her sleep, for when she wakes up she will shake the world”.

– Napoleon Bonaparte (1803)¹

Growth and Muscle

Steady Growth. Although some signs of a somewhat waning economy are now visible in China (the economic growth rate slid from 10.5 per cent in 2010 to 7.4 per cent in 2014), it has experienced a steady growth cycle for the past two decades, catapulting the country as the world’s second largest economy. Starting with a GDP of USD 214 billion at the beginning of its economic reforms programme in 1978, it now boasts of a GDP of USD 9.2 trillion; a feat achieved in a matter of just 35 years.²

Growing Muscle. In keeping with the trend and the nation’s high-growth trajectory, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and the People’s Liberation Navy (PLAN) have also followed a steady growth profile. Suffice to say, that the annual military expenditure for 2014 (808.23 bn Yuan or 131.57 bn USD) makes it the second largest in the world only behind US (575 bn USD). By the way, these are official figures; the unofficial estimates are a way higher (SIPRI: 166.1 bn USD).³

This Paper highlights the growth story of the PLAAF over the years and what may be required to counter the air threat posed by it today, and in the foreseeable future.

Paradigm Transformation

Little over two decades ago (around 1990–91), the PLAAF was an antiquated service, equipped almost exclusively with weapons based on 1950-era Soviet designs.⁴ Today, as per an expert opinion, the PLAAF is more operationally able than from any time in its past and it is enjoying the fruits of years of sustained reform and modernisation.⁵ How such a transformation has taken place in mere two decades is an incredible story which can be best demystified by unfolding the modernisation process in terms of each factor that constitutes the overall air-punch. An attempt follows in the succeeding paragraphs.

Legacy Platforms

Baby Steps. Right from its birth in 1949, the PLAAF built its backbone on the Soviet lineage of aircrafts. A humble beginning of a mere 159 mixed vintage aircrafts (remnants of the civil war), steadily grew into some 3000+ fleet in the fifties, largely provided by the former Soviet Union, based on the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance signed in 1950 between the two countries.⁶ Though, the inventory further swelled to about 5000 aircrafts by 1999–2000, it didn't raise much hackles in the West, as about 3000 of these numbers were known to be second-generation fighters (like F-6, J-8, Q-5, JH-7/A, etc.).

Early Developments. Though the modernisation drive related to the induction of the American Fire Control System in the F-82 Development Programme which began as early as 1985, under the Peace Pearl Programme (USD 502 Billion Project)⁷, the actual upgradation of the legacy machines still leaned heavily on Russia with the acquisition of 76 x SU-30 MKK's from 2000–2003 in three batches and the upgradation of 24 x SU-30 MK 2. This technological enablement led to the starting of the production of the indigenous J-10 and J-11 (licensed version of the Russian SU-27) fighter) from around 2002. In a matter of just about a decade and a half, their numbers in the PLAAF have swelled to formidable figures (J 10 240+, J11 205+)⁸. Alongside these machines, came a systematic enhancement of the air-tanker and strategic airlift capability through the modification of the old H-6 bomber fleet and the purchase of IL-76 and IL-78 from Russia.

Effect of Doctrinal Shift over Time.⁹ Ever since China's incursion into Vietnam in 1979, the PLA doctrine has evolved from Mao's 'People's

War' to 'People's War under Modern Conditions' through a 'Limited/Local War' phase to the current doctrine of 'Active Defence' (*Jiji Fangyur*). This doctrine is more assertive and is not bound by any restrictions to limit any future conflict to within China's natural boundaries – a clear shift from the 'People War' strategy of luring the enemy deep into China's territory. The doctrine of 'Active Defence', which seeks to conduct local wars under high technological conditions (*gaojishutiojianxia de jubuzhanzheng*) calls for integrated deep strikes and concentration of superior firepower to destroy the opponent's retaliatory capabilities through pre-emptive strikes. This pro-active doctrine essentially seeks to take the battle into enemy territory. On May 26, 2015, the Chinese Ministry of National Defence released its first public Chinese Military Strategy Paper outlining a new policy of "active defense".¹⁰ Essentially dealing with the PLA Navy, the doctrine sticks to winning 'local wars under informatized conditions'. It also refocuses the PLAAF mission from territorial air defence to both defence and offence and to build an air space defence force structure that can meet the requirement of informationised operations.¹¹

One of the fall-outs of the above doctrine on the PLAAF transformation was cutting it to size. In the period 2000–2003, it decommissioned some 850 obsolete aircrafts (Harbin H5, J-5 Fighters, Nanchang Q-5 Combat aircraft) in a phased and a time-bound manner. Resultantly, its aircraft arsenal shrank initially from around 5,000 to 3,400 and then to approximately 2,600 – a drive to make the PLAAF, a lean and a mean organisation.

Likely Future PLAAF Inventory

Taking pride in flying the first prototype of its latest Stealth Fighter (J-20) in January 2011, ostentatiously at a time, when the US Secretary of Defense, Mr Robert Gates was in Beijing, the PLAAF is steadily modernising. Predictions on the future PLAAF fleet indicate that it will consist of large quantities of Chengdu J-10 and Shenyang J-11 as mainstay platforms and JH-7A as the PLAAF's backbone precision-strike fighter. The stealth fighter J-20 which had its first flight on January 11, 2011 is likely to enter the PLAAF around 2018.^{12,13} The mainframe of the future transport fleet is likely to be anchored around the Y-9 medium range transport aircraft, duly supported by the IL fleet. The attack helicopter fleet is likely to be populated by the WZ-10, WZ-

9 and Z-11 AH. The AWACS/AEW fleet is likely to have refined variants of KJ2000 and KJ200 and a reported 50 (unconfirmed) numbers of similar platforms are likely to be imported from Russia. According to the *Jane's International Defence Review*, the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) has perhaps six developmental combat aircraft programmes underway. These include the significantly enhanced Chengdu J-10B multirole fighter, Shenyang J-11B5 heavyweight strike fighter, Shenyang J-15 carrier-borne fighter and Chengdu J-20 fifth-generation fighter demonstrator. There is at least one more fifth-generation fighter project yet to be publically reported. Besides this, the continuing enhancement of the current frontline types, such as the Xian JH 7A and H-6 bomber family, is also in progress¹⁴.

'Start Big' Concept. In contrast to the conventional wisdom of starting small and building big, the Chinese believe in 'starting big'. The best example of this is the COMAC C919 narrow body twin-engine jet airliner programme. The long term goal of this venture is to break the Airbus and Boeing's duo-play and compete against the Airbus A320. While the C919 is expected to have its first flight in 2016 and introduction in 2019, further down the line, are slated the C929 and C939 twin-engine, twin-aisle 300/400 seaters¹⁵. A similar spirit of 'starting big' runs as a knitting thread in the thought process of Active Defence Doctrine, in the PLAAF modernisation programmes, in refining air attack strategies and building a state-of-the-art arsenal.

Some Inputs on the Chinese UAVs. Besides the existing inventory of the UAVs (Xianglong, WZ-9, Yi Long, CH-3, Anjian etc.) some additional inputs are as under:

Sharp Contrast.¹⁶ The methodical and the well-structured way in which China has set out to modernise its manned aircraft sector contrasts sharply with its approach, thus far, to the unmanned platforms. The Chinese UAV industry is vast and seemingly unregulated with a large number of small start-up companies and a bewildering array of new products.

Innovations Galore. The Chinese UAV experiments have shown impressive levels of innovation by building and flying air vehicles of every conceivable design and genre. These include stealthy UAVs, morphing UAVs, annular wing VTOL design micro-UAVs, unmanned airships, flying wings, modified light aircraft and sailplanes, UFO-style

flying discs and even ornithopters (utilising flapping wings). Innovators, both professionals as well as greenhorns/debutants, have been allowed to run free and explore almost every UAV configuration. A good example of this came during September 2011, when the AVIC sponsored a nationwide event called the International UAV Innovation Grand Prix (UAVGP). This international event saw many an entrant, both professional, as well as, amateur, to exhibit their skills. The spirit has not been allowed to dampen as 2015 saw the third iteration of the same event that unfolded firstly as an Aerospace Carnival (13–16 Aug 15) and later as a Grand Prix event – UAVGP 3 (29 Oct–01 Nov 15).^{17,18}

Emerging Ideas-Emerging Designs. Events like the UAVGP provide ideal platforms from which emerge a fountainhead of ideas. Some innovative designs included rotary UAVs, supersonic, super-maneuvrable and low observable future platforms for air-to-air missions, models of forward-swept wing, twin tailed, single engine, canard-equipped aircrafts, jet engine UAVs (WJ-600 of AVIC)...the innovation story of the Chinese UAV is counting. Two other features very visible in the Chinese UAV development are namely, the arming of the UAVs and equipping them with enabling sensor payloads.

Arming the UAVs. China has followed a logical process in arming its UAVs by first adapting existing air-to-surface weapons and then developing purpose-built small light weight munitions. In each case, the weapons involved are relatively new. Weapon-vehicle matching has been thoughtful. Some examples:¹⁹

Wing-Loong. AVIC's Wing Loong is a well-established armed UAV. It has been matched with the laser-guided HJ-10, a hellfire class of anti-tank weapon.

CH3 UAV. The CH3 UAV of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC) carries an Anti-Radiation Missile (ARM) and an Air-to-Surface Missile (ASM) – with a Semi-Active Laser (SAL) seeker, suitable for low-to-med Close Air Support (CAS) missions. Some inertial/GPS (INS/GPS) guided munitions have also been produced for the CH3. 20xCH3 UAVs are planned to be sold to Pakistan. Another UAV weapon being developed by the CASIC is TB-1. It is an ASM, featuring an armour-piercing shaped-charged blast/fragmentation warhead with a SAL Seeker.

Other Weapon Developments. The Luoyang Opto-electric Engineering Company (LOEC) is also developing new UAV class of weapons. In 2010 LOEC displayed an entirely new type of small precision weapon in the form of small diameter standoff laser-guided glide bombs (50–100 kg class) combining a dual guidance sys (SAL with INS/GPS).

Sensor Payloads. LOEC and AVIC are in the forefront of missionising the UAVs through building a wide spectrum of electro-optical payloads in the form of attachable turrets. These feature dual day/night sensors and medium range Forward Looking InfraRed (FLIR) (YY-8). Other areas of future development are IR array sys, fielding of UAV-sized radar payloads, small Ku band Synthetic Aperture Radars (SARs), real time image processing techniques, etc. There is also an ongoing effort to interface existing earth stations with satellite communication stations providing seamless connectivity and data-sharing.

Smart/Intelligent/Precision Weapons

Besides the conventional payloads, the PLAAF is also emphatically present in the field of smart, intelligent and precision ammunition with surgical strike capability. Way back in 2007, China developed a powered smart bomb (KD-88) having an IR TV guidance sys. The estimated range is about 110 km with a capability to hit small targets.²⁰ The other state-of-the-art arsenal in use are the supersonic Russian and Chinese-made ARMs (KH 31P, YJ-91) for operational use with SU-30, JH 7A and J-11 attacks, laser-guided and satellite-guided bombs (on board Q-5 aircraft). As of 2011, the PLAAF reportedly had more than 200 aircrafts capable of carrying PGMs.²¹ This number is steadily increasing. It is now estimated that almost all the modern aircrafts of the PLAAF today are capable of carrying the PGMs. One assessment puts the PLAAF numbers as Fighters/interceptors 1,060, Strike aircrafts 1,300, attack Helicopters as 200.²²

Doctrinal Shift in the PLAAF

Envisioning a Proactive Role for the PLAAF.²³ the Chinese realise that since an all-out global conflict may be unlikely, there must be a capability to ensure a quick victory in localised wars (Local War Doctrine). The role of the PLAAF is considered to be vital in such a scenario. The PLAAF has a 'Rapid Reaction Strategy' which includes

the possibility of a pre-emptive first strike and offensive air operations. The Chinese have also outlined a 'War Zone Concept' wherein they are looking at a strategy to ensure the dominance of the complete War Zone. For the PLAAF, it implies striking first with a strong punch. This is seen as a shift in the trending pattern in the PLAAF which erstwhile had a predominantly defensive bias.

The Changing Trend and Pattern in the PLAAF Role.²⁴ The salient points of the changing trend and pattern of the PLAAF are summarised below:

- **Key Point Defence.** The erstwhile concept of 'key point defence' is waning while that of 'large area defence' is growing. Given the PLAAF's previous focus on defending cities, industry and bases, this is perhaps the biggest change in Chinese thinking. The forward edge of the battle must be pushed towards the enemy.
- **Mobile Air Defence.** Gradually, the fixed defences are giving way to mobile air defences which imply the ability to shoot-and-scoot, especially, when up against a more powerful reconnaissance and attack threat. As per this thought process, mobility can plug holes in air defences and allows forces to mass and gain favourable conditions for own forces.
- **Offensive Air Defence.** As stated in the pro-active approach, the earlier protective air defences are giving way to offensive air defence driven by more effective offensive operations. This strategy calls for reliance on integrated attack and defence in which the offence mounts more attack on targets, keeping a strong air defence punch ready to take on the opponent's counterattacks. The bias of the operations is to maintain an offensive posture, forcing the enemy into a reactive mode and ultimately seizing operational initiative.
- **Information....** Flowing out from its policy of accelerating military informationisation, this trend is based on the belief that information is a core component of strength and information superiority must be incorporated into the entire course of an air defence campaign.
- **Unification.** Another trend in the PLAAF doctrine points towards the unification of air and space defences requiring integrated command and control based on the understanding that whoever controls space, controls the planet.

- **Joint Operations.** In air defence parlance, joint operations will call for building synergy between the ground-based, shore-based, sea-based and air-based assets, across the entire spectrum of the conduct of air defence battle by knitting and co-coordinating the sensor, shooter and battle management capabilities across the Service domains.
- **Defence Budget on the Rise, Defying a Slowing Economy.**²⁵ Open sources have it that despite a slowing economy, the Chinese defence budget in 2015 showed a year-on-year increase of 10% (889 billion Yuan or 142 billion USD) as compared with 2014, though it compares unfavourably with the year-on-year increase of 12.2% in 2014 and 10.7% in 2013.²⁶
- **Likely Gains to Air and Air Defence Components.** The likely gains (acquisition/development) in the field of air and air defence include S-300PMU/SA-10, S-300 PMU-1/SA-30 Russian-built AD Missiles, as well as the indigenous HQ9 SAMs designed for the defence of vital facilities against main strikes by aircrafts, cruise missiles, tactical and theatre ballistic missiles and other air attack weapons over a full range of altitude and speeds in a hostile ECM environment. The production of fourth-generation aircrafts (SU-27/J-11 and SU-30 variants), as well as the indigenous J-10 will be expedited. The acquisition and development of long range UAVs and their cannibalised versions are also likely to get a boost. In addition, China is likely to continue to invest heavily in J-20 stealth fighters and on the qualitative development in avionics and futuristic jet engines. As to strategic mobility, the Y-20, four-engined, 50 tonne-payload aircraft is already under development. It had its first flight on January 26, 2013.^{27,28}

Core Missions of the PLAAF

As per an expert opinion, the Chinese thinking has evolved three core missions for the PLAAF. The first core mission is to defend China's airspace – particularly Beijing – HQ of the Communist Party of China and the seat of the government. Out of the seven Military Regions (MRs) (reportedly being reorganised into five new "Strategic Zones" alongside the regrouping of the Army's four HQs)²⁹, Beijing takes top priority followed closely by the Shenyang Military District (MD) in NE China bordering Russia, the Sea of Japan and North Korea. The

second core mission is to prepare for an assault on Taiwan, a task assigned to the Nanjing MD. The newest and the third core mission is to acquire the capability to project power into South China Sea.³⁰

The Likely Unfolding of the PLAAF Campaign. A RAND analysis paper carries comprehensive factual and analytical details on the likely unfolding of the air battle by the PLAAF in consonance with the core missions described above. Some facts related to the PLAAF operations as extracted from the above document are as under:³¹

Information Offensive. A typical air campaign will start with an information offensive which would entail cyber network attacks, electronic deception, electronic interference and firepower destruction.

Penetration of the Enemy Air Defences. Alongside the information offensive, penetration of the enemy air defences would be initiated. This would include attacks by conventional ballistic missiles of the Second Artillery Force. The likely targets will be assets on air bases in Counter Air Operation (CAO) mode, AD command, control and Control and Reporting (C&R) nodes, Surface to air Missile (SAM) sites and Electro Magnetic (EM) emitters. While long range Surface to Surface Missiles (SSMs) like the DF11/CSS-7, DF-15/CSS-6, etc., will be the likely arsenal; the PLAAF is also likely to use penetrating sub-munitions against runways and unitary warheads or warheads with blast sub-munitions against air defence command, control and C&R nodes.

Suppression of AD (SEAD) Means. The above will also be accompanied in an unpredictable time pattern/sequence by manned aircraft and cruise missile attacks. The primary goal of such attacks is likely to be electronic interference and suppression (EW & SEAD). The likely arsenal could be radar-guided AAMs, supersonic ARMs (KH-31P, Y-7-91, etc.) launched from aircraft platforms like the SU-30, JH-7A or multirole J-11 or ground launched ARMs (ARM version of the DH-10). The likely targets in EW/SEAD domain will be EW sites that may be still operational, SAMs, radars and EM emitters. Every attempt will be made to suppress/destroy AD C&R Nodes and other BMC2 systems that have escaped destruction till this phase of attack. Besides DH-10 cruise missiles, the H6 Bomber could launch a YJ-63 class of Air Launched Cruise Missiles (ALCM); front-line aircrafts (J-8, JH-7,

SU-30, J-11, Q-5) could launch laser-guided (KAB 500L/KAB 1500L/LT-2 indigenous) and satellite-guided bombs.

