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# China's Defence White Paper, 2013: Assertions of A 'Super Power' in Making?

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## About the Author



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# China's Defence White Paper, 2013: Assertions of A 'Super Power' in Making?

## Promulgations of A Super-Power

In April 2013, the People's Republic of China (PRC) released her eighth *Defence White Paper*, titled as 'The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces'. This exercise has been undertaken bi-annually since the early 2000's, and is in consonance with China's inexorable claim to super-power status that brings with it an expectation among the international community that the contender would want to enunciate her visions and goals for them to take note of the coming dispensation. Rise of PRC being an issue of global focus, the White Paper has been, and is being, analysed from various angles by eminent experts.

PRC's past record of dealing with the other stake holders of the Asia and Pacific Region instils amongst the latter, considerable degree of apprehensions as to her future intents 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 PRC, as exemplified by its policy of propping up Pakistan as her 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 her anti-India machinations in covert as well as ominous mode – appear to be in tune with her economic compulsions. Indeed, China's inroads into Africa, Latin America, Myanmar, Indian Ocean littoral states and the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, when shorn of background experiences of her 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

policy making 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 PRC leadership's cultural outlook. The matter has been discussed under the following Sections:-

- Section 1 : Cultural Dimensions of China's Statecraft;
- Section 2 : 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, discussion on certain aspects of her 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 her 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

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 River Valleys. Over the past millennia, this core area has been the cradle of the great Han civilisation while being ruled by dynasties of Han as well as foreign ethnicity. 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.

Relationship between the core and the periphery has ever been fluctuating between two extremes. The peripheral powers – the *Huns*, *Kitans*, *Jurchens*, *Turks*, *Uyghur's*, *Mongols*, *Manchu's* 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 her favour during the early part of the *Qing Empire*.

That institutional memory is so deeply ingrained that successive governments of China continue to consider '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, breakdown of internal order has been a recurring

feature in China. Besides, she 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. Chinese consider those catastrophes to be the main cause of weakening of the imperial China and the 'centuries of humiliation' that she 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 peoples, 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, is to be responded with firm clamp down – like it happened in the Tiananmen Square in 1989 and recently in Tibet. That is one principle that the PRC leadership would not compromise – their survival depends on it.

## **Rewarding Loyalists**

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 neighbouring ethnic nations demanded to be accorded vassal status for the lure of highly valued 'gifts' from the Empire, taking to violence if that demand was not met!

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

## **Regional Horizon**

Unlike European powers, America and Japan, China has not been reckonably successful in seizing profound control over regions beyond her periphery – probably on account of her unending struggles to keep her 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, path of economic progress is paved by control over outlying reservoirs of natural resources;
- Thirdly, 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, PRC's pressing urge to lay hands on territories beyond may be seen as a pre-requisite that she 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 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: 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 case of China, even as she transited through the periods of monarchical autarchy, a short republican regime, the *Guomindang* governance and finally its displacement by 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 PRC grows,

these instincts are apparently crystallising into an overt strategic vision of a complexion that her neighbours may have reasons to be wary of. Wisdom therefore dictates that 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 Chinese mainland. There may not be reasons to dispute that quest. However, in fulfilment of that self-ordination, they lay 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 her 'persuasive' power grows. That such brazen ideas, if conceded, would destabilise the entire world, does not seem to matter to the 'superior' race and their sense of 'entitlements by right'. Even if 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's past, barring her 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 *Qing Reunification* of the 17th and 18th Centuries. However, weighed down by incessant troubles caused by wars, revolts and recurring calamities, seldom ever in her history has China found herself prepared to look beyond her northern steppes or the westerly Tibet-Turkmen plateaus to establish her control. Even *Kublai Khan's* (Yuan-Mongol Dynasty) attempts to dominate the China Sea in the 13th Century and the 15<sup>th</sup> century six-voyage maritime exploits of Ming Admiral *Zhen who* did not change that focus. Presently however, PRC has broken from her past imposition to lay claims over lands and seas well outside her peripheral territories. As a corollary, she is intent on building up her military might as it must befit a super-power, including a blue water navy.



## Nationalist Surge

So far the expansionist urge had been confined amongst the hawkish policy makers 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 recuse at any stage. As evidenced from the situation created by the state in Pakistan, this is a dangerous portend.

## Committed Perceptions

Lastly, in the intermix of neo-Confucian, Sun Zsu-Bangfa and communist culture, the Chinese are smug in 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 they adopt, to convince the intransigent to back off from confrontation, as they 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 them '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, all out 'counter-attack in self defence'.

Similarly, taking liberty with interpretation of established facts, selective repudiation of international norms and reversal from past understandings are considered to be fair political strategy, to be unfolded "when time comes". Indeed, 'peace' is professed by enjoining the target country to let PRC take what she 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 her sheer arrogance.

