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PLA Reforms under Xi and their Security Implications

S L Narasimhan


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PLA Reforms under Xi and their Security Implications

S L Narasimhan*

Abstract

China is undertaking its most ambitious and far-reaching reforms and modernisation of the armed forces under Xi Jinping. The reforms are likely to fundamentally change the way PLA operates. If successful, they would reduce the power and influence of the PLA ground forces that so far has dominated the military, promote joint operations, and bring about significant capability build up in the maritime, air, space, and cyber domains. Creation of the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) and increased testing of missiles by China in the recent past will enable her to launch a protracted non-contact warfare necessary for winning modern wars. India needs to increase her all-round deterrence capability so that caution is placed on China not to enter into a conflict as a result of the enhanced capabilities that she may achieve due to the reforms.

China has come a long way since the modernisation of its armed forces—the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) – began modestly in 1978 as the fourth of the Four Modernisations Programme launched by Deng Xiaoping. By the time of the First Gulf War of 1991 the realisation had dawned on the PLA that it was an armed force that was not capable of fighting modern wars.

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Therefore, PLA’s Modernisation got an impetus in 1993. It was also due to the fact that by that time the modernisation of the other three aspects -- namely, agriculture, industry and science and technology, had progressed well. PLA saw how the mechanisation helped USA in winning the Gulf War. Hence, PLA started the process of mechanisation at that time. Even for a big and economically growing country like China this was not easy. So, China started a process of leapfrogging mechanisation and informationisation in 1997 (Li, 2007). Then came the Second Gulf War of 2003. PLA observed the way the USA orchestrated that war from the continental United States that was 6000 miles away. The power of `informationisation’ dawned on the PLA.

In its 2006 Defence White Paper (Government of PRC, 2006), China laid down a three step process for the further modernisation of the PLA.

“China pursues a three-step development strategy in modernizing its national defense and armed forces, in accordance with the state's overall plan to realize modernization. The first step is to lay a solid foundation by 2010, the second is to make major progress around 2020, and the third is to basically reach the strategic goal of building informationized armed forces and being capable of winning informationized wars by the mid-21st century.”

But it is under Xi Jinping, who became the Communist Party General Secretary in 2012, and was given the mandate to continue with the reforms, that the most far reaching reforms and modernisation of the armed forces in the past four decades have been launched. The principal aims of the reforms is to reduce the clout of the Army and bring it under a central command along with the navy and the air force that would enable it to undertake joint operations in its contested land and maritime territories more effectively. The present round of military reforms is expected to fundamentally change the way PLA operates. The reforms would also reduce the power and influence of the PLA ground forces that dominated the military in China, significantly, indicating China’s growing focus on the maritime, air, space, and cyber domains. Creation of the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) and increased testing of missiles by China in the recent past will enable her to launch a
protracted non-contact warfare necessary for winning modern wars. Finally, there is increasing stress on psychological warfare in attaining security objectives and winning modern wars.

After he took over as the President of the country and Chairman, Central Military Commission (CMC) he created a Leading Small Group for the transformation of the PLA of which he nominated himself as the Chairman during the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress. This Plenum was held in November 2013. The first meeting of the Leading Small Group to finalise further reforms was held on 27 January 2015, the second on 14 July the same year and the proposals were put forth in the CMC Executive on 22 July 2015. The Standing Committee of the CPC Politburo discussed the reforms on 03 September 2015. Finally, CMC Military Reform Work Conference discussed them on 24th and 26th November 2015. Mr Xi Jinping announced the reforms immediately thereafter on 26 November 2015.