Offensive Air Campaign. Seamlessly, during the currency of the EW and SEAD phase, the PLAAF is likely to embark upon an offensive air campaign to seize air superiority/favourable air situation/local favourable air situation. Besides the AD assets, EW sites, command, control and communication facilities, the SAM and fighter aircraft bases which have been continuously targeted in the earlier phases as well, would also be addressed. Other targets in this phase could include the SSM batteries and other residual assets related to the opponent's capability to conduct air or missile operations. While these targets and more will continuously be kept non-operational, the major PLAAF punch with aircrafts, ballistic and cruise missiles is now likely to shift to other targets like the seat of power, prestigious targets of political value, economic targets, water and electric installations, core-sector targets like oil dumps/refineries and civilian targets, etc. Once the favourable air situation is achieved, the air offensive campaign is likely to graduate to an air blockade campaign and strikes on naval bases and naval forces at sea.

The Implication of 'Likely'. It goes without saying that given the inherent flexibility in the prosecution of the air threat, the above-mentioned likely visualisation is just one of the several options. That said, while the execution pattern may vary from commander to commander and from situation to situation, the broad pattern is likely to be on the lines visualised above.

The Chinese Build-Up in Tibet/Xizang Autonomous Region (TAR)

Significance. While the likely unfolding of the PLAAF air campaign as covered above presents a macro picture, what is of special relevance is the build-up and growing capability of the PLAAF in the TAR. As per an expert opinion, though China's primary focus is on Taiwan, the South China Sea and West Pacific where its strategic objective is to reduce, if not eliminate, the US influence, the capability build-up in the Tibet region achieves the dual aim of addressing India as well as ensuring an economic development of the region that will eventually aid in dwarfing/diluting the Tibetan resistance.³² Reference India, the

build-up is aimed at gaining a capability of rapid deployment of forces in an eventuality besides an abiding power projection across the border. Some points of factual details and analysis thereof, are as under and are based on the now revised structure of the PLAAF which even after its crystallisation in a true form, would retain the actual force levels:

- Out of the seven (now five) MRs of China only two (now one) are opposite India. Lanzhou MR opposite Ladakh Sector and Chengdu MR off India's North East have been merged. The Chengdu MR had two MDs; Yunan opposite Myanmar and Xizang opposite Assam, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The Lanzhou MR had South Xinjiang MD opposite Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh, and East Xinjiang MD opposite Ladakh. The Chengdu Military Region Air Force (MRAF) was one of the seven (now five) MRAFs under the PLAAF. It is responsible for the air defence of the Chinese South West Region.
- It is assessed that in the Chengdu MR, the PLAAF has two fighter divisions (33rd and 44th Div) and an Airlift Division (4th). The MRAF includes J-10 (one regiment), SU-27 UBK (one regiment), J7B (two regiments), besides aerial tankers (IL-78), MI-17 V7 helicopters and J-6, J-7, and SU-30 aircrafts^{33,34}. In the adjoining Lanzhou MR, there are two fighter (6th, 37th) and one bomber division³⁵. The fighter aircrafts known to be in this MR include J-6, J-7G, J-7II, J-81, J-8F and J-11. The Bomber division has H6 bomber besides others.³⁶ All these forces form part of the merged command theatre.
- As to the PLAAF operations from the TAR, there has been a steady rise. In 2010, the PLAAF operations from TAR were just about 4–6 aircraft detachments in good weather conditions. This increased to about 6–8 aircraft detachments in 2011 operating from two airfields. This continued rising in 2012 when the PLAAF carried out weapon-firing trials at high altitude for the first time in an integrated exercise. In 2014, this presence showed an exponential rise with the PLAAF flying around 1400–1460 sorties (a 300% jump-year-on-year).³⁷
- The latest reports indicate an almost year-round presence of the J-10, J-11 and SU-27 aircrafts in TAR either on deployment or exercises. In Nov–Dec 2014 a total of 32 J-10 aircrafts were positioned for the first time in TAR at the Lhasa and Hoping

airfields.³⁸ In essence therefore, the TAR, which spans both the above-mentioned two now merged MRs, has the might of the PLAAF front-line air power.

- Other reports indicate that the regiments of the second Artillery deployed in the Tibetan Plateau regularly conduct 'live fire' exercises. In July 2015, a regiment conducted live fire exercise with 'new artillery guns' at heights between 3700–4800 m.
- Apart from a nuclear missile base in the Qinghai province which clearly targets India, China has built five fully operational air bases (Gongar, Pangta, Linchi, Hoping and Gar Gonsa) and an exclusive rail network and over 58,000 km of roads in the TAR.³⁹ It is reported that in 2015, another full-fledged air base at Kashgar located 600 km north of Srinagar was operationalised. It is assessed that with the above infrastructure at its call, the PLA can amass upward of two divisions at their launch pads along the border in just 20 days compared to over 90 days that it took earlier.
- The limitations of high altitude operations with combat aircrafts of yesteryears stands diluted to a large extent with the induction of modern aircrafts of the likes of SU-27 and J-10. To add to this, are the other 'enablers' like air-to-air-refuellers, Airborne Early Warning (AEW) aircrafts and a strong ground based air defence and Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) cover, centred around S-300/400 and a hierarchy of Short, Medium and Long Range SAMs.
- PLAAF's acquisition of force multipliers like air-to-air refuellers (H6U/DU Air Refuelling Tanker, IL 78 M Midas Air Refuelling Tanker) and tankers with strategic airlift capability indicate the strategy of strike aircrafts taking off with a combination of minimum fuel and maximum weapon load to be air refuelled in airborne mode. This will provide the SU-27s and J-11 a capability to strike deep inside Indian territory.
- According to a research analysis report by the Delhi Policy Group, China's vast networks of highways in TAR stands out prominently, giving it the advantage of a quick build-up and sustenance thereafter. The most prominent lifelines, built assiduously, are the Sichuan–Tibet Highway, the Qinghai–Tibet Highway, the Lhasa–Xinjiang Highway and the Yunnan–Tibet Highway⁴⁰.

- As to the rail network, the nodal Qinghai–Tibet 1,142 km major project completed way back in 2006, at a staggering 34 billion Yuan, along with several others lines completed/or in the pipeline (Lines connecting Lhasa, the capital of TAR with Shigatse bordering Sikkim, with Nyingchi in SE Tibet bordering India, with Yatung a trading town 30 km from the Indian border at the mouth of the Chumbi valley and with Linzhi 70 km from Indian border) provide it with the capability of swift movement of troops and material in the time of need.
- The PLAAF has stocked a large number of Non-Line-of-Sight Battlefield Support Missiles (NSOS-BSMs) at Xinjiang and Aksai Chin for a possible use in CAO missions against Airfields and Advance Landing Grounds across the Line of Actual Control.
- For interdiction operations on the supply lines of India's forward deployed ground forces in both Eastern Ladakh, HP and Utrkhand, the PLAAF is likely to employ a combination of massed fire assaults from heavy calibre MBRLS along with Battlefield Air Interdiction (BAI) sorties employing SU-30 Mk-2 and J-10 aircrafts, duly supported by AEW platforms.
- In order to rehearse the above-mentioned contingencies, adequate training is being carried out regularly. In the recent past, a joint expeditionary Army–AF live firing exercise took place in July–August 2010 at the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau (15,420 ft). The same exercise was repeated in 2011, dubbed as the Integrated Joint Operations (IJO) with elements from the Chengdu and Lanzhou MRs. This time, besides other aircrafts, the SU27SK and the SU27UBK also participated. A variety of arsenal was tried out in the above-said exercises, like the 122 mm S-13, 266 mm S-25 ASRs, P-11 Beyond Visual Range Missiles, P-8 Missiles, LT-2 Laser Guided Bombs etc.⁴¹

From Aug 2014 onwards, the J-11 and SU-27 ex-Lanzhou MR have been conducting 'combat confrontation' exercises in 'low meteorological conditions'. Also a regiment of the J-11 commenced night combat training from August 2015.⁴²

While the analysis of a response to the Chinese capabilities across the entire spectrum of its capabilities is beyond the scope of this paper, the following capabilities integrated across Service domains will be

required to put up a viable counter to the air threat posed by the PLAAF now and in the foreseeable future:

- The capability to carry out an effective surveillance of the TAR region with sensor efforts integrated across ground/shore/space media resulting in a comprehensive air situation picture. The above calls for identifying surveillance gaps and putting in place a tri-Service Plan to plug the same. A very tall order indeed.
- Providing a seamless Air Defence Battle Management System with near real time data transmission capability, anchored on satellite media with due redundancy. The system must integrate the highest BMC2 Nodes to air and air defence combat means cutting across Service boundaries, wherewithal and capability to carry out all-weather CAO, interdiction and Counter Surface Force Operations (CSFO) across the border both in pro-active/pre-emptive, as well as retaliatory mode.
- Building a degree of survivability in air defence command, control and communication centres both electronically, as well as, through equipment redundancy.
- Building an integrated family of ground, air and shore-based Air Defence Weapon Systems to ensure continuous and successive punishment to the air threat right through its ingress into own territory.

For ground-based air defence, the above capability must result in the following:

- Modernised and technologically-enabled gun-missile means to cover the entire range-height spectrum from LRSAM to MRSAM to SRSAM down to terminal weapons along with their sensors and associated support systems
- Capability to take on contemporary, as well as, futuristic threat from PLAAF including stand-off threat and the threat from smart/intelligent weapons and PGMs.
- Futuristic kill capability in the form of directed energy weapons (laser to start with).
- Capability of soft kill in Ground Based AD Weapons Systems (GBADWS) through integration of the ESM and ECM muscle.
- Fielding a counter for stealth aircrafts, ARMs and cruise missiles.

- Building BMD capabilities at the national level to take on the threat of SSMs.

As the third largest air force in the world and with a generous injection of capital for capability building, year-on-year, the PLAAF, as stated earlier, is more operationally capable than any time in its past. Gone are its days of obsolete inventory, poor training and outdated doctrine' today it is on a steady path of growth. Probably we need to revisit the dictum of the former Chinese premier Zhou En Lai.

'Watch what we do, not what we say!'

*

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9

Consecration of China's 'New Period' People's Liberation Army

Gautam Banerjee

"The structure of troops will be optimised to improve the quality and efficiency of the army. A 'revolution' of the management of the military will be rolled out with modern management techniques so that the army is managed professionally. Decision-making, enforcement and supervision powers should be separated and distributed in a manner that ensures they serve as checks and balances on each other but also run in parallel."

– Xi Jinping, November 2015.

A Home Run of Military Modernisation

In the dawn of the year 2016, the People's Republic of China (PRC) officially promulgated the commencement of the final phase of restructuring of its apex setup for management of national defence as well as its highest organisation for the exercise of military command and control over its 2.3 million strong People's Liberation Army (PLA). Thus commenced the 'home run' of military modernisation – a landmark endeavour that had commenced in early 1980s at the instance of Deng Xiaoping.

Wisely listed at the final ladder of the 'Four Modernisations' and commenced after the modernisation of the other three foundations of national power had made some headway, the process of modernisation of the PLA, as expected in any such super-venture, had to negotiate

through much resistance, disputes and debates over the past three decades or so before finding principal acceptance in 2011. Finally brought to the concluding phase by the end of 2015 with typical Chinese strategic foresight and professional perseverance, the entire progression has been much reported and discussed over time. Even then, the purpose of a comprehensive understanding of the recent promulgation of defence reforms and the apex level restructuring of the PLA's command and control may be better served by delving deeper into the determinants which shaped it.

Traditional of Political Initiatives

Right from the imperialist times, military restructuring, always at a political behest, has been a regular process in China, as exemplified by its evolutionary forms of 'Banner', 'Green Standard', 'Beiyang', 'Peasant', 'Route', 'National' and 'Peoples' armies. In modern times of Western military dominance, the Qing modernisation of the 1860s, which oriented China's military establishment towards modern technology, was a noteworthy event indeed. Thereafter, such operational upgrades and force restructures have invariably followed all major changes in China's governing system – for example, in 1906, 1917, 1936 and after the Communist takeover in 1949. In 1970, Lin Biao had proposed a comprehensive range of organisational upgrades and rationalisation of manpower to rid the PLA of the ill-effects of the 'Cultural Revolution'; this led to his differences with Mao Zedong and his eventual assassination. By the mid-1970s, the modernist ideologue, Deng Xiaoping, was in the doghouse and Zhou Enlai, the most balanced leader, had died. These setbacks put paid to the idea of military modernisation, much to the relief of the old crop of the Communist Party of China (CPC) honchos and PLA Generals whose grip over power-and-pelf was better maintained by the continuation of status quo.

PLA's First Phase Modernisation

In 1979, having had to stretch to its limits to finally get the better of the Vietnamese resistance, the PLA was shaken enough to revive the call for modernisation; Mao's absence from the scene and the re-emergence of Deng helped. The cause, however, could not make much

headway against the entrenched Party–PLA cabal, opposed as it was to the restructuring of the PLA through manpower reduction, professional military training and the induction of latest weapons and equipment as these could only be at the cost of rhetorical communist education, vested avenues of patronage and the benefits accruing of commercial ventures. These ventures had come up during the ‘Great Leap Forward’ (it actually turned out to be a bloody ‘leap into disaster’) when it was expected to raise its own resources through farming and other trades, and went on to form the PLA’s own ‘empire’. Subsequently, that empire got further strengthened when the PLA, being the only organisation capable of doing so, had to be called upon to undertake construction engineering and social development schemes in remote and backward areas. Thus over the years, the PLA’s traditional clout helped it build up its industrial and business assets, and with it, vast cadres of non-military and quasi-military rank and file, numbers of which nearly equalled the combat troops. With the passage of time, the extraordinary authority that the PLA wielded over societal affairs gradually turned this empire, much contrary to the pristine military ethos, into a refuge for bloated manpower, obsolete technology, inefficiency, nepotism, financial losses and corrupt practices. Having tasted that authority, the old guard was loathe to have the romanticised ‘people’s army’ turned into some unknown, compact, high-technology force.

Thus while the tug-of-war on such contentious issues continued amongst the modernist and orthodox factions, the schemes directed at modernisation of unit-level capabilities in terms of weapons, equipment and communications could still proceed. In the same vein, modern battle procedures in ‘battalion group’ configurations could be evolved, which, in the mid-2000s, eventually led to the realisation of the ‘modular’ structure for integrated all-arm operations. In so adapting, the PLA’s professionally focused hierarchy, while remaining stoic against larger resistance, proceeded to prepare grounds for the future modernisation of the higher echelons of its war machine.

Towards Conceptual and Structural Modernisation

The resistance to more substantial changes at the higher levels was finally overcome when witnessing the revolutionary military

capabilities of the American-led coalition forces during the Gulf War-I; a chastised Chinese leadership could no more overlook the obsolescence of the PLA's theories and structures in terms of modern warfare. Besides, the situation had now undergone a change. The PRC was economically and institutionally strong as never before, and by relieving the PLA of the non-military burdens of a 'people's army', was now quite capable of restructuring it according to the tenets of the 'Revolution in Military Affairs' (RMA) – with 'Chinese Characteristics', of course. The proviso was that, firstly, the excessive manpower, non-military ventures and corrupt practices had to be cut down to consolidate the army into a combat force that was capable of being modernised, and secondly, the heaviest stumbling block against modernisation, the CPC-PLA cabal, had to be reined-in. The PLA hierarchy also realised that to bring about an RMA, it was imperative to invest in modern air and naval forces which could not only cover for the trimming of manpower of the dated and sluggish ground forces, but could go further on to elevate the PLA's overall combat capability.

The stage was thus set to wean the PLA away from its ineffective military and non-military burdens. But this had to be done in a graduated manner so as to protect the stakeholders' interests. The vast cadres of redundant quasi and non-combatant employees could thus be gradually reassigned to civil sectors, and finally, the stagnant military organisations converted into 'People's Armed Police Force' (PAPF) and various other construction and industrial agencies. Time was also required to build up a modern military industry by various overt and covert means, and equip the forces with modern military wherewithal.

The period of late-1990s and mid-2000s therefore saw the PLA, while continuing with unit-level modernisation, elevating itself to the next stage to restructure its field formations. The assimilation of the concept of '*Integrated Joint Warfare*' (IJW) under the '*Conditions of Informationisation with Chinese Characteristics*', to prosecute a '*Localised War*', in what is termed as the '*New Period*', was the thrust area during this period. The concept of '*Integrated Logistic System*' was also developed and applied at the 'Unified' tri-service level, thus bringing much efficiency in the sustenance of remote military deployments.

Finally, under the third stage of modernisation, the PLA's role, charter, structure and geographical areas of responsibilities at the theatre

level were redefined. The notable features of this initiative were the consolidation of 11 Military Regions (MR) into seven Military Area Commands (MAC), conversion of army-intensive formation and theatre-command headquarters into a joint tri-service composition, and the creation of distinct air force and naval hierarchies. The lack of experienced joint warfare commanders and staff was answered at this stage by the creation of a 'War Zone Command' which would be implanted, when needed, on the warring MAC to take over the conduct of the IJW. Simultaneously, larger numbers of selected officers trained hard to imbibe the expertise of joint warfare. This was also the period when the upgradation of field formations from regimental to brigade configuration and integration of single-service 'Group Armies' into joint-services 'Combined Corps' found fruition. Meanwhile, as many as four lakh of the bloated manpower had been reassigned, and transfer of most of the unnecessary industrial ventures effected.

