



# DEFENCE AND DIPLOMACY

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## Special Issue: China

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of the *Defence and Diplomacy* journal is in continuation with our series of theme-based issues. The theme for this Special Issue is 'China' which should not come as any surprise considering the many recent happenings in our neighbourhood that have the unmistakable stamp of China written all across. From the South China Sea to the Horn of Africa, China has been making concerted attempts to 'colonise' the region on the strength of its economic might, reminiscent of the colonial era of the past few centuries. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Maritime Silk Road announced by President Xi Jinping are being likened to the Marshall Plan of the 20th century – something that the Chinese strongly deny. According to a Washington-based Think Tank, the eight trillion USD outlay for infrastructure development under this initiative is likely to entrap the smaller nations into a debt trap from which they would find it very difficult to recover.

On the domestic front, Xi Jinping is determined to rein in those who do not respect the law. In his crackdown on corruption, he has not spared even senior officers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The arrest of a famous Chinese film star – Fan Bingbing – on charges of tax evasion is meant to showcase the seriousness of the Chinese government to carry out the presidential decree against corruption.

Xi's ascent to power after assuming the presidency in 2012 has eclipsed the persona of the heretofore two most venerated Chinese leaders – Chairman Mao and Deng Xiaoping. While Xi's drive against corruption – including that against the PLA leadership – has been welcomed by the people, it has also led to apprehension of a potential return to autocratic, one-man rule.

To all external appearances, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) remains unfazed in the face of criticism over the abolition of the term limits for the president/vice president. Posters in Shanxi University suggest that the students don't accept Xi as their leader. This, along with widespread unrest and demonstrations, puts the onus squarely

on Xi Jinping to prove that he is indeed a worthy leader – one who is capable of delivering on the promise of the China Dream. **Jayadeva Ranade** sets the stage with the first article that examines the real turmoil in the Chinese interior following the abolition of the term limits for the president/vice president.

The “third era” of the fifth generation of Chinese leadership under Xi Jinping is predicted to change the lives of millions of Chinese, albeit with greater confidence that the future of China and the fate of the world are now inseparable. Amongst all this rhetoric, the realisation of the Chinese Dream is still predicated on the leadership’s ability to resolve the ongoing trade wars with the US to China’s advantage and also overcome the rising domestic unrest. Only then, will China be able to chart the course towards realising its two centennial goals slated for 2020 and 2049. The pronouncements of Xi Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Qingdao on June 10, 2018, to “....accommodate each other’s core interests and major concerns” are, however, not borne out by deeds, viz. the military build-up in the South China Sea. That this activity has created a ‘scare’ among the weak neighbours in the region would be stating the obvious. This Chinese ‘doublespeak’ exemplifies the adage “speaking with a forked tongue” comprehensively. Also, China’s ‘new diplomacy’ views the dominant state in South Asia with suspicion, largely on account of the internal conflicts prevalent in its own domestic periphery (Xinjiang and Tibet). This, then, is the compelling force – besides the BRI agenda – for Xi to strengthen China’s relations with countries in India’s neighbourhood, viz. Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The ‘debt trap’ that has ensnared Sri Lanka has, however, put the other nations on alert against the dangers of the ‘Chinese embrace’. This is further elaborated in the second article by **Sanjeev Kumar** and **Madhu Bhalla**.

In the next article, **Shalini Chawla** traces the beginnings of the Sino-Pak alliance – something that has continued to grow over the years since 1951 when Pakistan recognised the People’s Republic of China; Pakistan was amongst the first (India was the first) non-Communist countries to recognise China. The most significant aspect of this alliance – meant to checkmate India – was the assistance provided by China to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons programme.

Military assistance to Pakistan – particularly following the US sanctions post the 1965 War with India – nudged Pakistan into an even tighter embrace with the Chinese when Pakistan attempted to diversify its sources of military arms imports. Although China continues to support Pakistan's military development today as the biggest supplier of arms, it has maintained that the resolution of the Kashmir issue be done bilaterally by India and Pakistan. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is China's flagship project of its Belt and Road Initiative and China has invested heavily in ensuring that it succeeds. Is Pakistan developing cold feet towards meeting its end of the bargain – in view of the likely dangers of falling into a debt trap (*a la* Sri Lanka)? This will only emerge in the years ahead. With Pakistan being placed on the grey list by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the new leadership in Pakistan has its work cut out to rein in the terrorist organisations and stop terror funding if it wants to avoid being placed on the black list by the FATF.