The philosophy of the military reforms is to focus on projecting military power to the peripheries and beyond. This is clearly brought out by China’s Military Strategy Paper published on 26 May 2015. In Chapter 2 of the paper titled ‘Missions and Strategic Tasks of China's Armed Forces’ the tasks of PLA have been specified. Some of the tasks are: “To safeguard China's security and interests in new domains; To safeguard the security of China's overseas interests; To participate in regional and international security cooperation and maintain regional and world peace”. It is for the first time that China had tasked its armed forces to protect its interests overseas, in the new domains and maintain regional and world peace. This was a clear indication that China was tasking her forces to look beyond its territory. In Chapter 3, which is titled ‘Strategic Guideline of Active Defence’ it says, “Threats from such new security domains as outer space and cyber space will be dealt with to maintain the common security of the world community. China's armed forces will strengthen international security cooperation in areas crucially related to China's overseas interests, to ensure the security of such interests (Ministry of National Defence, Peoples Republic of China, 2015).” As part of its strategy of Active Defence, which implies that China does not have to wait for the adversary to
launch an offensive but pre empting such an action by launching an offensive first, it says that its armed forces will ensure security of its overseas interests. An understanding of the tasks and guidelines explained above clearly indicates that though the reforms are to create a force capable of joint operations and the theatre commands are divided within the geographical area of China, their intent is to project power towards the peripheries and beyond.

The background given above needs to be understood in perspective if one has to understand how the PLA’s military reforms affect India.

**Reforms Underway**

The first reform that was to be undertaken was the reduction of 300,000 personnel. This was announced by Mr Xi Jinping in September 2015 (Pradt, 2016). Though this was not part of the reforms announced in November 2015, it was also an important reform. Out of the 300,000 to be reduced major portion was to be from non-essential services like the music and drama troupe and units equipped with obsolete equipment. This reduction has been completed. This was confirmed by Premier Li Keqiang when he addressed the 13th National People’s Congress in March 2018 (Dominguez, Size of PLA reduced by 300,000, says Chinese premier, 2018). This reduction in the number of troops will release funds for modernisation of forces. A report on 11 March 2017 said that the reserves in the PLA will be reduced and the reserves in the other services will be increased (Dominguez, China to reduce army reserve numbers, 2017).

In 2017, PLA reduced five group armies from the total of 18. All the group armies were also renumbered starting from 71 to 83. Though some analysts call the Group Armies as Combined Corps, Chinese writings still maintain them as Group Armies. The numbering has been done Theatre...
command wise and it starts from Eastern Theatre Command, Southern Theatre Command, Western Theatre Command, Northern Theatre Command and Central Theatre Command in that order. The Commanders and Political Commissars of all the group armies have been changed (Yang, 2017). Gen Ding Laihang has replaced Gen Ma Xiaotian as PLA Air force Chief (Choi Chi Yuk, 2017).

**Major Reforms Announced**

The major reforms announced in November 2015 fell into five categories which are explained in detail in the subsequent paras. They are:-

(a) Changes in the Higher Defence Organisation.
(b) Creation of a Ground Force Headquarters
(c) Reorganisation of Military Regions into Joint Theatre Commands.
(d) Upgrading of the Second Artillery Corps into a full service and renaming it as PLA Rocket Force (PLARF).
(e) Creation of a PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF).

**Changes in the Higher Defence Organisation.**

The four general departments namely, General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Armament department and General Logistics Department were present in all organisations till the Regiment Level. These were the departments through which the CMC was controlling all the forces. A regiment of the PLA is equivalent to a brigade in other armies. Since there was no Headquarters for the ground forces, they were commanded through these four departments. It was felt that these departments were growing powerful and corruption was seen to be increasing. Moreover, these departments were dominated by the ground forces. In order to change all these factors the four departments were converted into six departments, six offices and three commissions which will function directly under the CMC. The changes are explained through two diagrams (Philip C Saunders, 2016) given below.
Earlier, CMC used to be a little removed from day to day management of the armed forces. With the present organisation, CMC will be involved in the same. This may affect the objective higher level planning and decision making adversely. An Overseas Operations Office (Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017, 2017) under the Joint Staff Department has been established which has not been shown in the list of
offices that function under the CMC. Establishment of Overseas Planning Department (OPD) substantiates the assessment that Chinese armed forces will project power to the peripheries and beyond.

**Creation of the Ground Forces Headquarters.**

Though the ground forces dominated the PLA, there was no Headquarters to control them and they were controlled by the four general departments as mentioned above. The command of the ground forces was also exercised by the same general departments. Since there was no intermediate headquarters, the ground forces were able to influence the hierarchy and garner better resources for themselves. This will change with the creation of the Ground Forces Headquarters.