Communism versus Generalship

But just as an 'RMA with Chinese Characteristics' was being applied to the PLA's modernisation, there was much debate, even acrimony, over the supremacy or otherwise, of the communist ideology over professional excellence. While the traditional school argued that the fervour of communism drove the soldiery to greater achievements, the modernist school pointed out that rather than the robotic hordes, modern war needed highly trained and fully skilled soldiers, and therefore, communist education and party work could not supersede full-time military training and skill development. In the interest of effective modernisation, the CPC endorsed the latter point of view and thus emerged a crop of highly professional military leaders who did not have to display their communist affiliations. Much to the chagrin of the hard-core communist Generals and the PLA's Political Commissariat, these officers concentrated on building a 'New Period' PLA in which the PLA Army (PLAA), PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy (PLAN) integrated into the IJW mode to prosecute 'Active Defence' under, as mentioned earlier, 'Conditions of Informationisation with Chinese Characteristics' in any of the 'Localised' theatres of war.

By 2008 or so, necessitated by the arrogation of controlling leverage into the grip of professional military brass, there had to be one more

correction to the power equation in the CPC. The supremacy of the CPC over the PLA had to be reiterated by, firstly, making it obligatory for the pure professionals to commit to party loyalty if not pure communist ideology, and secondly, rewarding their professional positions with due weightage as compared to that of the communist ideologues. Party loyalty, implicit obedience to the Chairman of the CPC and the Central Military Commission (CMC), and probity in conduct were thus reinstated as the prime qualities of higher military leadership.

By 2011, the modernisation at unit, formation and theatre level was well underway. Nearly 20 per cent of the forces had been modernised and brisk progress was being made to cover the entire teeth elements of the PLA. It was time to prepare for the final stage, that of subsuming the PLA's apex military decision-making body into the CMC and thus customising that body to conform to the unequivocal supremacy of the CPC. This indeed was the purpose as enunciated in the PLA's declaration of 'Grand Mobilisation, Liberation and Thorough Clean Up of Military Ideology'.

PLA's Apex Controlling Body

To understand the underlying principles of the restructuring of China's apex military decision-making body, a brief look at its structure and function so far would be in order.

This is a system wherein the CPC controls the entire gamut of national endeavours, leaving the Government of the PRC to implement the principles and policies enunciated by it. This arrangement is rendered workable by having both the bodies replicating, more or less, a common hierarchical structure as well as the membership of these. More importantly, the military establishment is but an intrinsic, subordinate organ of the CPC and its personnel are its committed members, formally or otherwise. This system therefore keeps the military leadership beholden to the Party's control while participating in the entire system of the PRC's governance. As usual, there are agreements and differences between the two in which the opinions and alignments are regularly forged across the lines.

From the time the thrust on modernisation commenced in the early 1980s, the apex controlling body of the PLA, that is above the seven MACs, consisted of two tiers. At the top tier was the 10-member CMC, two of them Vice-Chairmen and all of them Party-PLA leaders, with the General Secretary of the CPC and the President of the PRC being concurrently appointed as its Chairman. This is a trend mostly followed in the Chinese system as it helps establish a singular head to lead China under the guidance and assistance from a select group of all powerful Party loyalists. The CMC exercised political control over the PLA, and to that purpose maintained the Party's grip over the military establishment by preserving to itself the matters related to law, discipline, inspection, military diplomacy and audit.

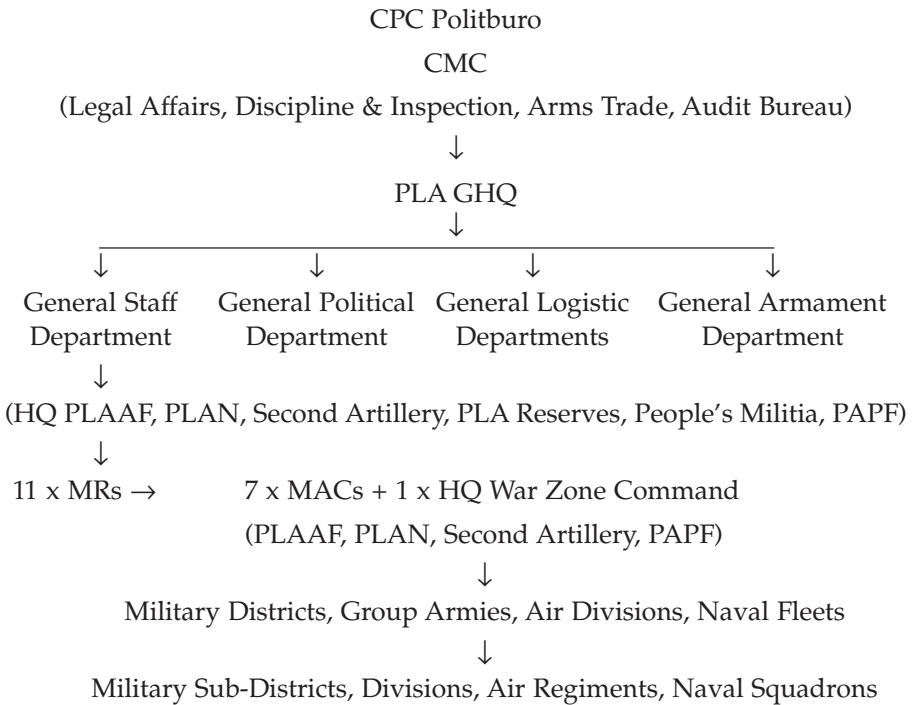


Figure 1: PLA's Apex hierarchy till 2015

So far, at the second tier, the PLA General Headquarters (GHQ) controlled the purely military matters through its four Departments,

namely, the General Staff, General Political, General Logistic and General Armament Departments. The General Staff Department, which controlled all operational matters, was more or less a PLAA-centric headquarters with the PLAAF, PLAN, Second Artillery and People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) hierarchies embedded in it. The tasking of the Second Artillery, the nuclear and missile forces, was however controlled directly by the CMC while the PAPF's budget as well as its peace-time employment was controlled by the Ministry of Public Security. The General Political Department handled, through its Political Commissariat embedded at all echelons, the political aspect of the military establishment such as communist education, motivation and welfare of the personnel, and maintenance of Party influence over what is principally a Party's armed organ. The General Logistic Department attended to the Integrated Logistic System and the General Armament Department was in control of the research, development, production and procurement of military hardware including that for the nuclear and missile forces. Of course, there had been many need-based modifications incorporated into the Department from time to time.

Obviously, the first was the preserve of the hard-core military professionals, the second was a setup of the Party-dedicated military officials, the third was the domain of the military and civil logisticians and the last Department was the preserve of scientists, military and civilian technocrats and military industrial establishments. A similar structure existed at the MAC level too. Since the 1990s, the pursuit of comprehensive military modernisation had ratcheted up the clout of the General Staff Department which had come to dominate the entire setup, somewhat to the discomfiture of the Political Commissariat.

In short, the CMC as well as the PLA GHQ had been PLAA-centric in composition and control while the other services functioned as its branches. However, as discussed above, gradually over the past decade or so, the PLAAF and PLAN hierarchies had been upgraded and inducted into the CMC membership and all the lower echelons of the PLA's chain of command. Similarly, over the years, many new 'offices' had been added to the PLA GHQ to cater to the staff work associated with the modern features of warfare, such as nuclear, information, cyber, space and media warfare. In the overall context, the effort had so far

been directed at fostering a higher level of service-specific professionalism at the one end, and the upgradation of the other Services to equal partnership in a tri-service jointness at the other.

Final Phase of Modernisation

Having made a satisfactory headway through incremental additions and modifications in a manner that the operational equilibrium is not upset during the transition period, in 2011, the PLA's two-tier apex command and control structure was ready for a formal switchover to a designated joint-services model with Chinese characteristics, so to say. As mentioned earlier, the ball was set rolling through the formal enunciation of a policy statement titled 'Grand Mobilisation, Liberation and Thorough Clean Up of Military Ideology'. Thus commenced, over the next four years, a series of systemic assimilation of the new 'offices' which had been added to the PLA GHQ and conditioning the higher commanders and staff to the operationalisation of a 'New Period' PLA.

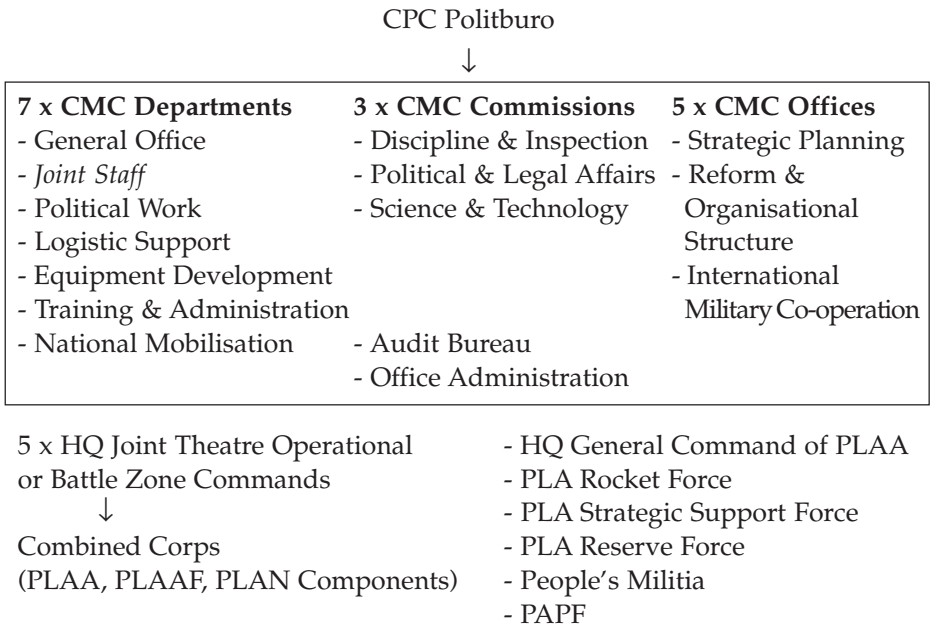


Figure 2: PLA's hierarchy integrated into the CMC

In 2014, according to the final agenda of China's military modernisation, a 'Leading Group for Reforms' was constituted to implement the intended restructure of the two-tier command and control system. Hundreds of serving and retired professionals were drafted to organise hundreds of debates, brainstorming sessions and experimentation in military bases across the country before the restructuring was certified for implementation. Finally, through the issuance of a formal executive order from the office of the President of the PRC-General Secretary of the CPC-Chairman of the CMC in December 2015 in the form of 'Guidelines on National Defence and Military Reforms', the PLA GHQ was subsumed into the CMC, and the apex command and control structure of the PLA, which had been under experimentation and training since 2011, was finally inaugurated. Even then, to prevent the loss of organisational control and balance, 'transitional work offices' have been given time till 2020 to settle the systemic changeover. Five years have thus been earmarked for the officials to gain more executive experience, formalise the rules of business and office procedures, make necessary adjustments and finally settle down to a *'seamless system in which the CMC takes charge of the overall administration of the PLA, the PAPF and the People's Militia and Reserve Forces, Battle Zone Commands focus on combat preparedness, and various military services pursue development'* (sic).

The reformed structure of the PLA's apex level management is now a one-tier configuration which encompasses all aspects of military expertise, Party control, science and technology, defence industry, military diplomacy and military as well as Party discipline – all to be directly controlled by the CMC. The four Departments of the erstwhile PLA GHQ are now subsumed into the CMC which is made up of seven 'Departments', three 'Commissions' and five 'Offices' as shown below.

Organisational Control of the Reconstructed CMC

Drawing inferences from the PLA's organisational culture, published reports of Chinese origin and the fundamentals of military principles and practices, the notable features of the reconstructed CMC may be summarised as follows:

- (a) As stated earlier, in an astute display of deep military insight, the CMC had already introduced in a quantum over the past

five years or so, most of the changes either in full or in skeleton form, to be functionally operative on experimental basis and for training. In fact, over these years the CMC had been gradually integrating the functions of the PLA GHQ and its four Departments into its fold.

- (b) The all powerful and PLAA-predominant General Staff Department of the PLA GHQ has been converted into a 'CMC Joint Staff Department' dedicated to joint, tri-service operational policymaking and control. Its diverse functions like military training, trials, administration and mobilisation have been separated out into full-fledged and specifically chartered CMC Departments, all in a tri-service mode.
- (c) The General Political Department of the PLA GHQ has been reconstructed into the 'CMC Political Work Department'. The change possibly conforms to the policy of making command and commissariat appointments somewhat interchangeable and so to assuage the ever-contentious relationship between military commanders and their *bête noire*, the political commissars. Generally in the past, the latter used to be Party-fundamentalists in uniform who arrogated higher authority, but with the commencement of the process of modernisation, these had been upstaged by the professional military officer corps. The change is expected to balance the equation, with a tilt towards military professionals with Party affiliation.
- (d) The 'CMC Logistic Support' and 'CMC Equipment Development' Departments are respectively the restructured versions of the General Logistic and General Armament Departments of the erstwhile PLA GHQ. Civil-military integration in both the Departments is expected to improve the management of military land, infrastructure and supply chain in the first named, and a brisk upgradation of the military hardware in the second.
- (e) The three 'CMC Commissions' are Party-predominant oversight mechanisms to nurture the PLA's Party-dedication and moral as well as legal probity among the military fraternity. Together, the 'CMC Discipline & Inspection Commission' and the 'CMC Political & Legal Affairs Commission' are also charged with bringing about reforms in military wages, housing, insurance, military justice, inspection, discipline and

post-retirement welfare of the soldiery. Most significantly, in line with the PLA's thrust area, it also provides for an unencumbered preserve for the development of the PLA's scientific temper.

- (f) The five 'CMC Offices' are the military–diplomatic think tanks charged with strategic innovations, monitoring the implementation of reforms and modernisation schemes, and military diplomacy. The creation of these Offices indicates the seriousness that the Chinese accord to political articulation of military power. Besides of course, there are the Offices to audit and administer the house.

Indeed, catering to a major concern in the CPC hierarchy, the restructuring brings about an intimate degree of integration among the military professionals, Party loyalists and civilian experts. Notably, even if subscribing to the exercise of command and control through joint headquarters, the executive organs are retained in single-service, single-branch configuration, as it must be in the interest of nurturing domain skill and experience. The reform also aims at manpower right-sizing of from 2.3 million to 2 million that would facilitate the PLA's re-use from non-military functions and orient its focus on force-modernisation.

Command Functions of the Restructured CMC

Having combined the 10-member CMC and four Departments of the PLA GHQ, the top two tiers of the PLA's operational control and administration are now merged into just one reconstituted CMC made up of a total of 15 Departments, Commissions and Offices. Apart from exercising an apex-level control over all operational and administrative aspects of the PLA, in its new form, the CMC also exercises direct command over certain organisations, as described below:

- (a) Notwithstanding the switch to tri-service jointness, a dedicated headquarters to administer the PLAA is still needed because of its huge combat and non-combat establishments, vast scope for manpower reassignment, smooth transfer of its industrial ventures and the need to oversee the extensive range of modernisation schemes. To this purpose, a 'HQ General Command of PLAA' is created out of the erstwhile PLA GHQ

to function under the direct command of the CMC.

- (b) The PLA Second Artillery, China's nuclear and conventional missile force, earlier had only its action switch in the CMC's control. Presently, under a new nomenclature of the 'PLA Rocket Force' (PLARF), it has been fully brought under the direct control of the CMC. The implications are, one, there is no intermediate headquarters to go through in seeking its employment, and two, freed from generalist obtrusions, the specialist force would find autonomy in its evolution.
- (c) Between the General Staff and Armament Departments of the erstwhile PLA GHQ and many of the civilian-faced science and technology organisations, the development of China's nuclear and conventional missile forces had so far been a multiple-department effort. Besides, the elements dedicated to information, space, cyber, psychology and media warfare had been added to the PLA GHQ from time to time. The experience gained thus has permitted the consolidation of the entire setup into one 'PLA Strategic Support Force' (PLASSF) which, functioning under the direct command of the CMC, is mandated to undertake a conjoined operationalisation of all aspects of the information age war at strategic as well as tactical levels. Under a shorter and direct command, control and administrative hierarchy, the PLASSF is expected to synergise all the above-mentioned kinetic and non-kinetic modes of warfare in support of the PLA's overall strategy.
- (d) The restructuring has also brought the 'PLA Reserve Force' and the 'People's Militia' under the direct command of the CMC. Under the reforms, the loosely structured Reserve Force is to be streamlined into designated units, while ridding the Militia of non-effective camp followers and trimming its numbers down to half a million. These steps are aimed at a better preparation and response of the Reserve Forces, the regulation of the control of local Party Offices over the Militia, and significantly improving welfare measures for the ex-servicemen.
- (e) Due to rising challenges against the preservation of internal security, the PRC has had to strengthen its armed police organisation. The PAPF is thus revamped from being an appendage of the sectoral PLA formations into a distinct force

with its dedicated hierarchy, largely ex-military manpower and light hardware transferred to it from the PLA surpluses. Presently, in its armed, anti-rebellion functions, the PAPF has been brought under the direct control of the CMC, while its peace-time administration and control remain in the hands of the Ministry of Public Security. At the field level, however, the PAPF is under the functional control of the PLA.

HQ Joint Theatre Operational or Battle Zone Commands

As for the PRC's combat forces, the seven MACs are restructured into five 'Battle Zone Commands' (BZCs) without any change in the location or tasking of the subordinate formations like the Combined Corps, the Group Armies and the corresponding PLAAF and PLAN elements. Thus while the areas of responsibilities for prosecuting theatre or localised war have somewhat expanded, the overall force levels and operational tasking of the field formations may not undergo any major revision.

