



The Communist Party-Army Equation in China

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About the Author



Lieutenant General (Retd) Gautam Banerjee, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, has held many important command, staff and instructional appointments. He also has the distinction of participating in all operations undertaken by the Army since 1971. In the last part of his career, Gen Banerjee was the Chief Engineer of the Western Command, General Officer Commanding of the Madhya Bharat Area and the Chief of Staff, Central Army Command. Before superannuating after 40 years of distinguished service, he was the Commandant of the Officers' Training Academy, Chennai.

He is a prolific writer on military strategy, leadership and futuristic warfare for various defence journals. He has contributed to a range of Army's modernisation and transformational studies, many of which have since been adopted.

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Preamble

In republican scheme of matters, *warfare* is the ultimate political recourse that is to be prosecuted to seek conditions for advantageous settlement of external disputes. Conversely, in communist theology, 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 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 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 political management of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).
- In Part 2, the dynamics of 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 PLAⁱ. 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 policy making. This is a system opaque that functions behind a solid 'bamboo curtain'. It remains therefore an engaging obligation for China watchers to arraign past trends and experiences of 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 1950's, disaster of the 'Cultural Revolution' of the 1960's, purge of Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four' factions in the 1970's, turnabout of proletariats-policies into a technical-economic deviations in the 1980's, and the course of PLA's own modernisation since the 1990's 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 has 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, 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-1970's, the CCP was the *de jure* as well as *de facto* government, 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 reins 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 policy-making bodies had formalised the PLA's participation in governance of the state, just as it ensured its implicit obedience of the Party's promulgations. However, in contrast to the rest of the Government, the military brass enjoyed much autonomy when it came to 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 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 commitment to hard-line communism. Gradually, with the Party's foresighted understanding and endorsement, these changes led to propriety in observance of rules, regulations and procedures in the PRC's governing establishment, and that in turn led to 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 1970's decade, with Deng Xiaoping at the helm, 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. PLA heavyweights in the Party's apex policy-making bodies, the CMC included, had endorsed that concept because they understood that technological and economic modernisation was pre-requisite to restructuring the PLA in the form of a modern military power. As a result, advent of the 1980's saw the state proceed towards achievement of 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 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 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. 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. Promotion of the idea of China's 'rightful' claim to Han supremacy over lesser societies and her '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, PLA has substantial roles to play in promoting these measures, and *inter alia*, ensuring a trouble free continuation of 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', 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 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 simultaneous commitment of all of these three force-elements to preserve PRC's national stability – and inter alia, perpetuation of Party Rule over the realm.

As therefore 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 her past "hundred years of humiliation" at the hands of the Western Powers and Japan, and the anarchies inflicted by its own tottering Qing Dynasty, 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 her super-status 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 evidences, 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 coterie 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 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 similar vein, for its burgeoning demand for raw material and resources to feed its development, PRC cannot but look beyond her borders, and even at the regions beyond.

Like all great powers, 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, 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, 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. Upholding of that *caveat* of Party Rule therefore is contingent upon the CCP having at its exclusive disposal a fully committed military institution. 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, PLA is being geared up to be able to protect the PRC's concerns by disarming any possible - expected in fact - rise of inimical forces.

As stated, in her leadership's reckoning, China's rise is considered to be contingent upon the CCP ruling the roost, which in turn requires 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 brow beat, 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, 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 her superior status. CCP would therefore do everything to keep the PLA strong in terms of war-wherewithal. 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 CCP-PLA Engagement

Leadership Ideologies in the Contemporary CCP

As in any coterie-ruled regime, 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 are subscribed to by military as well as 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 perpetuation of that system by maintaining the Party's grip over every endeavour of the state - on policy-making as well as on the policy-makers 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. Scrutiny from the Party-angle of every major scheme - to gauge the resultant fallouts on socio-economic, personnel and promotion policies - is thus ensured. Influence of this group of proven Party-functionaries is considerable, and rising with their elevation to higher rungs of Provincial as well as Central leadership.

This group, consisting of conservative military as well as civilian Party members, are chary of rightsizing the PLA and its delinking from economic ventures for 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 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 background, 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 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 regiment 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 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 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 strong camaraderie base among the military hierarchy. Influence of this cadre in nurturing the CCP-PLA engagement has ever been overwhelming.

Point to reiterate is that each of the factions of the CCP-PLA leadership described herein have a mix of civilian and military stake-holders; 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 to 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 – 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 1950's, 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. PLA's change of track from dormancy to assertiveness on the Indo-Tibet Border on 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 who 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 right-size 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 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 *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 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 2000's, 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 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. 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 devote 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 devotion of its soldiery to the communist ideals, while there are others who profess 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 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 policy makers in the CCP Politburo, the CMC and the PLA.

Lastly, backed up by the resolutions promulgated by the recent Plenum of 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 stake holders. That, in fact, is a major challenge confronting the PLA.

The State's Nurturing of the Soldiery

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 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*, added emphasis to the soldier's welfare has been laid in the aftermath of the CMC's recent pronouncements. Towards this end, state guidelines on protection of soldiers' rights have been promulgated, directing courts, procuratorates and various ministries to resolve soldiers' legal, land and domestic problems in co-ordinated 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 stresses 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 policy-making 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. PRC's hot and cold stance on American involvement in 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 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 steadied, the hapless victims of PRC's brazen aggressiveness – termed as 'assertiveness' in deference to her ability to inflict economical and military punishment - might find the three decade old break from military arm-twisting coming to an end.

Image source:

- <http://www.englisharticles.info>
- <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn>

End Notes

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.*

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