**Reorganisation of Military Regions into Joint Theatre Commands**

Prior to the reforms, whole territory of China was divided into seven military regions. These have been converted into five joint theatre commands. See the map 1 below:

*MAP 1 – MAPS SHOWING THE MILITARY REGIONS AND THEATRE COMMANDS (MAPS: GLOBASECURITY.ORG)*

Many analysts have equated this change with the Goldwater-Nichols Act (GNA) of the United States. There are many differences between the military reforms in China and the reforms brought by that act in the USA. USA was creating theatre commands outside her territory whereas China has created them within her territory. Second, GNA was created so that the President of USA can be in direct communication with the Theatre
Commanders. However, in China’s case, Central Military Commission has a hierarchy.

Creation of theatre commands and the Ground Forces Headquarters in China has given rise to two phenomena. The command and control set up has been bifurcated. There are two lines of command. One flows from the CMC to Theatre commands and fighting formations. This is the operational chain of command. The second flows from CMC to respective forces headquarters and the fighting formations. This chain of command works for the technical control of the troops, training and equipping the respective services. Respective forces headquarters do not exercise any operational control over the fighting formations.

Each theatre command has a PLA HQ and a Joint HQ. Surprisingly they are not co located. It appears that in order to speed up the reforms, China seems to have utilised the existing infrastructure. However, in the long run, this geographical separation is likely to adversely affect the functional efficiency. Map 2 below depicts the locations of the PLA HQ and Joint HQ in each theatre command (Salvacion, 2016).

*MAP 2 – MAP SHOWING THE ARMY HEADQUARTERS AND JOINT HEADQUARTERS OF THE THEATRE COMMANDS*
The role of the theatre commands are threefold. One, responding to security threats from their strategic directions. Two, maintaining peace, deterrence against adversaries and win battles and three, safeguarding overall situation with respect to national security and military strategy. The area of responsibility of each theatre command (Arthur, 2016) is given in Map 3 below.

MAP 3 – MAP SHOWING ASSESSED AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THEATRE COMMANDS
Whole of PLA was converted into 84 Group Army Level Units. This implies that there are 84 units that are commanded by Major Generals. The details of those units are given in the table below:

*FIGURE 4 - TABLE SHOWING THE DETAILS OF 84 GROUP ARMY LEVELS OF PLA*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP ARMY LEVEL UNITS IN PLA</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Groups</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army Experimental Bases</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Bases</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Aviation Units</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Land Battle Units</td>
<td>01 (Likely to be Marine Corps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Experimental Base</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force Bases</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force Unit</td>
<td>01 (Likely to be Airborne Corps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force Experimental Base</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA Rocket Force</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket Force Bases</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket Force Training Base</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rocket Force Experimental Base</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Support Force</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Space Unit</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Warfare Units</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Districts</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Combined Arms Brigades

The Joint Theatre Commands comprise of Group armies and the divisions under those group armies are being converted into combined arms brigades. An assessed organisation of the combined armed brigades is given below:-

![Figure 5 - Combined Arms BDE](image)

**Heavy Artillery Brigade**

As part of the reforms heavy artillery brigades are being raised. An organisational lay-out of this has been given in the figure given below. These artillery brigades are expected to form part of the Group Armies.

![Figure 6 - Heavy Arty BDE](image)

**PLA SSF**

Among all the reforms that PLA is undergoing, the most important one is the creation of the PLA SSF. In Xi’s own words said during the inauguration of the PLA SSF, “the Strategic Support Force is a new-type combat force to
maintain national security and an important growth point of the PLA’s combat capabilities.” (Shaohui, 2016) This force is being studied in detail because it is felt that this force will be the battle winning factor in all China’s future wars.

PLA SSF is not a full-fledged service. This new force is likely to have two major domains (PLA Strategic Support Force, 2017). First one is the Space Operations. China’s Space Programme was under the General Armament Department (GAD) prior to the latest reforms. Though China’s officially stated policy is non militarisation of space, the very fact that her space programme was under GAD implied that there is a significant military content in that programme. From 10 satellites at the turn of the century, China’s satellite constellation has increased to 181 satellites (Scientists, 2016) and the number is constantly growing. China’s satellites include weather observation, earth observation, environmental monitoring, remote sensing and navigation satellites. In addition, she is pursuing a space station project called Tian Gong, a moon programme called Chang’e and manned space craft programme called Shen Zhou. In August 2016, she launched a Quantum Satellite. As per Xinhua, “The (Quantum) satellite is designed to establish ultra-secure quantum communications by transmitting uncrackable keys from space to the ground”. (Xinhua, 2016) Some analysts also attribute teleportation capability to this satellite (Jeffrey Lin P. S., 2016). In October 2016, China launched a micro satellite named Banxing 2 from her space station Tian Gong 2 (Companion Satellite released from Tiangong-2 Space Lab for Orbital Photo Shoot, 2016). Earlier there were reports that a Chinese micro satellite passed a mere 45 Km (Kevin Pollpeter, 2015) from the International Space Station. All these indicate that China's space capabilities are good and improving further. This capability will be now under the PLA SSF.