The advantages of this restructure accrues from: one, conversion of all five theatre command headquarters into an integrated joint operational composition in place of just one centrally controlled War Zone Command; two, flexibility in intra-theatre build up and force-application; and three, thinning down the establishment – most of it being reassigned into the expanded CMC, some to build up new units for the PLAAF, PLAN, PLASSF and some to the PAPF. Notably, due to expansion of the CMC, PLARF, PLASSF, etc., the overall number of top appointments remains more or less the same, and that serves the purpose of career protection.

Congruence of Strategic Orientation and Restructure

The analysis of the final phase of China's military modernisation and reforms would not be complete without a brief mention of the conceptual revolution that the PLA has adopted to turn itself into a superpower military. The thinking process had gained a quantum boost in the early-2000s but its revelations came to a wider external scrutiny only after 2011 or so, when China's aggressive behaviour in the region escalated to start hurting the interests of the so-far by standing powers.



Map 1: The PLA's New BZCs

The connection between China's military concepts and practices is clear from the themes propagated through China's 'Defence White Paper' of April 2013, and the 'White Paper on Military Strategy' of May 2015. Highlights of the enunciations of these policy documents are as follows; verbatim quotes are used selectively to convey the right intent:

- Enunciating the concept of 'Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces' in its Defence White Paper of 2013, the PRC tasked the PLA to secure its core objectives of sustaining 'national strength, national unification and territorial integrity'. Moreover, the PLA was also mandated to bring about 'peaceful development through integrated civilian-military effort' and to facilitate 'contribution to world peace and regional stability'. Implicit in all that was the charge of safeguarding the CPC's 'ruling position'.
- To that end, a build-up of powerful armed forces 'in conformity to China's status' is considered imperative. The aim is to build a new type of 'lean, joint, multi-functional and informationised'

military force with 'Chinese characteristics'. The stated purpose is to 'safeguard border, contain separatist forces, ensure security of coastal and air territories, protect national maritime, outer space and cyber space rights and interests, and to prevent aggression'. The strategy adopted is to 'win local wars' by recourse to 'active defence' – a form of pre-emptive aggression to be described as 'counter-attack in self-defence' -the option of 'resolute nuclear counter-attack if China comes under nuclear threat' being in order.

Based on the parameters enunciated in the White Paper on Military Strategy of May 2015, the military objectives are sought to be achieved by the following measures:

- (a) Building a '**smaller, adaptable PLAA**' that is structured in 'small, multi-functional and modular units'. The objective is to 'reorient from theater defense to trans-theater mobility to execute precise, multi-dimensional, trans-theater, multi-functional and sustainable operations' (sic).
- (b) Building a blue water PLAN as a 'combined, multi-functional and efficient marine combat force' with capabilities for 'strategic deterrence and counterattack, maritime maneuvers, joint operations at sea, comprehensive defense and comprehensive support' (sic), the last role apparently referring to the PRC's expanding maritime initiatives. The objective is for the PLAN to shift focus from the strategy of 'territorial waters defense' to that of 'joint offshore waters defense' and open seas protection'.
- (c) Orienting the focus of the PLAAF from 'territorial air defense to both defense and offence', and the creation of an 'air-space defense force structure' that can meet the requirements of 'informationised operations'. This objective is to be met by having a '**fully-functional air force**' with 'boosted capabilities for strategic early warning, air strike, air and missile defense, information countermeasures, airborne operations, strategic projection and comprehensive support' (sic).
- (d) Commitment to the maintenance of an '**effective Missile Force**' is reiterated.
- (e) Lastly, enhancing the quality of national defence through 'mobilisation' and 'reserve force building' is also a part of the agenda. These steps are necessary to retain the ability to

reinforce a leaner standing PLA should such a need arise. Inter alia, these steps permit right-sizing the PLA from being a manpower intensive peoples' force to an informationised one, and so make it practical to achieve military modernisation.

The above-mentioned strategies are to be promulgated only after the military objectives are formally crystallised through discussions, training and trials, and then followed up with an assured progression in translating these into the PLA's modernisation. The recent restructuring of the PLA's apex command and control setup is the culminating stage of that endeavour.

Concluding Observations

The modernisation of the PLA is well underway; it is estimated that about 20 per cent of it is fully modernised to the scale of advanced capabilities, 20 per cent is under various stages of modernisation, 40 per cent maintains its still useful 1980s composition and the rest are to be gradually thinned out. Meanwhile, in July 2015, the PRC's National People's Congress passed a comprehensive 'National Security Law', covering besides the areas of domestic interests, even the technological, military and environmental aspects related to outer space, polar regions and cyber security. This Law accords constitutional authority to the state power to deal with resistance against the CPC's policies including those related to national defence. It was therefore an appropriate juncture to implement the final and key phase of that long process of defence reforms, that is, restructuring the PLA's apex level command and control organisation.

Assimilation of the PLA GHQ into the CMC does not per se change the PLA's regional or territorial force-posture. That however may not comfort the hapless subjects of the PRC's military highhandedness because a modernised PLA now stands further empowered for a synergised prosecution of war by a joint, Party-integrated strategic command and control mechanism.

Sustained progress over the past quarter of a century of military modernisation in due consonance with the development of new strategies illustrates the traditional Chinese wisdom of nurturing its military institutions, and so deriving political dividends in good

measure. Further, the promulgation of strategic policies and translation of such policies through comprehensive modernisation of the PLA's force-structure as well as the restructure of its apex level command and control mechanism is a quantum leap in an effective empowerment of the PLA.

To wit, China's official stance enunciates that *"China must have a strong military... China doesn't need to worry about military aggression ... But there is more about national security... With a strong army, China can be more politically appealing, influential and persuasive, and will make it easier to network... As we gain more trust from other countries, many of them will no longer be dependent on the US for security and on China for economic benefits ... our military strength has to be demonstrated to the world... The army needs to be able to fight battles and provide real deterrence... The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting"*.

China's neighbours may take due cognisance.

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10

Chinese Quest for Space Supremacy: Implications for India and the World

Radhakrishna Rao

China's Space Quest

In a stunning demonstration of its growing prowess in the cutting-edge space research and technology, on June 11, a Chinese Long March-2F rocket successfully launched the longest-ever manned Chinese mission with its second woman astronaut among the crew. The three-member crew of Shenzhou-10 (meaning Divine Vessel) manned ship, which had a smooth lift-off from the Jiuquan launch centre in the Gobi desert, is designed to accomplish a series of exercises and tests, aimed at acquiring the necessary level of expertise for developing and operating a –full-fledged, manned Chinese orbital laboratory by 2020. In particular, the Shenzhou-10 mission will evaluate the life support system of the Tiangong-1 target space station. The 8.5-tonne Tiangong-I (meaning Heavenly Palace) launched in September 2011 is essentially meant to serve as a platform to test the rendezvous and docking techniques. The Tiangong-I features a pressurised experimental module where the visiting crew can live and work. In the ultimate analysis, the three astronauts on a 15-day “celestial journey” – which constitutes the fifth Chinese manned mission- will prepare the ground for giving a fresh thrust and new direction to the Chinese manned space programme.¹

Source of Pride and Prestige

All said and done, China would need to cover much ground before it catches up with the USA and Russia in the conquest of the final frontier. Significantly, the rendezvous and docking techniques such as those, which China is now mastering, were perfected by the US and the former Soviet Union decades ago. Even so, China considers a high-profile space mission such as this as a source of huge national pride and international prestige. Chinese President Xi Jinping who met the astronaut trio at the launch site remarked, "You made Chinese people feel proud of ourselves". Leaving apart the emotional upsurge, and on a more practical plane, this latest space journey has been described as a challenging exercise that marks the last of the three planned missions to master the rendezvous and docking techniques that hold the key to the operations of a permanent, manned orbiting station.²

Referring to the Shenzhou-10 mission, a spokesperson of the Chinese manned space programme pointed out that it will carry out one manual and one automatic docking: "So far we only conducted three automatic docking tests and a manned one. More tests are needed. We also need to further prove that our astronauts are fit for a longer stay in space and the orbiters are able to support their life and work".³ After the Shenzhou-10 returns back to earth on completion of the mission, the curtains will come down on the two-year mission of the relatively small Tiangong-I space module. China is already working on realising a vastly improved Tiangong-II as a replacement to the Tiangong-I. According to Zhou Jianping, chief designer of China's manned space programme, a freighter will be launched soon after the Tiangong-II goes into orbit. Interestingly, the Tiangong-I weighs half of the world's first space station, Salyut-1, launched by the former Soviet Union in 1971. And in comparison, the currently operational International Space Station (ISS) weighs 400 tonnes.

White Paper Focus on Space Strides

A 17-Page White Paper issued by the Chinese Government in December 2011 outlines the course and contours of the Chinese space programme over a period of five years. According to this document, the priorities of the Chinese space venture would include developing three new generation heavy-lift launch vehicles, mitigating the problem

of space debris and expanding the scope of lunar exploration. The report observes in clear-cut terms:

“In the next five years, China will strengthen its basic capabilities of space industry, accelerate research on leading edge technology and continue to implement important space scientific and technological projects including human space flight, lunar exploration, high resolution earth observation systems, satellite navigation and positioning systems, new generation launch vehicles and other priority projects in key fields. China will develop a comprehensive plan for construction of space infrastructure, promote its satellites and satellite application industry, further conduct space science research and push forward the comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of China’s space industry”.

The White Paper also reveals China’s more than usual interest in space science research involving the deployment of astrophysical and astronomy satellite probes to study the properties of black holes and explore properties of dark matter particles and test the basic theories of quantum mechanics. Of course, this fact-filled White Paper also provides a clear pointer to Beijing’s determination to emerge as a truly global spacefaring nation at par with the USA. In addition, the White Paper reveals that China’s three-man crew space station will become operational by 2020 when the 17-nations ISS will go into oblivion. Going ahead, the White Paper lays stress on “exploration and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes” and space cooperation in the Asia Pacific region. It says: “The Chinese Government holds that each and every country in the world enjoys equal rights to freely explore, develop, utilize outer space and its celestial bodies”.⁴

But then, China seems to be blowing hot and cold in so far as its stand on the peaceful uses of outer space is concerned. For while strongly espousing the need for an international treaty banning the weaponisation of outer space, China nonchalantly continues with the plans to master anti-satellite techniques to help it remain prepared for the possibility of a space war. As such, the Chinese space venture is considered far from transparent.

The Space Route to Superpower Status

The political leadership and military setup of China views its rapid space forays as a springboard to showcase its technological and economic prowess, further its military and strategic goals, strengthen its diplomatic and political clout and expand its business interests by offering assistance to the Third World countries keen on entering the space age. Further, in the long run, the well conceived and systematically implemented Chinese space activities are also designed to replace the USA as the global space supremo and use the vantage position in outer space to challenge the US military might⁵. China is also keen to project its soft power and diplomatic clout by making available space services—by way of building custom made satellites followed by their in-orbit delivery—on reasonable terms to the developing countries. According to Morris Jones, an Australian expert on global space issues, “if it (China) wants to be a super power class nation, then developing a very strong space programme is one way it can project that image both internally and externally to the outside world”.⁶

And for the Chinese defence forces, a range of satellites built and put into operation by Beijing for the purposes such as surveillance and reconnaissance, navigation, communications and broadcasting as well as weather watch and ocean monitoring, serve as a “force multiplier” by acting as “eyes” and “ears” in space on a round-the-clock basis. In fact, the satellite resources would prove to be valuable assets in the strategy of network-centric warfare envisaged by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Indeed, China has observed with a great deal of interest as to how the US-led allied forces made use of “space birds” to meet the strategic goals during the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Momentum towards a Space Station

Today, China happens to be the only space power to sustain human space exploration with both USA and Russia showing a clear disinterest in this crucial area of space research. The orbital complex that China is planning to put in place by 2020 would make this dragon country the only power to have a permanent presence in outer space. According to Ming Li of the China Academy of Space Technology, China eventually plans to build a Soviet-era Mir-class multimodule space station

weighing around 80 tonnes as a follow up to its first orbital station. Though the first Chinese orbital complex weighing around 60 tonnes will be much smaller than the ISS and Mir, it would provide China with the necessary level of expertise to place in orbit larger space stations with a longer life span.⁷ Indeed, an autonomous orbital complex, besides helping China further its space science research, can bolster its space war efforts by serving as a strategic outpost in outer space. It is now a part of history that China was not allowed to participate in the ISS, mainly following objections by the US which was not receptive to the idea of Chinese participation on account of the political differences and military edge of the Chinese space programme.

As it is, the Shenzhou-9 mission carried out in June 2012 had clearly demonstrated China's prowess in direct docking and undocking. This manned space mission spread over thirteen days, reinforced China's claim to being an emerging global space power. Incidentally, the Shenzou-9 crew hooked up with Tiangong-I for nearly ten hours. According to space experts, the high point of the Shenzhou-9 mission was the successful accomplishment of China's first-ever manual docking. According to Dean Cheng, a research fellow at the Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Centre in Washington DC, "the most important point is that developing docking techniques and technology, which, in turn, means precision controls for thrusters and the like which has obvious military/anti satellite implications". Incidentally, the Tiangong-I launch came within a couple of months of the phasing out of the US space shuttle programme. "This is a powerful signal that China is ascendant and the US is descendent", says Chang.⁸ Indeed, after the US Space Shuttle Atlantis made its final touchdown at the Kennedy Space Centre for the last time in July 2011, the US has been left without a manned space vehicle for the first time in five decades. As it is, the ISS is sustained by the Soviet-era Soyuz spaceship which regularly carries the crew and supplies to this orbital complex. "Over the past decade, China has arguably gone further, faster than any other space faring nation", says an analysis by the technology consulting firm Futron Corp. Incidentally, China has succeeded to a large extent in improving its launch and success rates. And during 2011, this Communist giant, for the first time, accomplished more space missions than the USA.⁹

China has also dropped clues about its plan to create the ground work towards landing a man on the moon—a feat so far only achieved by USA most recently in 1972. However, China has not given any timeframe for such a space spectacular. China has also hinted at exploring the Red Planet, Mars. According to Chinese media reports, the country spent around US\$ 6.1 billion on its manned space programme since it began two decades ago. The successful accomplishment of China's first manned mission in 2003 was followed by the second human flight in 2005 along with "space walk" performed in 2008. These three missions paved the way for putting in place the Tiangong-I orbital module aimed at carrying out a range of experiments. And in November 2011, China accomplished its first unmanned space docking when the Shenzhou-8 capsule coupled with the Tiangong-I by remote control. But all said and done, the construction of its orbiting space complex by 2020 will only bring the Chinese space programme at the same level as that of the USA and the erstwhile Soviet Union in the 1970s.

According to Chinese space officials, the first flight of Long March-5 capable of placing a 25-tonne class payload into the near-earth orbit was planned in 2014. It was China's most powerful rocket yet. Beyond the Long March-5, China has plans to develop far more heavier class Long March-6 and 7 vehicles¹⁰ As pointed out by Gerry Webb of Commercial Space Technologies, "the Long March heavy lift vehicle would give China new capabilities to build larger spacecraft or space stations". He also believes that this new generation space vehicle would invest China with a vastly enhanced capability for deep space and military space missions.

"I believe that we can achieve the goal of realizing a space station by 2020, because we already have the basic technological capability", says Zhou Jianping, chief designer of China's manned space engineering project. As pointed out by Joan Johnson Freese, an expert on the Chinese space programme at the US Naval War College in Rhodes Island, "the Shenzhou-9 mission demonstrated China's commitment to the long term human space flight and marked a test of the technological capabilities required for a future permanent space station". Observers drive home the point that it was the refusal to accommodate China in the ISS project that nudged this Communist

giant to develop home-grown capabilities in various types of technologies required to build and operate a space station. And, the space analysts in US believe that the USA could indeed slip behind China if the US space programme is not supported with a greater level of funding and a heightened commitment to sustain the US's lead position in space with a particular focus on manned missions. "China is in space for long haul. The US ignoring that and refusing to work with China will neither stop them nor slow them down", says Freese.¹¹

Closing Gaps with the USA and Russia

Meanwhile, the perception in the US is that China is making vigorous efforts to close its gaps with Russia and USA, the two space front runners. Building of an orbital complex is one of the objectives to realise this ambition. Other areas of focus envisaged to sustain and take forward China's leadership position in space are: a sample return mission to the moon and a lunar landing mission, boosting the launch capability and development of a global navigation satellite network to rival the American GPS system and pushing forward with the exploration of planets, asteroids and sun.

The Chinese space programme suffered a minor setback when its Mars probe Yinghuo-1 came a cropper as it formed a part of the doomed Russian Phobos Grunt mission launched in 2011. Undeterred, China says it would go ahead with its lunar and planetary exploration missions. The moon has remained a major focus of the Chinese space programme. Chang'e-1, the first Chinese lunar orbiter, was launched in 2007. This was followed by the Change'e-2 launch in 2010. Meanwhile, China prepared for the launch of its robotic mission designed to explore the lunar surface.¹² However, the launch of India's Chandrayaan-II probe, with somewhat similar features as the Chinese robotic lunar mission, that was originally envisaged for 2014, stands postponed on account of the delay in getting the Russian original lander for the mission. It is now reportedly slated for launch in 2018 by the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F05) Mark II.

