



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

Lt Gen Gautam Banerjee



Theatre commands

- Eastern
- Southern
- Western
- Northern
- Central
- Headquarters



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FOREWORD

China's nearly three decade long process of military modernisation has ever been an interesting object of studies and analyses 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 her traditional propensity to back up her regional ambitions with hard military power.



In the regime of Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), for military modernisation to be meaningful, it must be linked to strategic reorientation. And for either of the purposes to find fruition, defence reforms become imperative. Accordingly, as dawned the second decade of the 21st Century, the traditional Chinese military insight manifested, first, in the form of evolution of new war-strategies, and next, by the institution of far-reaching reforms in China's politico-military decision-making structure.

It was in that context that the Year 2016 saw the restructuring of China's Central Military Commission (CMC) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Headquarters. The transition was promulgated in the name of China's all powerful leader, Xi Jinping, no less, and is slated to be firmly in place by 2020. As that happens, the current generation of military modernisation would find full maturity, periodic upgrades being continued as a matter of course.

China's recent defence reforms are better appreciated when viewed in the backdrop of the Party-PLA confabulations that went to influence the restructure of the CMC. To that end, an endeavour has been made in this Paper to delve into the nuances of the defence reforms and to draw informed inferences to be taken note of.

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"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

At the dawn of 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 principle 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 have been much reported and discussed over time. Even then, the purpose of comprehensive understanding of the recent promulgation of defence reforms and 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 done at 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 mid-1970s, the modernist ideologue, Deng Xiaoping, had been sent to the dog house 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 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 better of Vietnamese resistance, the PLA was shaken enough to revive the call for modernisation; Mao's absence from the scene and re-emergence of Deng helped. The cause, however, could not make much headway against the entrenched Party-PLA cabal, opposed as these were to restructure of the PLA through manpower reduction, professional military training and 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 out 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 ranks and file, numbers of which nearly equalled the combat troops. With 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 be denied that in the name of turning the romanticised 'people's army' into some unknown, compact, high-technology force.

Thus while the tug-of-war on such contentious issues continued amongst the modernist and orthodox factions, 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 future modernisation of the higher echelons of its war machine.

Towards Conceptual and Structural Modernisation

The resistance to more substantial changes at 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 out to consolidate 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 a 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 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. 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. Assimilation of the concept of '*Integrated Joint Warfare*' (IJW) under '*Conditions of Informatisation with Chinese Characteristics*', to prosecute '*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 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 joint tri-service composition, and creation of distinct air force and naval hierarchies. 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 IJW. Simultaneously, larger numbers of selected officers trained hard to imbibe the expertise of joint warfare. This was also the period when upgrade 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 affected.

Communism versus Generalship

But just as 'RMA with Chinese Characteristics' was being applied to the PLA's modernisation, there was much debate, even acrimony over the supremacy or otherwise of 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 hoards, 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 PLA Army (PLAA), PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy (PLAN) integrated into IJW mode to prosecute 'Active Defence' under, as mentioned earlier, 'Conditions of Informationization 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 of 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, modernisation at unit, formation and theatre level was well underway. Nearly 20 percent 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 so 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 restructure 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 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.

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 an PLAA-centric headquarters with PLAAF, PLAN, Second Artillery and People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) hierarchies embedded into it. Tasking of the Second Artillery, the nuclear and missile force, was however controlled directly by the CMC while the PAPF's budget as well as its peacetime 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 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 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.