The second important capability that is likely to pass into the hands of the PLA SSF is the Information Warfare (IW) Capability. Under this domain the PLA SSF is likely to have the Psychological Operations, offensive and defensive cyber operations and the electronic warfare capabilities (Davidson, 2016). There has been no mention of psychological operations being part of the PLA SSF. However, it is one of the important components of Information
Warfare and therefore, it is likely to be handled by this newly created force. Moreover, psychological operations forms part of the Three Warfares that China practices. Chinese PLA is one of the few armies that relies heavily on psychological operations and has invested heavily in cyber warfare. Each Military Area Command had a cyber-unit. These are likely to be reorganised and affiliated to the Theatre Commands. It is a known fact that she has civilian entities incorporated for the cyber warfare task (IV, 2016). China was by far the largest source of international hacking attacks, with 41 per cent of the world’s attacks to her credit (Staff, 2013). China watchers will also recall that a Cyber Unit 61398 was located in Shanghai in 2013. Her cyber warfare capabilities have been experienced by many countries including advanced countries like the USA. Needless to say that India has also been one of the victims of such cyber-attacks. There is a huge radar network that she has built up all along the coastal areas and her border with other countries. All these capabilities will also now be under the PLA SSF. A diagrammatic organisation of the PLA SSF is given in the Figure below:

*FIGURE 7 - EXPECTED ORGANISATION OF PLA SSF*
Human Resources for PLA SSF

In order to constitute this force, manpower has been drawn from PLA’s No 1 Department (Operations), No 2 Department (Intelligence), No 3 Department (Technical Reconnaissance), No 4 Department (Electronic Counter Measures and Radar) and Informationisation Department (which is also sometimes known as No 5 Department). From the departments from which manpower has been drawn to create the PLA SSF one can clearly understand the role and mission of this force (Sino Defence, 2017).

Mission of PLA SSF

Mission of the PLA SSF is to enable battle field operations in Aerospace, Space, Cyber and Electromagnetic battle fields. In the Space Domain, this will involve, target tracking and reconnaissance, operation of the Beidou navigational satellites (35th and 36th satellites out of the planned 35 operational satellites constellation have been launched so far) (Jones, 2018), and management of reconnaissance satellites. In the cyber space, it will involve both offensive and defensive cyber operations. Jamming and Disrupting enemy’s radars and communications and protecting China’s radars and communications from enemy’s attacks through Electronic Counter Measures will also be the mission of the PLA SSF. Another major mission that has been given to the PLA SSF is to protect China’s financial security and security of peoples’ lives (Narasimhan, 2016). This mission enables the PLA SSF to support China’s interests at home and abroad. It is in consonance with the role and mission enunciated for China’s Armed Forces in her 2015 White Paper that goes beyond China’s territory.

Command and Control

PLA SSF will be controlled centrally by the CMC (Costello, 2016). It will have its units and corresponding command and control staff in each of the
Theatre Commands. The organisation at the Theatre Command Level is likely to have a dual command and control system as the PLA Navy and Airforce had in the avatar prior to the reforms. While they will be placed under the Theatre Command, for technical control they will be under the CMC. CMC will also be responsible for manning and equipping the PLA SSF. This system will enable the Theatre Commands to benefit from the capabilities of the PLA SSF without directly getting involved in equipping and training the units. CMC is likely to take care of the equipping, training and the capability building of this force. A diagrammatic representation of the expected command and control of the PLA SSF is given at Figure 8.