Space for Militaristic Advantages

As it is, China's human space flight programme reveals a steady and systematic endeavour with a strong political support and robust

funding to develop newer technologies with a focus on sustaining its advances in exploration of the final frontiers. In contrast to the US, where space activities are diffused and distributed across several, separate entities, the Chinese space programme is well coordinated and highly focused under the overall supervision of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with strong militaristic ambitions. Not long ago, the chief of the Air Force wing of the PLA had said that a military race in space is inevitable, thereby underpinning China's growing interest in building space war capabilities. In fact, a most recent 92-page Pentagon report on China's defence capabilities says, "China is developing a multi-dimensional programme to improve its capabilities to limit or prevent the use of space based assets during the times of crisis or conflict".¹³

China continues to down play the possible strategic and militaristic advantages it could derive from its manned space programme. China's manned programme has never been for military purposes, is the refrain of the ruling elite in Beijing. As pointed out by Ashley Tellis, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, China sees space as a vital platform to effectively use its armed forces against its adversaries. In the ultimate analysis, space stands out as a centrepiece of China's long term geostrategic ambitions. Defence experts believe that China's increasing number of satellites help the PLA in improving the tracking and targeting systems for its missiles.

In a development of strategic significance to its manned mission, China has announced that it has plans to grow fresh vegetables in extra-terrestrial bases on the Moon or Mars in the future with a view to provide food and oxygen supplies to its astronauts. Of course, China has hinted at setting up bases on the Moon and Mars as and when technological advances become robust enough to realise this ambition. Deng Yibing, Deputy Director of the Beijing-based Chinese Astronaut Research and Training Centre, said that the recent experiment focused on a dynamic balanced mechanism of oxygen, carbon dioxide and water between people and plants in a closed system. The experiment, the first of its kind in China, is extremely important for the long term development of the country's manned space programme, Deng added.

China Ahead of India

While the Chinese manned space exploration programme is gathering momentum, the Indian Government is yet to give its final go-ahead for India's manned space flight mission which was proposed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) more than five years ago. However, now with the priority of the ISRO shifting to the Mars probe, the human space flight mission has taken a back seat. Indeed, sometime back, the ISRO Chairman K. Radhakrishnan told media persons in Bangalore that India will not undertake a human space flight before 2017. The failure to get the budgetary approval for this nationally important space project along with the challenges ahead of the ISRO in terms of developing and qualifying a man-rated high performance cryogenic fuel-driven launch vehicle have conspired to put the Indian human flight programme on the backburner. Indeed, the Indian Government seems to be totally unaware of the importance of an Indian manned flight programme and the benefits and advantages it could bring to the country on a variety of fronts. Significantly, the historic 1969 US human landing mission to the moon not only electrified the nation by giving a big thrust to its psyche but also helped boost the prospects of science, technology and industry.¹⁴

The Achilles heel of the Indian space programme is that it has to make do with a single operational launch vehicle in the form of the four-stage space workhorse PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle), the most powerful version of which can deliver an 1850-kg payload into a polar/sun-synchronous orbit. All said and done, the ISRO is yet to operationalise the country's first cryogenic fuel-driven carrier rocket, the three-stage Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV). The hitches in the home-grown upper cryogenic engine stage of this vehicle have resulted in an inordinate delay in operationalising the GSLV. The ISRO can hope to develop more powerful launch vehicles only after the GSLV is put to the regular operational use.

In contrast, China has a range of vehicles under the Long March family that could be deployed to launch satellites of different weight class into a variety of orbital slots. Unlike China, which already boasts of three landlocked launch centres with the fourth ultra-modern coastal launch complex at Wenchang in Hainan Island, India has only a solitary space port, Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota island on India's

eastern coast. Meanwhile, the ISRO is looking at the possibility of building a second launch complex, for a second/alternative launch centre could lend a strategic edge to the country's space programme in addition to helping it expand its presence in the global market for launching commercial satellites.

The strategic location of the well-equipped Chinese launch complex in Hainan Island, surrounded by sea in three directions, could help this Asian Communist giant step up the frequency of space missions and attract more customers to the Chinese space launch service. As it is, this launch complex fits well within the Chinese strategy of cornering a 15 per cent share of the global market for launching satellites. It will handle as many as 12 space missions a year. This launch complex will be primarily used for launching heavier class communications satellites. Further, it would fully support the lunar sample return mission in 2017 and the construction of the space station in 2020. Interestingly, the Hainan Island's proximity to the equator gives the new launch centre distinct advantage over the existing three landlocked launch centres. Additionally, as the new launch centre faces the sea on three sides, there is no danger of debris of the exhausted stages of the space vehicle hitting thickly populated areas. However the Jiuquan launch centre will continue to be the nerve centre for manned missions.¹⁵

All said and done, right from the outset, the Chinese space venture has enjoyed many clear-cut advantages over the Indian space programme. To begin with, during its formative days, it was guided by Hsue Shen Tein, a US-trained aerospace engineer with a sound background in rocketry and missile systems. On the top of this, the Russians made available vital elements of missile technology to China which was imaginatively exploited by the Chinese space scientists to build civilian launch vehicles. A strategic missile and a civilian launch vehicle have many common technological elements including electronics, materials, control and guidance package and propulsion. And with the Chinese military setup being closely associated with the space activities, the expertise available with various institutions under the PLA were utilised to support the Chinese space enterprise to the hilt.

On the other hand, India's peace oriented, civilian space programme had to start virtually from scratch without any outside assistance.

Moreover, it did not get the kind of funding and autonomy that was available to the Chinese space programme. Being a fully civilian venture operating in a democratic setup, the Indian space programme is subject to parliamentary scrutiny and public criticism. On the other hand, the far-from-transparent Chinese space programme with its pronounced militaristic ambitions is free to pursue its goals without being subject to either public scrutiny or budgetary constraints.

Expanding Frontiers of Commercial Space

Indeed, China's impressive forays into space provides it with a platform to expand its soft power in the Third World by making available its knowhow and expertise for building and launching satellites on reasonable terms. China has already built and launched satellites for Pakistan, Nigeria and Venezuela in addition to providing launch support to the Indonesian domestic spacecraft Palapa. The China Great Wall Industries Corporation (CGWIC) set up in 1980 as the commercial arm of the Chinese space enterprise to provide commercial space services to worldwide customers, has also signed satellite and ground systems export contracts with Bolivia and Laos. In 2012, the CGWIC signed an agreement with the Colombo-based 'SupremeSAT', the Sri Lankan satellite technology enterprise, for building and launching a satellite. An official of the SupremeSAT was quoted by the Chinese *Xinhua* news agency as saying, "by 2015, we hope for the launch of our own satellite which will be Sri Lanka's first". Meanwhile, the Supremesat-1 satellite built by the West European aerospace enterprise Thales Alenia, was launched by means of a Chinese Long March rocket in November 2012. Supemesat-1 is considered as Sri Lanka's first co-branded satellite. As it is, SupremeSAT in a joint venture with China Satellite Communications Company will operate the satellite.¹⁶

The relationship that China has forged with Sri Lanka in the strategic area of space cannot but be a matter of concern for India. For Sri Lanka already forms a link in China's 'String of Pearls' policy meant to encircle India. China, which provides economic, military and technical assistance to Sri Lanka through its investment in the Hambantota port has gained a toehold in the Indian Ocean region close to India. Antrix Corp, the Bangalore-based commercial arm of the Indian space programme, is yet to build and launch a satellite under

a package deal for a Third World country. For undertaking the launch of commercial class communications satellites, India would need to qualify and operationalise its three-stage cryogenic fuel-driven GSLV.

Thrust on Space Industrialisation

China has also hinted at the setting up of a base on the lunar surface as part of its long term vision of staying ahead in the “space industrialization race”. One of the key objectives of the proposed Chinese lunar base would be the extraction of Helium-3, considered a clear and abundant source of energy and its transportation back to the earth. To realise this challenging mission, China has started concentrating on developing rockets capable of generating a massive thrust. ‘The lunar probe is the starting point for the deep space exploration. “We first need to do a good job of exploring the moon and work out the rocket transportation technology that can be used for planetary exploration”, says a leading Chinese space scientist. And eventually, Beijing looks at its multi-billion dollar space programme as a symbol of its rising global stature, growing technical expertise and the Communist Party’s success in turning around the fortunes of the once poverty-stricken nation.

Another high-profile space project from which China can draw tremendous strategic and economic advantages happens to be its home grown ‘Beidou’ space navigation system designed to provide a global coverage with a constellation of 35 satellites by 2020. China wants to position the Beidou system as a serious competitor to the GPS, the American satellite navigation system by boosting its capability in a phased manner. The navigation capability of Beidou could also act as a force multiplier for the Chinese defence forces. In particular, the Beidou capability could come in handy for delivering long range missiles with a high degree of precision and accuracy to the pre-determined targets. China is fully well aware that the GPS is one of the key elements for the successful implementation of net-centric battlefield strategy. Pakistan is among the countries which are tipped to make use of the commercial potentials of Beidou. China has left none in doubt that it would commercially promote the capabilities of Beidou across the world.¹⁷

Challenging USA in Space Defence

There is no denying the fact that the Chinese space strides have serious implications for American strategic interests and defence agenda. For a fact-filled study brought out by Project 2049 Institute, a research group on Asia Pacific security issues, says that China's growing capabilities in space could undercut any US military response in the event of Beijing deciding to take over Taiwan into its fold by force. China has claimed Taiwan as its own since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949 and has repeatedly vowed to bring the island under its control, if required, by forceful means. Giving details, the study says that China's growing push in military space projects "may complicate US freedom of action in the Asia Pacific region". For instance, Beijing can deploy its satellite eyes in the sky to track US aircraft carriers and target them with anti-ship ballistic missiles. Incidentally, the PLA is all set to substantially improve its ability to monitor events in the Asia Pacific region through a rapidly expanding network of space-based remote sensing, communications and navigation satellites. Such space assets could help China threaten an expanding number of targets throughout the Western Pacific, the South China Sea and elsewhere around its periphery, says the study by the Project 2049 Institute.

Similarly, a well-documented national security report on revising US export controls on satellites by the US State Department and Department of Defense (DOD) reflects the concern that the rapidly expanding Chinese space capabilities could hurt the long term national security and geostrategic interests of the US. "China's modernized military and especially its space related capabilities could be put to use in ways that increase China's ability to gain diplomatic advantages for resolving dispute in its favour and possibly against the US national interests", says the report.

On the other hand, researchers at the Washington-based World Security Institute drive home the point that "starting from almost no live surveillance capability ten years ago, today China's PLA has equaled the US ability to observe targets from space for real time operations". The dominant view in Washington is that the PLA has built up capabilities aimed not only at Taiwan but also to deter, delay or outrightly deny, possible US or allied intervention in any cross-strait conflict.¹⁸

Preparing for Space War

The US think tanks believe China is also active in preparing the ground for space war by engineering and testing anti-satellite systems and building weapons based on laser beams and directed energy devices for use in space. The perception in the US political and strategic circles is that China's anti-satellite programme has significant implications for anti-access/area-denial efforts against the US in Taiwan Strait contingencies.

Providing a clear pointer to the Chinese plan to use the "high grounds" of final frontiers to further its "military interests", China in early 2007, successfully accomplished an anti-satellite test. The Chinese anti-satellite test, which involved the destruction of an ageing weather watch satellite in the middle earth orbit by means of a ground-based ballistic missile, sent shock waves throughout the world. But then, one cannot brand China as the original sinner in so far as the endeavours to turn outer space into the battlefield of the future is concerned. For the former Soviet Union gave rise to the spectre of space war by carrying out what has been described as bizarre, "hunter killer satellite tests" in 1960s. In these tests, a target satellite would be chased and destroyed by a so-called killer satellite. In those days of Cold War between the two superpowers, it was but natural for the USA to respond with redoubled vigour to expand the scope and sweep of the "space war".

Indeed, the tremors of the Chinese anti-satellite tests were also felt in India in the context of the security of Indian space assets. And naturally, there was a strident clamour in the country for ensuring the security of the space assets by putting in place killer satellites to take care of rogue satellites. There was also a clamour to speed up the process of setting up a tri-service Indian aerospace command that would serve as the focus of Indian space war efforts. In fact, while addressing the United Commanders Conference in New Delhi in mid-2008, the then Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony had pointed out to the threat faced by the "Indian space assets" from the developments in the neighbouring country. Antony was clear in his perception that India was very much concerned about the emergence of "anti satellite weaponry, a new class of heavy lift off boosters and an improved array of military space devices in our neighbourhood". Rightly, he wondered as to how long India can "remain committed to the policy of non

weaponisation of outer space even as offensive counter space systems are emerging in our neighbourhood".¹⁹

Meanwhile, a section of the Western space defence experts believe that the so-called space exploration rocket firing carried out by China some time back was a camouflage for the test aimed at expanding the scope of its anti-satellite capability. As it is, the missile fired from the Xichang launch centre has been identified as Dong Ning-2 anti-satellite system. However, in this test there was no target satellite. There are also reports to suggest that China is preparing the ground for yet another full-fledged anti-satellite test. However, the details of the test are not known.

Conclusion

By any means, India cannot afford to remain complacent over the Chinese advances in developing space war capabilities. The possibility of India, which fought a bitter war with China in 1962 in the Himalayan heights, once again confronting this Asian giant in the celestial heights cannot be ruled out. As such, strategic experts stress the need for the political dispensation in New Delhi to give a green signal to an Indian space security plan with both defensive and offensive components. Of course, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has already made it clear that it has a technological base resurgent enough to realise the various components of space war including anti-satellite devices.

Will the Chinese advances in space, which would be a major contributor to its military build-up, pose a threat to the world peace in the years ahead, and would it depend upon how its political leadership shapes the course of its space exploration in the future with particular reference to preventing the weaponisation of the final frontiers? But for now, China is keen to not only position itself as a global military power drawing heavily from its space strides but also to challenge the American strategic supremacy across the world. And, this quest lays the seeds of the Chinese space war efforts.²⁰

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11

China's Geography: A Boon or Bane?

Ashish Sirsikar

The Factor of Geography

Well before China arose, its inherent geographical potential had been studied and commented upon by many. However, the true potential of Chinese geography was recognised by the English geographer Sir HJ Mackinder in his famous 1904 article, 'The Geographical Pivot of History'¹ in which he posited that the Chinese, should they expand their power well beyond their borders, "might constitute the yellow peril to the world's freedom just because they would add an oceanic frontage to the resources of the great continent, an advantage as yet denied to the Russian tenant of the pivot region". Mackinder's assertion was based on the indisputable premise that, whereas Russia, basically was and still is a land power with an oceanic front blocked by ice, China owing to its large temperate coastline was both a land power and sea power. Subsequently, Mackinder in his widely read and acclaimed piece 'Democratic Ideals and Reality' had predicted that, along with the United States and the United Kingdom, China would eventually guide the world by 'building for a quarter of humanity a new civilization, neither quite Eastern nor quite western'². A century on, some feel that Mackinder's prophetic pronouncements are turning into a reality and China's geography is its greatest boon.

However, there are others who feel that China's geography has resulted in China suffering from external aggression. These commentaries find their basis on account of China suffering a 'Century of Humiliation' which came across the oceans as well as the fact that, earlier, the Mongols invaded China over the land frontiers.

By the turn of this Century though, China's rise was clearly evident to all and subsequently, over the next decade and a half seen to be assuming aggressive contours. As a consequence, the jury was out again contesting whether, China's geography in any way contributed to its rise or present behaviour. Connected to this, one can't help but recall what Napoleon had famously said, "The policies of such states are inherent in their geography". It would be thus worth its while to study and analyse the ways in which China's geography could shape its future policies.

China's Interaction with the World

Contemporary analysts have viewed China as "Island".³ Such an assertion is not made on account of it being surrounded by water (which borders only its eastern flank) but on account of it being bordered on the other three sides by terrain that is difficult to traverse in virtually every direction starting from North Korea in the North-East to Vietnam in the South-East. To develop a better understanding of China's predicament, let us first develop an understanding of China's external periphery and topography. A study of China's external periphery can be undertaken along the four cardinal directions as described Map 1.

North

In the North, China has a long Northern border with Mongolia and then Russia running right up to the Pacific. This region is sparsely populated and difficult to traverse. Moreover, this vast area is underdeveloped and devoid of any major communication links. The only exception being the Russia region bordering the Pacific, namely, the area from Russia's Vladivostok to Blagoveshchensk. This region has reasonable transport, population and communication links to both sides.