After restructuring the military apparatus in 2016 – with the creation of five Theatre Commands in place of the seven Military Regions – Xi's emphasis on innovation and technological development appears to be at the core of 'enriching the state and strengthening its military power'. China's annual spend on the military has been approximately USD 150 billion in the last few years, with the official budget for 2018 standing at USD 175 billion (an 8 percent increase over the previous year). The PLA Academy of Military Sciences has been identified by Xi Jinping as the leading institution for scientific research in the military; with the National Defence University and the National Defence Technical University also being placed directly under the Central Military Commission (CMC). Greater emphasis has been placed on civil-military integration – its effectiveness, however, will only emerge in the coming years as observed by **Bhavna Singh** in her article "CMC and Propaganda under Xi Jinping: Invoking Military Nationalism to Address the Crisis of Morale".

The unfolding of the first televised war in 1991 sent shivers down the spine of the leadership in China to imagine what fate awaited their country in case the US was to train its military might against China. The antiquated military that China possessed at the time – that had so far relied on the People's War doctrine, predicated on strength in

numbers – appeared to be no match to the armed forces of the US. The systematic annihilation of the Iraqi Republican Guard and the Iraqi Integrated Air Defence System (ADS), brought about by the effective use of technology – including stealth and space-based assets (to improve the accuracy of weapons) – gave the US and coalition forces a decisive edge against the Iraqis. While the PLA was still recovering from the existential dilemma posed by the US juggernaut during Op Desert Storm, the intervention by the USN Seventh Fleet carrier battle groups in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 completed the humiliation faced by a nation that was aspiring to be a regional power. Serious introspection and a determination to never be humiliated again in its own backyard set off a chain of events that produced the Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) capability and an improved People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF); development of both of which was aimed at the US being the primary adversary. How far the PLAAF has travelled on this journey is covered by **Ravinder Chhatwal** in the next article.

Ever since the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Communist nation that had been rent asunder by the 'century of humiliation' looked at its big brother – the Soviet Union – for ideological and military aid, more so as it was sucked into the Korean War within a year of its formation. Creation of its Military Industrial Complex (MIC) along Soviet lines and manufacture of aircraft, tanks and ships – with assistance provided by Soviet engineers – laid the foundation of a strong indigenous defence manufacturing capability that has been the strength of the nation till date. This was despite the ideological parting of ways in the early Sixties when the Soviets unilaterally withdrew all their engineers from China. The impact of the Soviet style of functioning was, however, all too pervasive and deeply ingrained into the psyche of the Chinese, to the extent that almost sixty years later, the Chinese still attempt to mimic almost every big Russian achievement. The Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014 that finally resulted in the annexation of Crimea has been studied by the Chinese leadership very carefully. While the Russians used their 'Little Green Men' – Russian troops with no identifying badges on their person to determine their nationality – for their intervention in Ukraine/Crimea, the Chinese have begun using

their 'Little Blue Men' to terrorise fishermen in the South China Sea through the use of the maritime militia and Chinese Coast Guard. While the Russian intervention in Ukraine/Crimea has been placed as the epitome of 'grey zone conflict', the effort of the Chinese in this 'aping strategy' has produced results of its own. **Pooja Bhatt** explains this further in the next article.

China's policy towards Nepal has always been predicated on the 'uncomfortable' fact (for China) of the many 'Tibetans-in-exile' who are living in Nepal where their presence can (and has in the past) lead to disturbances in the neighbouring Tibetan region – a declared red line for China. Any adverse impact on China's economic development – as a result of such disturbances – would be most unwelcome by the Chinese; hence the 'strict' (unofficial) diktat to the Nepalese government by the Chinese for ensuring the tightest control over the Tibetan population in Nepal. Tibet remains at the very core of China's engagement with Nepal. **Rishi Gupta** examines the implications of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli with China during his visit to the country in June 2018.

Djibouti occupies a strategic position in the Horn of Africa as it overlooks the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal. With the establishment of a military base in Djibouti in July 2017, the Chinese have virtually ensured their ability to influence the SLOCs that carry almost 8 percent of the world's trade and 45 percent of Europe's energy demand. China's significant investment in the region through massive infrastructure development in Djibouti and Ethiopia underscores its intent: stay rooted in the region to enjoy the geostrategic advantages this brings. The dynamics of the Chinese presence in the region and its implications for India have been amply covered by **Sarvureshth Dhammi** in this extremely informative and analytical article.