**FIGURE 8 – ORGANISATION OF PLA SSF IN THEATRE COMMANDS**

In these reforms PLA SSF with higher level units have been placed under the CMC thereby enabling the PLA under the theatre commands to concentrate on operations. CMC will have the direct supervision on the sensitive space and cyber domains. The capabilities of Space, Cyber and Electronic warfare can be exploited better by all services of the armed forces of China. Earlier, since these were under General Staff Department and General Armament Department, there were drawbacks in sharing the inputs with other
services. This force will enable better joint-ness amongst the services. Though it is not a full-fledged service it will draw its importance from being directly under the CMC and the kind of capabilities that it is expected to possess.

**PLA Rocket Force**

In the present round of military reforms, the Second Artillery Force was upgraded from a Branch to a service equivalent to China’s Army, Navy and the Air Force. Xi Jinping described the PLA Rocket Force as a "core of strategic deterrence, a buttress to the country's position as a major power, and an important aspect of national security." He made this statement when he visited the Headquarters of the Force in Beijing on 26 September 2016. PLA RF has both the conventional and strategic missiles. When the latest military reforms were announced there was a question as to whether the conventional missiles will get delegated to the Theatre Commanders. It is by and large sure now that the PLA RF will be centrally controlled by the Central Military Commission (CMC) (Clover, 2016). The reason for this could well be that when a missile is launched, it is extremely difficult to make out whether it is a conventional one or the nuclear tipped strategic one. Should a theatre commander pre-maturely decide to launch a missile, it may result in an escalation of the conflict that could spin out of control.

As per the latest US Department of Defence report on China’s Military Capabilities released in August 2018 (Defence, 2018), China’s missile holdings are as follows:

**FIGURE 9 – MISSILE HOLDINGS IN PLA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYSTEM</th>
<th>NUMBER OF MISSILES</th>
<th>LAUNCHERS</th>
<th>ESTIMATED RANGE (KM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICBM</td>
<td>75 - 100</td>
<td>50 - 75</td>
<td>5400 – 13000+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRBM</td>
<td>200 - 300</td>
<td>100 - 125</td>
<td>1500+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRBM</td>
<td>1000 - 1200</td>
<td>250 - 300</td>
<td>300 - 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLCM</td>
<td>200 - 300</td>
<td>40 - 55</td>
<td>1500+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Raising of Missile Brigades**

Brigades with DF 41 missiles that are likely to be inducted soon have been raised. The organisation of the new DF 41 Missile Brigades is given below:

**FIGURE 10 - TWO x DF 41 MISSILE BRIGADES**

- Bde HQ
- 4 x BN
- 1 x LAUNCHER
- 4 x MISILES

Other than the upgradation to a service, no major change is expected in the capabilities of the PLA RF.

**PLA Airborne Corps (Global Security).**

**FIGURE 11 - PLA AIRBORNE TROOPS**

- PLA AB Tps
  - 2x Regts (Academy of AB tps)
  - From one parachute one gun to combined Air force Corps
  - AB Bdes x 6 (127,128,130,131, 133,134)
  - SPEC Ops Bde
  - Comb sp Bde (Comms Engg, Chem def)
  - Air Tpt Bde
Air Assault Brigades (China Defense Blog, 2017).

FIGURE 12 - 121 & 161 AIR ASLT BDES (SOUTHERN & CENTRAL THEATRE COMDS – 83 & 75 GP ARMIES

Effects on the PLA

The present round of military reforms in the PLA is likely to radically change the way PLA operates. There are a number of inferences that can be drawn from these reforms. PLA Ground Forces were the most powerful and they dominated the military scene in China. With these reforms the power and influence of the ground forces will be reduced considerably. Chief of General Staff will lose oversight of military training, and education, mobilisation, strategic planning, electronic warfare, cyber units, and human resources management. Human resources management will be done by the Political Works department. The CMC will get involved in day to day functioning of the armed forces. This aspect is likely to adversely affect the functioning of the CMC. Earlier, the CMC had a buffer which it could use effectively to do strategic thinking and planning. After the reforms, the PLA will concentrate more on operational issues related to combat and territorial defence. Separating the departments to form the PLA SSF will enable greater exploitation of the resources by all the services. This will facilitate in increasing the joint operation capabilities. Overall, PLA is likely emerging as a leaner and meaner force better equipped to carry out joint operations.
Security Implications for India