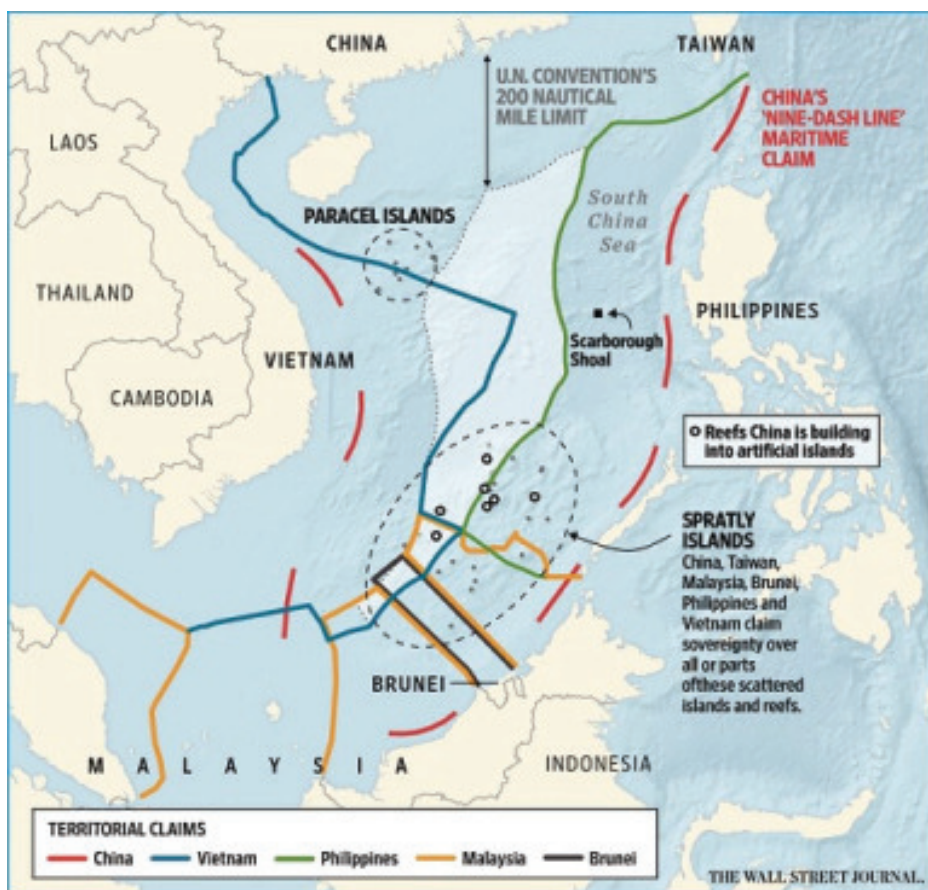


Map 2: First and Second Island Chains

East

To the East is the Pacific coast, which has numerous harbours and has historically had substantial coastal trade. China is bordered by seas and waters eastward (Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea) and has a 9000 mile temperate coastline. Prior to the 19th century, China had not suffered any naval threat and hence had little interest on building a navy. However, over the last two centuries, major incursions into China have been through this very coast viz. by the Japanese and the British. Historically, despite having a long coastline, China has never been a maritime power. But, with the increasing integration of Chinese economy with that of the World, China has laid greater emphasis on the development of its coastal regions. Apart from this it

has also been slowly but steadily building up its capability to exert influence beyond its coastal regions. The same is evident from its desire to project power beyond and control the first and second islands chains. The First Island Chain being the line through the Kurile Islands, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Borneo to Natuna Besar), while the second island chain runs along a north-south line from the Kuriles through Japan, the Bonins, the Marianas, the Carolines and Indonesia.



Map 3: China's Nine Dash Line⁴

China's desire to control the first and second island chains stems on account of it being boxed in by these island chains. Attempts at breaking this stranglehold would involve China attempting to wrest control of the "Asiatic Mediterranean". The famous Yale University

professor Nicholas Spykman described the Asiatic Mediterranean as “an insular world par excellence” which is composed of marginal seas such as the Sea of Japan, the East China Sea, and the South China Sea.⁵ China’s attempts at wresting control of the Asiatic Mediterranean would manifest itself in the following ways:-

Reunification of Taiwan. Besides the call of history, “national reunification” of Taiwan makes greater sense on account of its geography. A look at the above figure will show why Taiwan was called an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” midway up China’s seaboard by U.S. General Douglas MacArthur. Access to it without doubt allows China to break free from the first island chain.

Domination of the East China Sea. China’s dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu Island and declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over portion of the East China Sea are attempts at dominating the East China Sea.

Claim and Control over the South China Sea. China’s claim to most of the South China Sea on account of its hugely contentious nine dash line which is shown in the figure below is well known. If China were to be able to control the South China Sea, besides negating the first island chain it would also be able to dominate what most analysts refer to as the “second Persian Gulf”. This desire stems from what Nicholas Spykman calls the “circumferential and transmarine expansion” which leads states to gain control of adjacent seas. This as per him can be seen in Greece seeking control over the Aegean, Rome over the Mediterranean, the United States over the Caribbean - and now China over the South China Sea.⁶

South

In the South, the border with Vietnam is the only border readily traversable by large armies or capable of being utilised for mass commerce. The rest of the southern border where Yunnan province meets Laos and Myanmar is hilly jungle, difficult to traverse, with almost no major roads. Significant movement across this border is almost impossible. *Hkakabo Razi*, almost 19,000 feet high, marks the border between China Myanmar and India. At this point, China’s Southwestern frontier, anchored in the Himalayas, begins. More precisely, it is where Tibet borders India and the two Himalayan states,

Nepal and Bhutan. This border runs in a long arc past Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kirgizstan, ending at *Pik Pobedy*, a 25,000 feet mountain marking the border with China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. It is possible to pass through this border region with difficulty; historically, parts of it have been accessible as a merchant route. On the whole however, the Himalayas are a formidable barrier to substantial trade and mass movements from North to South and vice versa.

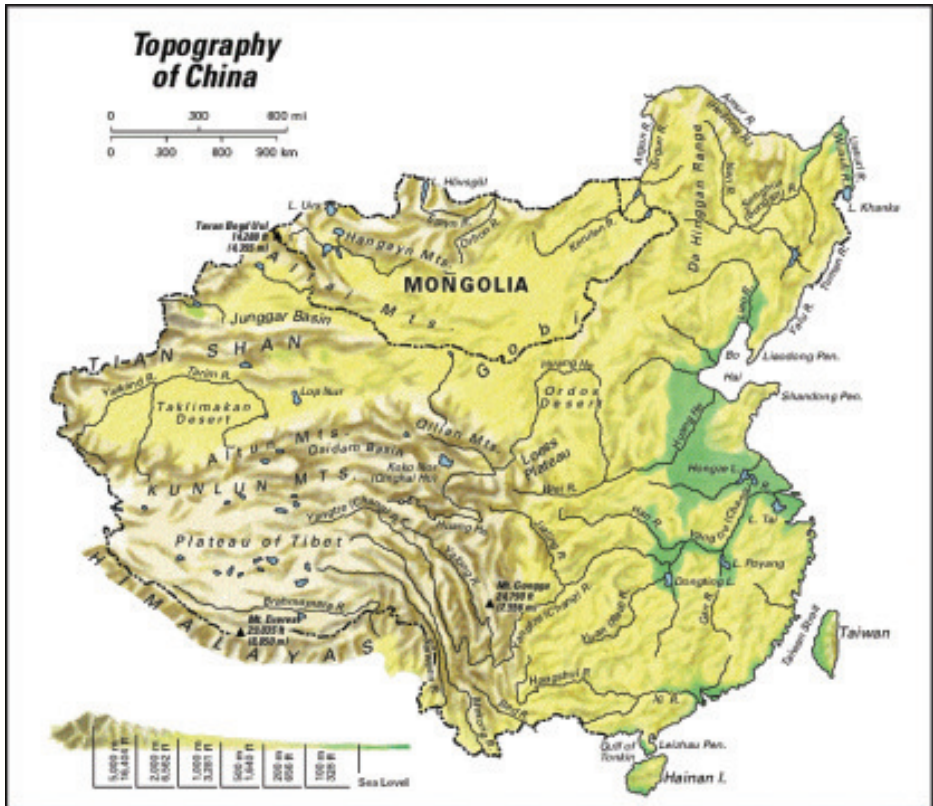
West

The one open passable corridor along the western border of China is with Kazakhstan. This area is passable but has relatively little communication routes as of now. This corridor is being developed as a main route between China and the rest of Eurasia. The only problem is distance. The border with Kazakhstan is almost thousand miles from the first tier of Han Chinese provinces, and the route passes through sparsely populated Muslim territory of Xinjiang, a region that has posed significant challenges to China. Historically, the Silk Road from China ran through Xinjiang and Kazakhstan on its way west integrating the trading communities of Europe and Far East⁷.

What though is most pertinent to note is that, barring India and Bhutan, China has settled its territorial borders with all its other neighbours, sometimes even at a disadvantage to itself. This gives China the ability to concentrate on its maritime domain. At the same time though, if one ignores China's maritime borders, China's interaction with the world is limited to a few areas only. As a result, despite containing a fifth of the world's population, China can either wall itself off from the rest of the world (as it did prior to its economic boom) or conversely is forced to reach out to the world across these limited access areas (as it is attempting now). However, this notwithstanding, China's geographical position gives it a distinct advantage. Sitting atop the age old trade route, it enjoys a unique position of connecting energy rich CAR to the Pacific Ocean. Geography provides China the unique opportunity of becoming both a continental and maritime power

China's Physical Topography

China stretches some 5,026 kilometres (3,123 miles) across the East Asian landmass. Its landscape is diverse with snow-capped mountains and deep river valleys, broad basins and high plateaus, rolling plains interspersed with terraced hills, sandy dunes and low-latitude glaciers and other landforms present in myriad variations.



Map 4: Topography of China

In general, the land is high in the west and descends to the east coast. Mountains (33%) plateaus (26%) and hills (10%) accounts for nearly 70% of the country's land surface. Most of the country's arable and population are based in lowland plains (12%) and basins (19%) though some of the greatest basins are filled with deserts. The country's rugged terrain presents problems for the construction of overland transportation infrastructure and requires extensive terracing to sustain

agriculture but is conducive to the development of forestry, mineral and hydropower resources and tourism.

Traditionally, the Chinese population centred on the Chinese central plain and oriented itself toward its own enormous inland market, developing as an imperial power whose centre laid in the middle and lower reaches of the yellow River on the northern plains. More recently, the long coastline have been used extensively for export-oriented trade, making a power shift, with the coastline provinces becoming the leading economic centre.⁸

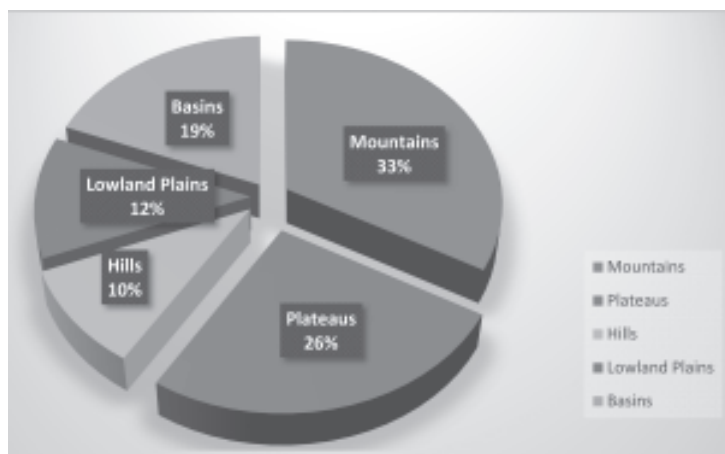


Chart 1: Breakup of China's Terrain

Major Physical Macro Regions

The physical topography of China can be divided into three physical macro-regions namely, South-Western (SW) region (Tibetan highlands), North-Western (NW) region (Xinjiang – Inner Mongolia) and Eastern China (subdivided into the North-Eastern plain, North plain, and Southern plain).

SW Region

Located in TAR & Qinghai region, it has an average height between 13000 to 16000 feet and popularly known as the 'roof of the world'. Consists mainly of cold lofty areas with plateaus and inland lakes. This vast inhospitable and thinly populated area can further be divided into two main regions:

Yunnan – Guizhou Plateau. Consists of mountains ranging from 10000-13000 feet, and lies in the Northern part of Yunnan and western part of Guizhou provinces. This area is characterized by deep valleys of limestone and underground rivers.



Map 5: China's Topographical Regions

Tibetan Plateau. Occupies Quarter of Chinese mainland with the heights varying from 13000 to 16000 feet. To the North of this rugged terrain lies Kunlun mountain ranges and to the South 'The Mighty Himalayas'. This plateau is origin of many great rivers including Yangtze, Brahmaputra, Salween, Indus, Hwang He, Irrawaddy and Mekong. Gravel, salt sakes, sandy and salt deserts and salt wastes dominate this area.

NW Region

Including Tian Shan and Kun Lun mountain ranges with heights ranging from 3000 to 6000 feet it is also intermingled with basins including Mongolian Plateau, Tarim Basin and Loess Basin. This area of China is mainly arid, eroded by winds and forms inland drainage basin. Some of the features of this area are as follows:-

Tarim Basin. Between great Kunlun ranges (also known as the Pamirs of the west) to the South and Tien Shan (celestial mountains) to the North lies Tarim Basin with the average elevation of about 3000 feet. A number of rivers rise from these mountain ranges and loose themselves in the Taklimakan desert, one of the world's most barren deserts, situated in this basin. Lop Nor, the Chinese Nuclear blast sites lie in this area.

Dzungarian Basin. To the North of Tien Shan mountains lies the Dzungarian Basin. It consists of plain deserts with elevation of about 1500 feet sloping to the South-West. Most parts of this basin are covered with Barchans i.e. crescent shaped moving sand dunes.

Tien Shan Mountains. This massive mountain range forms the North-West boundary of China with Kazakhstan. With an average height of 13000 to 15000 feet, the western most part is covered with glaciers and is source of river systems with vast drainage area. Lower slopes are characterised by large alpine meadows and some of China's best grazing grounds.



Map 6: Schematic Representation of Mountains and Deserts in China⁹

Eastern Region

Consisting of the region East of Taihang mountain ranges and Yunnan-Sichuan plateau right up to sea. This region is shaped by three main rivers i.e. Hwang He (Yellow River), Yangtze River and Pearl/Xia River.



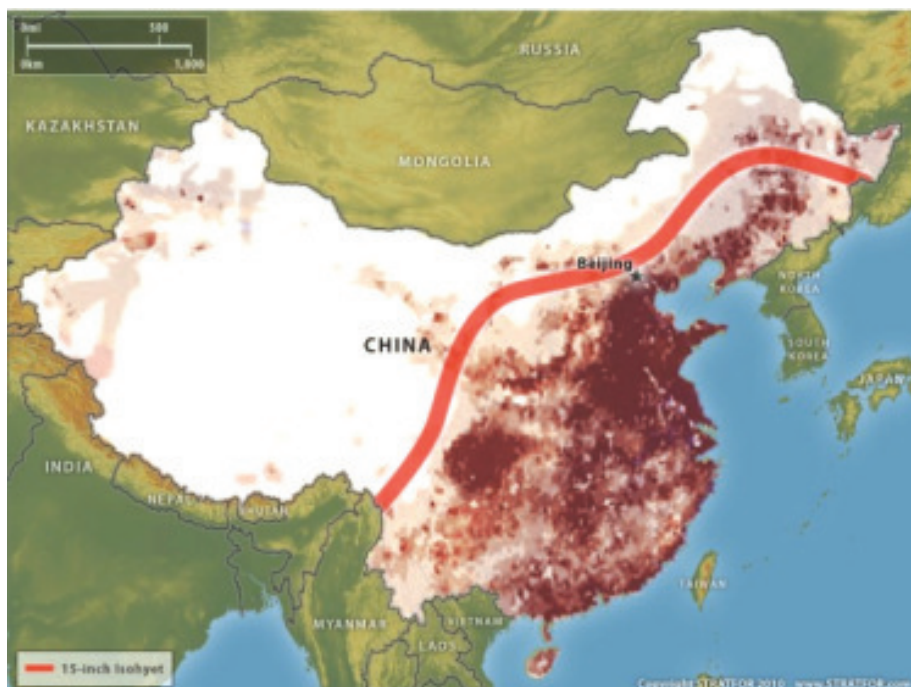
Map 7: Schematic Representation of Major Rivers in China¹⁰

The Rivers have eroded landforms in some parts and deposited rich alluvial soil in others. This is the area where along the Yellow and Yangtze River systems the Chinese civilizations flourished and prospered; this is also the area which has been traditionally the seat of power for most of the Chinese dynasties; and this is the area which is today the most developed in China. Topographically, it can further be divided into two parts, Northern and Southern, which in turn are represented by two main dialects, Mandarin in the North and Cantonese in the South. These dialects share a writing system but are

almost mutually incomprehensible when spoken. This region is also China's agricultural region. However – and this is the single most important fact about China – it has about one-third the arable land per person as compared to the rest of the world¹¹. This aspect will be discussed further later.

China's Internal Divisions

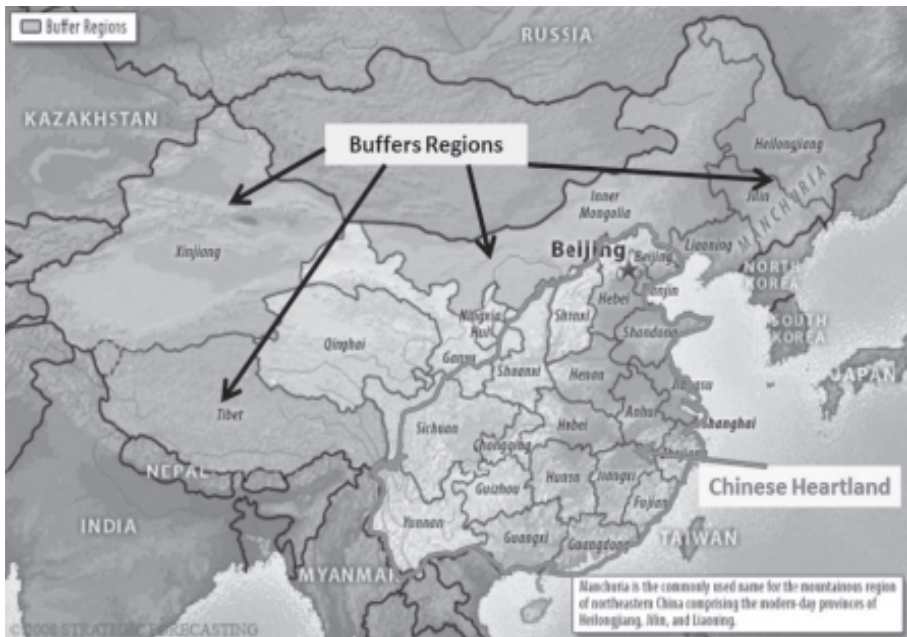
Internally, China can be divided into two parts by a line called the “15 inch isohyets”. The 15 inch isohyets line runs roughly from Heihe in Heilongjiang in the North to Tengchong County, Yunnan in the South. While areas east of this line receive more than 15 inches of rainfall every year, areas to the west receive much lesser rainfall. Thus, China is a country with immense geographic divisions between its fertile eastern lowlands and the arid, sparsely populated highlands to its west.