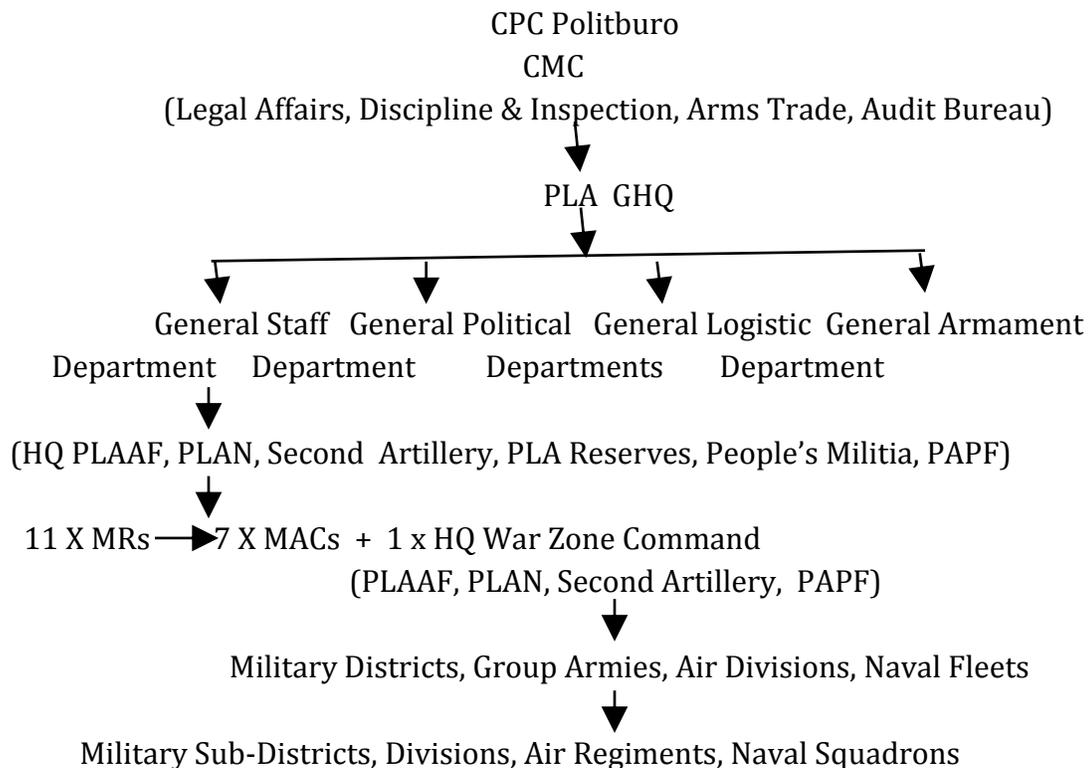


Figure 1: PLA's Apex hierarchy till 2015

Obviously, the first was the preserve of hard core military professionals, the second was a setup of Party dedicated military officials, the third was the domain of military and civil logisticians and the last Department was the preserve of scientists, military and civilian technocrats and military industrial establishments. 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 set up, 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 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 higher level of service-specific professionalism at the one end, and upgrade of the other Services to equal partnership in tri-service jointness at the other.

Final Phase of Modernisation

Having made satisfactory headway through incremental additions and modifications in a manner that operational equilibrium is not upset during the transition period, in 2011, the PLA's two-tier apex command and control structure was ready for formal switch over 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 systematic 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.

In 2014, according to the final agenda of the 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 and experimentations in military bases across the country before the restructure was certified for implementation. Finally, through the issuance of a formal executive order from the office of the President of PRC-General Secretary of CPC-Chairman of 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 was under experimentation and training since 2011, finally inaugurated. Even then, to prevent loss of organisational control and balance, 'transitional work offices' have been given time till 2020 to settle the systemic change-over. 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 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.