India needs to increase her deterrence capability so that caution is placed on China not to enter into a conflict due to the enhanced capabilities that she may achieve due to the reforms. Creation of the PLA SSF and increased testing of missiles by China in the recent past will enable her to launch a protracted non-contact warfare. The non-contact phase of operations will aim to degrade Indian armed forces’ ability to fight a war effectively. This phase will mainly be focussed on space based operations and cyber warfare. Since these domains do not have territorial limitations and activities in these fields have absolute deniability, actions carried out in these domains cannot be deemed as acts of war in its earlier sense. China follows the principle of Active Defence. Principle of active defence implies the China need not necessarily wait for an adversary to launch an attack on her soil. She can take proactive measures to pre-empt her adversary’s attack. PLA SSF will be central to this concept. PLA SSF will provide an information umbrella to her armed forces. This will reduce the Observe, Orient, Decide and Act (OODA) loop and also reduce the time for PLA to react to any of adversary’s actions. India needs to prepare herself for such an eventuality. India also needs to improve her space and information warfare capabilities. PLA RF will be able to offset the disadvantage that the PLA Airforce faces due to the high altitude terrain in the Tibetan Plateau. Therefore, India needs to cater for redundancies in her operational and civil infrastructure. To counter the PLA RF, India needs to continue on the path of developing and attaining an effective ballistic missile defence capability.

India needs to monitor PLA SSF’s space assets and develop systems to safeguard own assets. Since this force has all the space and cyber assets of China placed under it, India needs to harden, isolate, and protect critical infrastructure and military networks. India also needs to synergise offensive and defensive cyber capability. There have been talks of China developing laser and particle beam weapons. Chinese call them assassin’s mace weapons. These are likely to be launched from space and likely to be part of the PLA
SSF. Therefore, India needs to protect her networks and harden them against such weapons. One of the major efforts by the PLA SSF is likely to be cyber warfare. India needs to synergise her efforts in this field. Separate domains need to be created for offensive and defensive cyber warfare. She also needs separate set of people to carry out offensive cyber operations. There are a number of agencies involved in cyber operations. Their efforts need to be synergised.

China follows a concept of three wars (Mattis, 2018). They are Psychological, Media (Public Opinion) and Legal Wars. Of these Psychological Warfare is likely to be part of the PLA SSF. In India, there has been no effort that can be seen in the open source domain regarding psychological operations. There is also a feeling that psychological operations are done only during war. This is a misnomer. Psychological operations need to be carried out in continuum. India needs to create a structure at national level to do this and thereafter incorporate all the agencies that are needed into it.

As explained earlier, PLA is improving its airborne capability. It is also increasing the Marine Corps strength to 100,000 (Jeffrey Lin P. W., 2017). This expeditionary capability that the PLA is acquiring may manifest in India’s neighbourhood. Moreover, China may resort to exporting weapons and equipment that are being replaced by the more modern ones to countries in India’s neighbourhood. That will increase their dependency on China. India needs to be prepared for this.

PLA Navy has commissioned 84 ships in the last five years. While many of them are replacement for old ships, PLA Navy is emerging as a more capable navy. Such a navy when it starts operating away from its shores, will need bases. Djibouti is the first overseas base that China has acquired. More Chinese bases in the Indian Ocean are likely in the future. Due to the geographical advantage, India has been the first responder in this region. With
increased number of bases China may compete for that space thereby reducing India’s influence.

If China feels that the military power differential is larger between India and China due to the military reforms then she may harden her stand on the border issue. Due to the reforms, China will become more equipment heavy and, therefore, more energy dependent. Competition for energy resources is likely to increase between India and China.

China and Pakistan have a very close relationship. China seems to be convinced that this relationship is important for her strategically. She is likely to increase her military assistance to Pakistan. If that happens it will embolden Pakistan to carry out the nefarious activities that she has been carrying on with and impinge on India’s national security.

In sum, China’s PLA is likely to emerge as a force capable of carrying out joint operations that is a basic necessity for winning modern wars. India’s armed forces should be ready to face such a capability. This enhanced capability of the PLA is likely to impinge on India’s influence in the region. India needs to be prepared with alternatives to overcome this phenomenon.

References


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