Map 8: 15 inch Isohyets and China Population Density (Source Stratfor)¹²

The bulk of what the world regards as ‘The Chinese’ are the ethnic Hans who live east and south of this line. Thus this area is known as ‘Han China’ and is also regarded as “The Chinese heartland”. It is

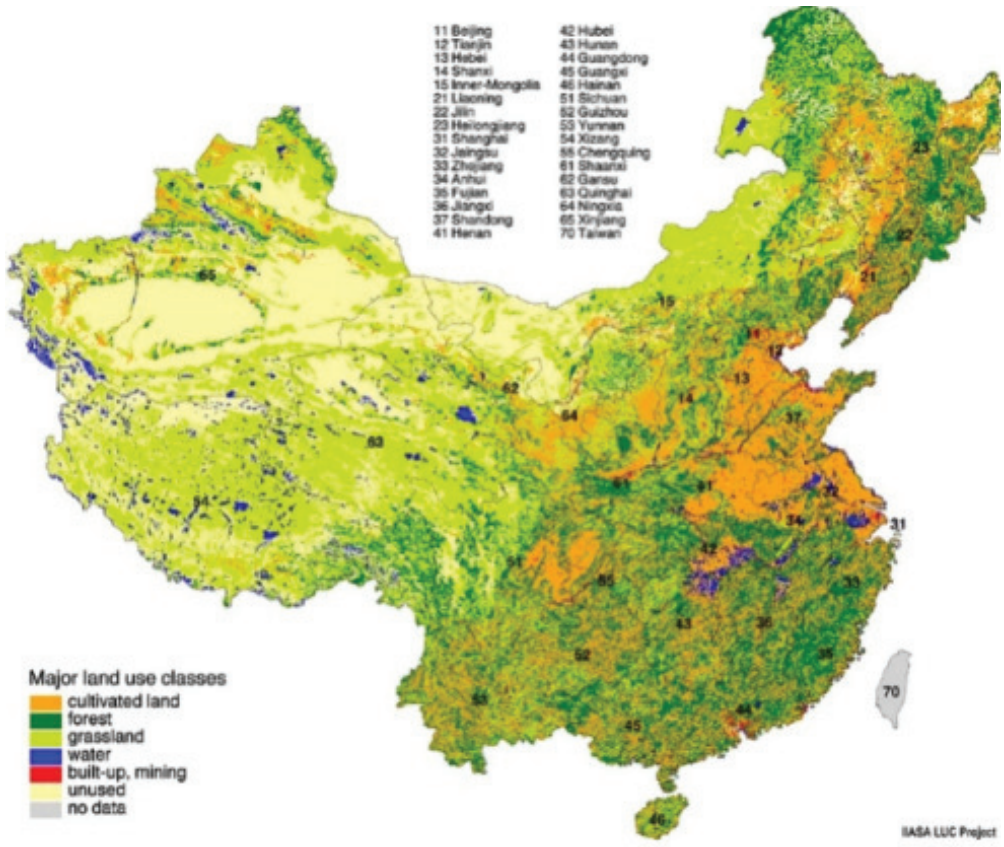
believed that over a billion people live in an area about half the size of the United States¹³. To ensure safety of the heartland, over the years, the boundaries of the heartland were pushed outwards so as to integrate regions lying on the periphery which were at a distance from the heartland and suffered from poor connectivity. These regions thus provided a buffer to the heartland from any threat emanating over the continental dimensions. Thus, areas further to the west of the 15 inches isohyets line are known as the “Buffer Regions” as they enclose the heartland like a shell and provide a buffer against any aggression. It can thus be seen that, on account of its geography and history, China is split into two fundamental parts “The Chinese Heartland” and the “Buffer regions” surrounding it. While the Chinese heartland comprises of provinces along the eastern coast and those slightly to the east of the coast, the four provinces of Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria are the buffers which provide the protection to this heartland.



Map 9: China's Heartland and Buffer Regions

Fourth Largest Country with Limited Arable Land

It is a well-known fact that China is the most populous nation in the world. Such a huge population imposes substantial stress on the country's natural resources, including arable land. Although China ranks fourth in the world in terms of total arable land, the pressure of population on this precious available agricultural land is acute. China's arable land is primarily in the eastern region, the same area where a majority of china's vast population is concentrated. In addition to extensive areas of western China which are relatively uninhabited, substantial portions of southern China are unfavourable for agriculture because of mountainous topography.



Map 10: China's major land use classes¹⁴

As a consequence, only about 12% of China's land is arable which are and that too are prominently found in Eastern China. Thus, China feeds somewhat less than one-quarter (25%) of the world's population on approximately 7% of the world's arable land. Facing increasing difficulties to feed its growing population, China is turning to its "blue territories" and high seas for food. Chinese marine experts have advocated the country's food system to be more maritime based. Such a maritime based food security strategy aims at intensifying its fishery operations in its territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) as well as expanding them to its Distant Water Fishing (DWF) reach, to utilise the resources of the oceans. While this shift in China's food system contributes to its food security, it also has serious regional and global implications¹⁵. These effects are already evident in the East and South China seas where the China's search for maritime based food is one of the contributors to it aggressively seeking sovereignty rights in these disputed waters.

A Restless Thirsty Dragon

China's Water Crisis. China is struggling to stave off a serious water crisis by 2030. It is estimated that, with water consumption soaring, per capita water resources in China will drop to 1,760 cubic meters, perilously close to the 1,700 cubic metres which is an internationally recognized benchmark for water shortages. The gravity of the problem lies in the fact that, though China has adequate water resources, these are unevenly distributed with the northern parts being water deficient while the southern parts are water rich¹⁶.

As a consequence, China despite being the source country of the Yangtze, Mekong, Yarlung-Tsangpo, Indus, Irrawaddy, Sutlej and the Salween Rivers, has a tendency of exercising a fair degree of hydro-hegemony. On this account, Chinese statistics speak for themselves. Two thirds of China's 669 cities suffer from water shortage and over 300 million lack access to clean drinking water. This grim picture has been painted as "wherever there is a river, there is no water; wherever there is water, it is heavily polluted". Today, mining and processing of coal and electricity generation, which is concentrated up North, account for a fifth of the national water consumption. It is estimated that by 2020, China's growing dependence on coal for primary energy is will

grow by an additional billion metric tons annually thus representing a 30 per cent increase. This will create a significant geographical headache for the government as, while the coal reserves are concentrated in the dry northern provinces of Gansu, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, the water to develop them is in the south.

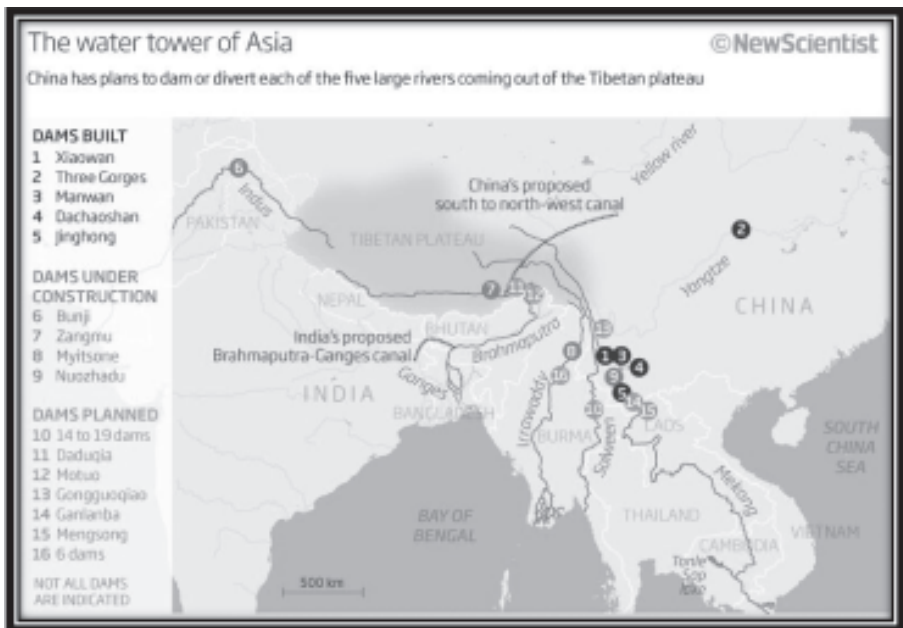
To overcome this looming water crisis, China has gone back to what Mao had said of overcoming China's water problems: "Since the South has a great deal of water, and the north very little, we should borrow some of it."¹⁷ China has thus embarked upon ambitious projects of damming Chinese rivers with the twin aims of producing Hydroelectricity and reducing the carbon foot print as well as diversion of water to its Northern water starved areas. One of the major projects amongst these is the South to North Water Transfer Project (SNWTP or nanshui beidiaogong cheng).



Map 11: China's South to North Water Transfer Project¹⁸

South-North Water Transfer Project (SNWTP). The \$62 billion South-North Water Transfer Project was launched in 2002 and is the largest water transfer system in the world. It has three routes Eastern, Central and Western. The Eastern Route diverts water from the lower reaches of the Yangtze River to the North, while the Central Route mainly serves the domestic and industrial water requirements of Beijing, Tianjin and cities in Hebei, Henan and Hubei provinces. The Western Route, which is in the construction stage, diverts water from the upper reach tributaries of the Yangtze River to the upper reach of the Yellow river. The whole project is envisioned to be completed in 2050 with a total diversion capacity of 45 billion m³ through the three routes.

China's Damming of other Asian Rivers. Although SNWTP will ease the imbalance between supply and demand of water resources in Northern China, even post its completion, water resources per capita will still be at the lowest level of about 300 m³/person. Thus, China is undertaking damming programmes on other Asian rivers that rise in Tibet, namely the Indus, Sutlej, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Salween, Irrawaddy and Yangtze. The Fig below shows some of the Chinese dams that have been built or are under construction/planning on some of the major rivers originating in Tibet.



Effects of some of the programmes that China has taken on Asian rivers are as follows²⁰:

- (a) China's dams on the Mekong River which flows through Yunnan province in China, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam and feeds an estimated 60 million people has resulted in it being severely depleted. China has built three dams on the Mekong since 1996, and the number is set to increase to twelve in the coming years.
- (b) On China's border with Myanmar, a giant hydro-electric dam named Myistsone is being constructed near the source of the Irrawaddy to supply power to Yunnan. This dam is affecting the Kachin people of north Burma who are being left to pick up the environmental tab²¹.
- (c) Beijing's move to build 13 dams on the middle and lower reaches of the Salween River further stimulates anxieties of China's dominance over the hydrological contours of South Asia as downstream states, Myanmar and Thailand do not possess the means to directly and physically influence the flow²².
- (d) As far as Brahmaputra River (Tsang Po in Chinese) in concerned, a 38 GW dam at Motuo at the Great Bend is planned with other large infrastructure-based hydro projects which are set to majorly alter the riverscape²³. Experts believe that the 38 GW dam is not primarily designed to generate electrical power for Tibet as there is no electrical load requirements in the south-eastern part of Tibet. It is felt that this project has been designed with an eye on fuelling the Eastern economic provinces of China.
- (e) **Brahmaputra Water Diversion.** But, the real concern for the downstream regions does not stem from generation of hydro-electricity but from a proposal aimed at diverting 200 billion cubic meters of water from the Brahmaputra to the Yellow River for easing existing water shortages in cities of Shaanxi, Beijing and Tianjin in Northern China. This proposal is separate from the great SNWTP Project. Although this project raises concerns, sceptics of the same feel that the cost of diverting Brahmaputra's water would be higher than the common alternative of desalination of sea water. Therefore, China's

implementation of this massive diversion project is still not a certainty²⁴.

From the above it is evident that the prospects of a solution being found to China's water crisis looks to be extremely bleak. Thus, in the future, it is more than likely that China's relentless quest for water will lead to a greater level of hydro hegemony on its part.

China's Geographical Dilemma: "Be Rich" or "Maintain Control"

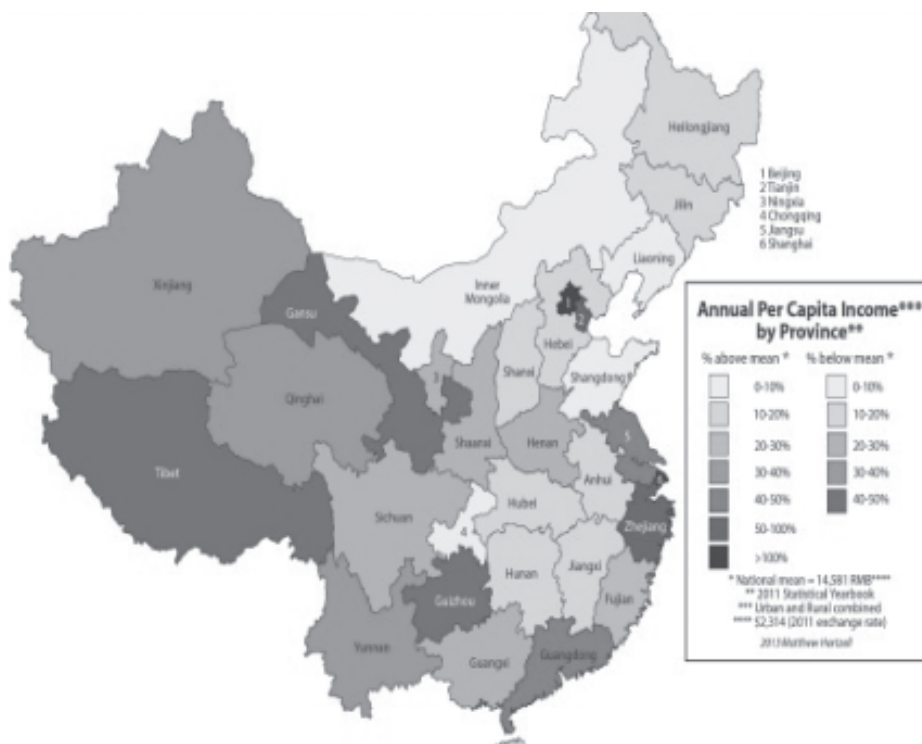
China is more enclosed than any other great power. The size of its population coupled with its secure frontiers and relative availability of resources, allows it to develop with minimal interaction with the rest of the world, as it did prior to the 19th Century. However, an insular China is a recipe for poverty. Given the ratio of arable land to population, a self-enclosed China will always remain a poor China.

For China to prosper, it has to engage in trade. However such a trade comes with its consequences. China's mid-19th century trade with the British opened a new chapter in its history. For the first time, the Pacific coast was the interface with the world not Central Asia. This in turn, massively destabilized China. As trade between China and the world intensified, the Chinese who were engaged in trading increased their wealth dramatically. Those in the coastal provinces of China, the region most deeply involved in trading, became relatively wealthy while the Chinese in the interior (not the buffer regions, which were always poor, but the non-coastal provinces of Han China) remained poor subsistence farmers. More intense the trade, wealthier the coastal leadership and greater the disparity between the regions.

However as trade increased, foreigners allied with Chinese coastal merchants and politicians thus becoming more powerful than the central government. The worst geopolitical nightmare of China came true. China fragmented, breaking into regions, some increasingly under the control of foreigners, particularly foreign commercial interests. On the whole, Beijing lost control over the regions.

This 19th Century geographical dilemma holds true even today. Even till 2013 (largely applicable even today), let alone the buffer regions, even in heartland China, a huge income disparity exists

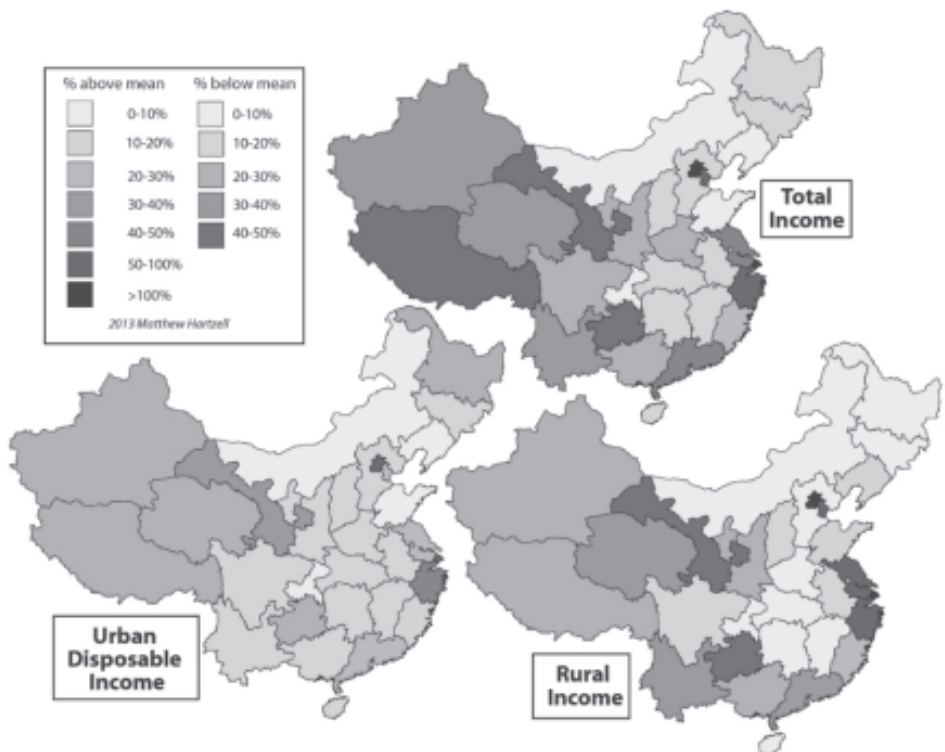
between the coastal and inner provinces. This fact is clearly vindicated by the figure given below.