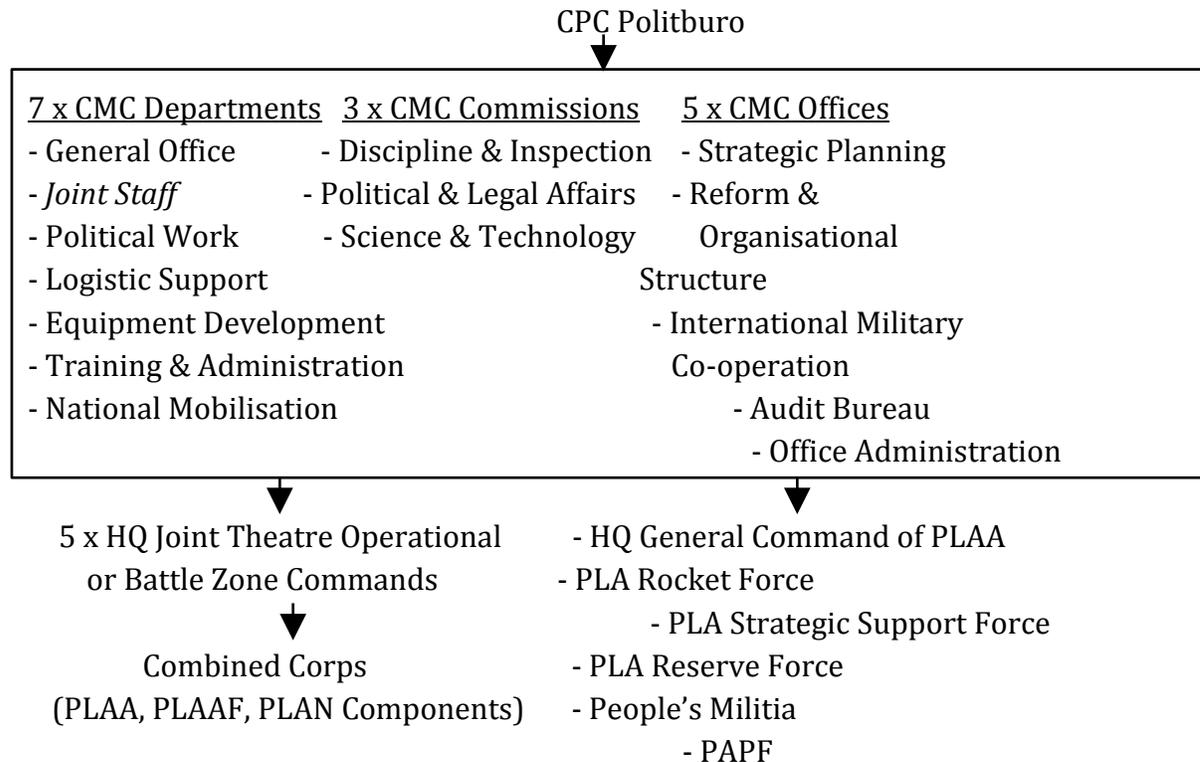


Figure 2 : PLA's hierarchy integrated into the CMC

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 quantum's 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 policy-making 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 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 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 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 improve management of military land, infrastructure and supply chain in the first named, and brisk upgrade of military hardware in the second.
- e. The three 'CMC Commissions' are Party-predominant oversight mechanisms to nurture PLA's Party-dedication and moral as well as legal probity among the military fraternity. Together, the 'CMC Discipline & Inspection Commission' and '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. Creation of these Offices indicate 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 restructure brings about an intimate degree of integration among 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 recuse 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 PLA GHQ, the top two tiers of 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 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 '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, development of China's nuclear and conventional missile forces had so far been a multiple-department effort. Besides, 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 set up into one 'PLA Strategic Support Force' (PLASSF) which, functioning under the direct command of the CMC, is mandated to undertake 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 abovementioned kinetic and non-kinetic modes of warfare in support of the PLA's overall strategy.
- d. The restructure 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 better preparation and response of the Reserve Forces, 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 preservation of internal security, the PRC has had to strengthen its armed police organisation. The PAPF is thus revamped from being an appendage to the sectoral PLA formations into a distinct force with its dedicated hierarchy, largely ex-military manpower and light hardware transferred to it from PLA surpluses. Presently, in its armed, anti-rebellion functions, the PAPF has been brought under the direct control of the CMC, while its peacetime administration and control remains 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' (BZC) 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 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 remain more or less the same, and that serves the purpose of career protection.



Map 3: The PLA's New BZCs

Congruence of Strategic Orientation and Restructure

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 super-power military. The thinking process had gained a quantum boost in the early-2000s but its revelations came to 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.

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:-

- a. 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 her 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'.
- b. To that end, 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 cyberspace 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

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 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 arises. 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 abovementioned strategies are promulgated only after the military objectives are formally crystallised through discussions, training and trials, and then followed up with assured progression in translating these into the PLA's modernisation. The recent restructure of PLA's apex command and control set up is the culminating stage of that endeavour.

Concluding Observations

Modernisation of the PLA is well underway; it is estimated that about 20 percent of it is fully modernised to the scale of advanced capabilities, 20 percent is under various stages of modernisation, 40 percent maintain their 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 for 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 PRC's military high-handedness because a modernised PLA now stands further empowered for

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 her military institution, and so deriving political dividends in good measure. Further, 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 lead in effective empowerment of the PLA.

To wit, China's official stance is 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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