## Comments

Having discussed the state as well as 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 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, 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, concentrate 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 deployment of *People's Militia* in implementation of massive social, economic and engineering schemes, commitment of *People's Armed Police Force* (PAPF) in controlling revolts in peripheral provinces and 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 state-Party-PLA has been nurtured by 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, 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 the modern standards. The contemporary military brass, while remaining communism-oriented on face, are 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 furthermore 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 by practice communist regimes ride on their military institution, 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 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 PLA for granted – like a sheep to provide wool when alive and meat when dead.

As the society flowers, display of ideas and actions outside the Party Line would not remain confined to what today is called as 'dissidence'. CCP therefore would do everything to keep a firm grip on the PLA. One mean to do so would be to accommodate PLA top brass in the policy making bodies and accord due respect to PLA's concerns. The other mean 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 to the second condition.

Fourthly, in contrast to the aforementioned trend, the state-CCP continues to be dependent on the PLA, one, to attain global super-status, two, to maintain internal stability, and three, to progress civic-economic developmental schemes. In fact, execution of projects and implementation of schemes under military norms of conduct is found to be preferable in distant underdeveloped areas, to keep to fast-track schedule, 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 overarch of military law. Indeed, 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, 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 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 super-power. The PRC recognises that concern and as it behoves an emerging super-power, assuages the stake-holders 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, messages of the Chinese state, to be comprehensively understood, have to be factored with its 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, PAF and the People's Militia as distinct entities, '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 greater role in 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 incremental grab of over the thirty odd islands in the China Sea which PRC considers to be in the 'hands of foreigners' (sic), besides helping out with exploration in her claimed expanse of continental shelf and making sure that her overseas investments are not tampered with.

## The Preface

In the Preface, apart from '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 intents :-

- 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 matters aforementioned 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 earlier Sections. At the same time, it raises hope that unlike other super-powers of the past and the present one, China will actually rise to that status peacefully, without having to de-stabilise 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*, '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 outlying regions is asserted. Besides, commitment of China's armed forces in disaster relief, security of her 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 'universally recognised norms of international relations', to ensure 'legitimacy of operations involving foreign countries and militaries' (sic).

## Comments

To the target readership of the White Paper this part is 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 her, not the outsider's, hands;
- The moot point to ponder is as to what threat to her security, territory, rights etc. might China envisage, and why, and in what manner; who's *aggression* does she intends to *win* against in a *local war* by her 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 their 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 super-power aspirations. Hopefully, unlike the preceding insinuations, these pronouncements may not chill the neighbour's spine if the PRC leadership desists from their habit of professing their unique interpretations of the universally recognised norms.

Viewed in light of her past behavior with those nations who 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, evaluation of the defence force-structure of 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 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 850,000 strong PLA Army (PLAA) stands organised into seven Military Area Commands (MACs), with 18 Combined Corps, additional independent formations and reoriented from theater defence to trans-theater mobility;
- The 235,000 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 endeavor 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 398,000 officers and men who form part of one 'air command' integrated with each of the seven Military Area Commands. 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 counterattacks 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 backup force of the PLA. It is structured to undertake support 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 socialist modernisation drive, maintenance of social order and emergency rescue and disaster relief operations.

## Comments

This part alludes to 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 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 they 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. PLA accedes to the fact that it will have to fight a superior enemy (unmistakably, the United States) and the theatre ('War Zone') could be the China Sea (*localised*). Thus motivated by its proven military wisdom, PLA aims to gain 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 high-technology dependent adversary and thus create an asymmetrical advantage. Knowing themselves to be nowhere near catching up with the sole competitor, Chinese strategists bank on missile units to find some sort of parity in *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, commitment of PLAP in fostering internal stability and the Militia's role in infrastructural development are also reiterated in this part. 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 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 the PAPF and the Militia, all combined being referred to as the 'armed forces'. May be, like the PLAN and PLAAF, 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 the Section 3 above;
- Viewed in the backdrop of recent statements made in various forums, the narration may be a reiteration of 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 Chinese statecraft would ensure that PRC does what it intends to do. Elements of doubt over that excellence, however, emerge when considered that: firstly, by her nuclear proliferation, China has undermined her own status; and secondly, by her brusque mannerisms, she 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 force's '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 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 her goal of global super-status and that her civil institutions are but nascent, contrary to the hallmarks of that status. It also indicates that she intends to march on resolutely – she 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 communications, and play an active role in 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 out-reach to global super-power 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 role in upholding world peace and 'mutual development'.

Issuance 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 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. Perceptible experiences of 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 PRC's climb to super-status is leveling out, there is no easing out of the arrogance and mal-intent, as exemplified by 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 what inimical acts that China's past tormentors had inflicted upon her.

It is certain that China's deeply ingrained wisdom would tell her 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 super-powers.

### Image Sources:

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The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organization to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelize fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

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