Map 13: China Annual Per Capita Income by Province
 (Source: Matthew Hartzell 2011)

Using data from the 2011 China Statistical Yearbook, China-based blogger Matthew Hartzell had created the map 13 that shows just how large the income gap is in China. This map shows that China's coastal provinces are relatively wealthy and the country gradually becomes poorer the further west it goes. Matthew Hartzell had also gone further and plotted two more maps. However, the apportioning the Chinese economic disparity on account of a divide between the coastal vs interior or urban vs rural is easier said than done. The same is on account of its internal migration. It is estimated that over 100 million people internally migrate each year within the country for a better living. While doing so a 'Hukou', a household registration document that functions as an internal passport is required. Chinese migrants

are only eligible to retain social benefits in their city of origin. Therefore, those who migrate internally are essentially undocumented workers and do not count toward municipal economic statistics. Thus Chinese economic statistics don't accurately account for internal migration. Hence the income of Beijing or Shanghai is actually lesser than what appears simply because so many of its migrant workers technically "live" elsewhere. That said simple statistics cannot be ignored. It is estimated that in 2009, China's 12 coastal provinces (out of 31) accounted for 65% of the country's GDP, and had a collective per capita GDP 50% higher than the national average.²⁵



Map 14: China's Province wise Total Income, Urban Disposable Income and Rural Income (Source: Matthew Hartzell 2011)

The same is apparent from a look at the 'Gini' coefficient of Asian nations shown in the figure below.

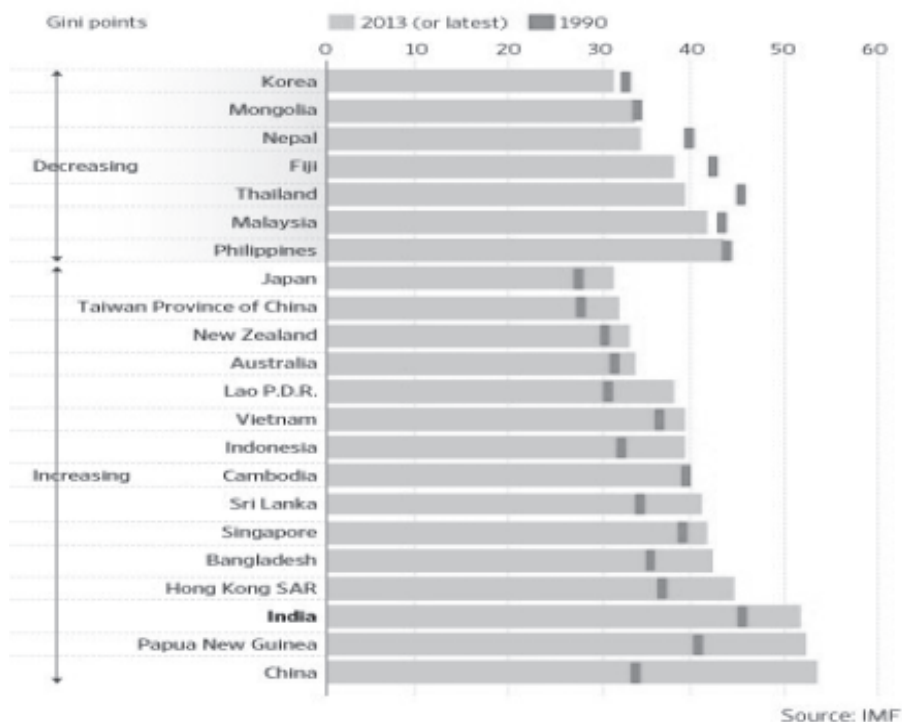
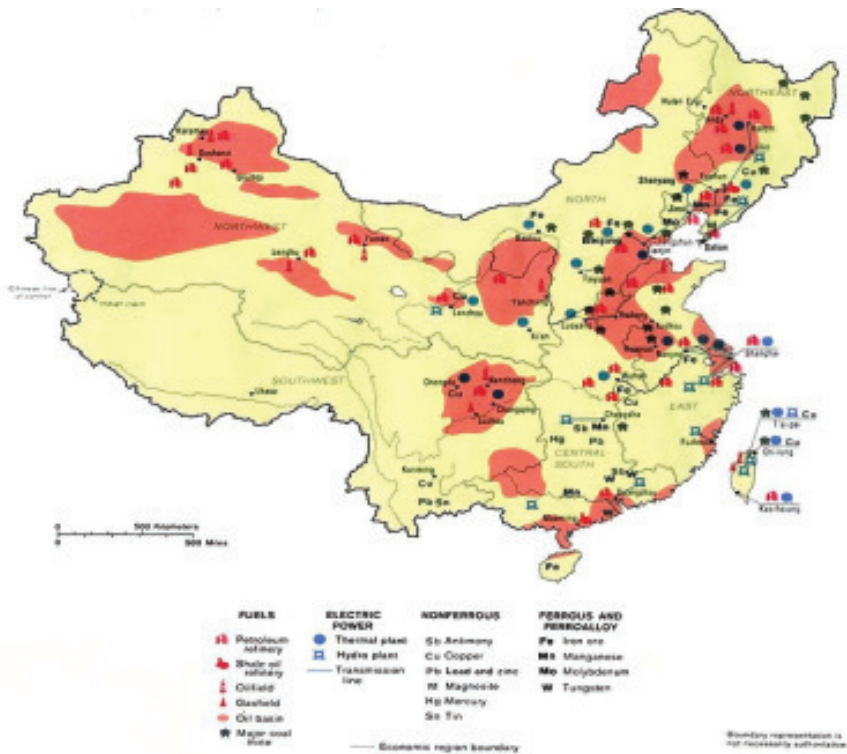


Chart 2: Gini Coefficients of some Asian Nations²⁶

The Gini Index is a statistical measure that is used to represent unequal distributions, e.g. income distribution. Gini coefficient is a widely used measure of inequality and takes into account income distribution among residents of a country. The higher the Gini coefficient, the greater is the inequality. It can take any value between 1 and 100 points (or 0 and 1). The closer the value is to 100 the greater is the inequality. 40 or 0.4 is the warning level set by the United Nations. It is evident that from the 1990's level, Chinese income disparities are much higher and at worrying levels.

As a consequence, China's primary geopolitical dilemma is how to achieve its China Dream without compromising on the authority of the CPC? The China dream looks at raising the standard of living of all Chinese by promising prosperity for all. For this to happen, China must engage in international trade. For it do so, it must use its coastal cities as an interface with the world. When that happens, the coastal cities

and the surrounding regions become increasingly wealthy. The influence of foreigners over this region increases and the interests of foreigners and the coastal Chinese provinces start converging. As a consequence, they begin to compete with the interests of the central government. This in turn weakens the central government and as a consequence there is a threat of instability being caused in the Chinese heartland. The most disturbing part is that an unstable heartland allows the buffer regions to spin out of control. Thus, China's geographical dilemma relates to engaging in international trade and yet maintaining internal harmony.



Map 15: China's Fuel, Power, Minerals and Metals²⁷

This fact has always been recognised and Beijing has followed a major "Go West" campaign of public investments for the Far West. The fact that this dilemma still exists was evident when, recently in Jul 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping, while presiding over a symposium on poverty alleviation in Yinchuan, China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous

Region had stressed upon the necessity of pairing and cooperation between the eastern and western regions. Elaborating upon the same he had brought out that, China has been using this strategy for the last 20 years and the widening gap between the east and west had been curbed to a great extent due to this. Also, "significant progress" in poverty alleviation of the poor western areas and old revolutionary base areas had been made. He had therefore called for "Cooperation between paired eastern and western regions in poverty alleviation to continue for a long time".²⁸

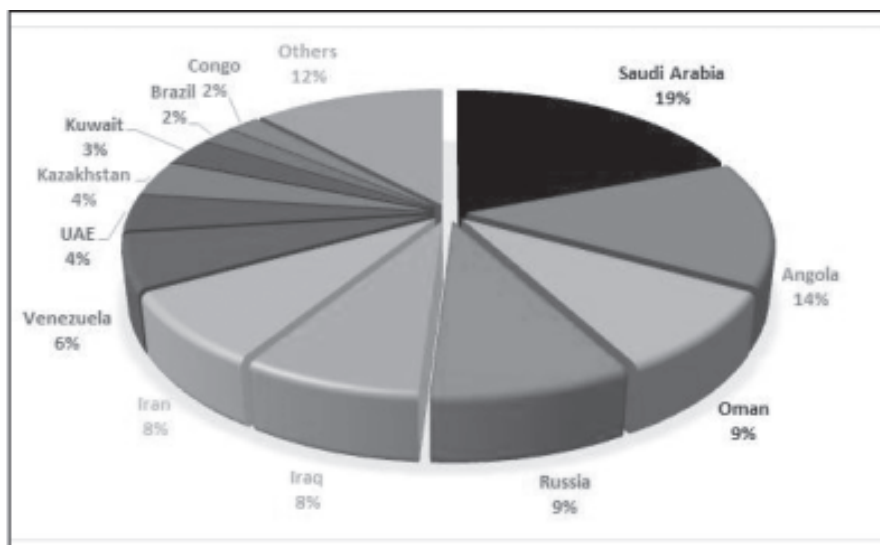


Chart 3: Breakdown of China's Crude Oil Imports by Source Country (as of 2103)²⁹

China's Physical Resources

For many years the juggernaut of Chinese export oriented economy required a continuous supply of raw material and energy resources. Of late, though the requirements for the same have reduced, China still requires a sizeable quantum of physical resources for its economic growth. Physically, China has been gifted with adequate raw material. The problem though lies in its exploitation as, most of the raw material and oil lies in the restive Xinjiang region where communication and lack of water hinders its exploitation. Thus, China faces the various

geographical dilemmas on account of its requirements for raw material and energy resources.

Malacca Dilemma. Former Chinese President Hu Jintao first fully articulated in 2003 what has become known as the “Malacca Dilemma.” That laid out Chinese fears that some unnamed power – such as the United States – could use its dominance at sea to blockade the narrow-but-critical sea lane in the Strait of Malacca near Singapore, through which about three-quarters of Chinese oil imports pass. A look at sources of Chinese oil imports would explain the same. Signs of the articulation coming true became stronger in April 2015, when China surpassed the United States as the top global importer of crude oil by importing a record 7.4 million barrels of oil a day to the US’s 7.2 million barrels. More important than the 7 million barrels was the fact that Chinese dependence on overseas oil, and especially on oil from the Middle East, had further grown in recent years.

From the 2007 levels of 46 per cent coming from the Middle East, in 2014, the levels rose to 52 per cent.³⁰ Thus despite years of effort to source more energy from places like Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, and Russia, China’s dependence on oil from the Middle East was not diminishing. Those diversification efforts “will help stem the rate of growth of dependence on Middle East oil, but they don’t change the fundamentals,” said Bruce Jones, director of the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution and author of *The Risk Pivot*. “China will remain heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil and gas for 30 or 40 years at least.”³¹ Thus to obviate its Malacca dilemma, China has begun making deep forays into the Indian Ocean and has been on an economic charm offensive in the IOR. A manifestation of this is the ‘String of Pearls’ strategy which seeks to increase access to ports and airfields, develop special diplomatic relationships, and modernize military forces that extend from the South China Sea through the Strait of Malacca, across the Indian Ocean, and on to the Persian Gulf.³²

CAR and West Asia. Increased international dependence on oil and gas, as well as China’s growing thirst for these resources has intensified competition over these fuels. On account of this and the aforesaid Malacca dilemma, China has been diversifying its sources of energy in order to reduce its dependency on oil from the Middle East. Given the fragility of the maritime supply lanes via the Indian Ocean and

the Strait of Malacca in wartime, these factors make it more important for China to control Central Asia, as it is both, a producer and a transit region. Therefore, China has pursued the exploitation rights of several oil and gas fields in Central Asia through bids and purchases. However as already stated, despite attempts at diversification of energy sources China's Malacca dilemma is here to stay for some while.

China's Geography: Inferences

From an analysis of China's Geography the following inferences can be drawn:

- (a) China's geographical position gives it a distinct advantage. Geography provides China the opportunity to become both a continental and maritime power.
- (b) China, when it controls Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, can insulate itself from the world. The unique geography of China provides it with the wherewithal to shield itself from the outside influence. An insulated China is easier to manage by the central authority. This aspect of China can be seen throughout its existence; be it in the form of construction of Great Wall of China or controlled trade with the outside world. In contemporary times, this is also assuming the form of a great firewall around its internet services. It is likely that, this trend will continue for the foreseeable future.
- (c) However, for China to develop, it must engage in international trade. At present it uses its coastal cities as an interface with the world. While doing so the coastal cities and the surrounding region become increasingly wealthy. As a consequence, the interests of the Chinese coastal provinces compete with that of Beijing. In addition, income disparities between the Coast and the Interiors keeps widening. Both of these could lead to unrest and instability in Chinese Heartland. This is unacceptable to China. Maintaining the unity of the heartland will remain a core Chinese geopolitical imperative.
- (d) For control of the buffers, Han China has to be strong and united. Presently Han China is strong and hence has been able to politically integrate all its erstwhile buffer regions. However, on account of ethnic, economic and regional disparities between the buffer regions and Mainland/Han China, the buffer regions

would continue to resist this integration. Thus the central theme of the CPC's internal policy will be a united Han China which can effectively control its exterior buffer regions. The present stress on the dominance of the CPC which pursues a 'regional periphery' policy is in consonance with such a belief.

- (e) From the above it emerges that, the primary Chinese geopolitical imperative would be to find ways of engaging in trade and yet maintaining Heartland unity thereby ensuring that the buffer regions remain firmly under central control.
- (f) China's settlement of land borders with all but India gives it the ability to concentrate on its maritime domain. However, the India factor and the restive peripheral regions would necessitate the availability of a defence forces component which has the ability to execute and win limited wars decisively as well as respond to uncalled for situations in the peripheral regions at the earliest.
- (g) Strategies which enable China to engage in trade with the world through its western provinces (buffers) would serve a double purpose, firstly, it would enhance the living standards of these provinces and secondly, it would allow China to tighten its control over these buffers. China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) is an initiative/strategy launched with such a purpose.
- (h) China's quest for breaking free from the first and second island chains has been severely dented by the Jul 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) award. This award has clearly stated that there was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources within the sea areas falling within the 'nine-dash line'.³³ The PCA award further found that all of the high-tide features in the Spratly Islands are legally "rocks" that do not generate an exclusive economic zone or continental shelf as also the UNCLOS does not provide for a group of islands such as the Spratly Islands to generate maritime zones collectively as a unit.³⁴ In fact it even went further to state that China's large scale land reclamation and construction of artificial islands at seven features in the Spratly Islands has caused severe harm to the coral reef environment and that China has violated its obligation under UNCLOS to preserve and protect the marine environment with respect to fragile ecosystems and the habitat of depleted, threatened, or endangered species.³⁵ The PCA

award notwithstanding, China's quest for breaking free from the first and second island chains will continue in the near future through strategic, diplomatic, economic and military means. This quest would involve the reunification of Taiwan and domination and subsequent control of the East and South China seas. As regards the military dimension necessitated by such a quest, China would have to develop a blue water navy capability.

- (i) Finding Alternates to the Paucity of Arable Land. China has almost one third arable land per person as compared to the rest of the world. This overriding reality of feeding its hungry mouths would in the years to come guide future Chinese policies. China's search for farm lands in Africa/Latin America or its focus on Maritime food industry is a trend which would continue into the future.
- (j) Quenching the Dragon's Thirst. Future Chinese generations would be more thirty than their forefathers. Hence, taking advantage of being an upper riparian state and home to some of the great Trans Asian Rivers, China has embarked upon some ambitious projects of constructing dams on these rivers with the twin aims of producing hydroelectricity and diverting waters to its water starved Northern areas. Apart from its South to North Water Transfer Project (SNWTP), China also has elaborate plans to dam some of the world's great rivers such as Mekong, Brahmaputra, Salween and Irrawaddy. Thus, in the near future, Chinese hydro hegemony will continue unabated. Such an approach could eventually result in a conflict of interests with its neighbours.
- (k) China's Appetite for Resources. China's hunger for resources will force it to look for new avenues of import and the necessity of securing the flow of these to Chinese shores. Some likely ramifications of the same are as follows:-
 - (i) Its insatiable hunger for resources would cause China to seek expansion/enhancement of influence not geographic (colonial) but in terms of its ability to influence and extract its requirements related to security, energy and economy. This could cause a conflict of interests with the comity of Nations.
 - (ii) Integration of China with CAR by the way of multiple land

routes will continue. Apart from present route through Kazakhstan, it could explore the possibility of another route through Afghanistan also. To enable this, Chinese involvement in Afghanistan independent of Pakistan is likely. China would also look to remain engaged with Afghanistan post US withdrawal as when that happens. The prospects of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) providing a secure corridor for oil and gas outlet from the warm waters of Indian Ocean through the Gwadar port in Pakistan would continue to be explored and worked upon.

- (iii) In the decades to come, besides geostrategic requirements, energy security would lead to continued Chinese Naval presence in the IOR.

Conclusion

Geography puts China in a Catch 22 situation. Its enviable position in the Asian landmass gives it the ability of becoming both a continental and maritime power, however, the same very geography creates internal dynamics which affect its stability. Thus, if China can manage and control its internal contradictions and dynamics, geography is a boon to it else, it's a bane.

(Image Source: <https://www.travelchinaguide.com>)

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