In the penultimate article, **Raj Mongia** examines the aftermath of the Doklam episode and its impact on the bilateral relations between India and China. He analyses the tough stand taken by the Indian military, the Indian polity, and the Indian diplomatic corps to defuse a potentially dangerous situation without yielding to Chinese

brinkmanship. The continued bilateral engagement with China post Wuhan and the impact of various meetings between the two leaders (of India and China) are also examined.

In the final article of this issue, **Samatha Mallempati** traces the historical relationship between Sri Lanka and China to the present times.

This issue also carries a Book Review carried out by **Manpreet Sethi** on Yogesh Joshi and Frank O'Donnell's book *India in North Asia: Evolution of Regional Forces, Perceptions and Policies*.

Happy reading

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Joshi', with a small mark below it.

# IS XI JINPING REALLY AS POWERFUL AS HIS IMAGE SUGGESTS?

JAYADEVA RANADE

Chinese President Xi Jinping's appointment to China's three top posts, of general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) and China's president, for the first time simultaneously in 30 years, clearly indicated the strong support he received from the Party's veteran and senior cadres. Since his appointment to these three posts at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, within a short span of five years, Xi Jinping has concentrated unprecedented power and sought to build himself an image virtually on par with Mao Zedong. Today, he heads 15 Central Small Leading Groups – the most powerful decision-making bodies in Communist China. Amidst speculation that Xi Jinping may have stepped beyond the mandate initially given to him – of restoring the CCP's legitimacy as the sole ruling party and promoting Party ideology – recent events suggest that Xi Jinping has perhaps begun going beyond that.

Soon after assuming office, Xi Jinping began building his popular image. In sharp contrast to the coverage received by his predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, in the official media, Xi Jinping has ensured

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that either his photograph or activities figure in China's official media each day. Whereas the official media reported on Hu Jintao on average 2,000 times a year and Jiang Zemin was featured over 3,000 times, Xi Jinping has averaged 5,000 times a year. Xi Jinping's portraits and statues are also reported to have been put up, at times, replacing those of Deng Xiaoping. Unusually, Deng Xiaoping's role in 'opening up and reform' has not received special mention during this 40th anniversary year. In fact, soon after Xi Jinping unveiled the strategic geoeconomic initiative of 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR), later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and adopted a more assertive foreign policy, thus, discarding Deng Xiaoping's dictum of 'lie low, bide your time', his acolytes began saying that China has embarked on another 30-year era under Xi Jinping, like those of Mao and Deng Xiaoping earlier!

Taking cognisance of the widespread discontent caused by corruption in China, Xi Jinping unleashed a vigorous anti-corruption campaign the ambit of which was within months extended to include the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The campaign, which is the most sustained and penetrating that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has witnessed, was widely welcomed. A number of high-level officials were apprehended and punished, and by the time of the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, it was officially reported that over 176 officials of the rank of central vice-minister and above, more than 145 officers of, and above, the rank of major general and 14,000 officers in the PLA and a million Party members at different levels had been caught. However, the initial applause with which the Chinese people welcomed Xi Jinping's far-reaching anti-corruption campaign, especially that targeting the PLA, appears to be yielding to mounting apprehension of a return to a potentially autocratic one-man rule.

Conscious of the damage done during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution decade when millions died and suffered, Deng Xiaoping had sought to build checks against the emergence again of an authoritarian one-man rule. While the CCP general secretary remained the preeminent authority, there was an effort at separation of powers with the creation of the posts of chairman of the CMC and president of the People's Republic of China (PRC). A two-term limit

on the tenure of the PRC president was imposed and a convention established over two Party Congresses that Party cadres would be ineligible for promotion to the Politburo (PB) and Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) in case they are 65 years or older. There was also the effort for decisions by consensus, with the Party chief being *primus inter pares*.

Indications are now beginning to surface of resistance to Xi Jinping dismantling these barriers and becoming so powerful. The decision to abolish the term limits for the posts of president and vice president appear to have been the trigger for the opposition. After news emerged on February 25, 2018, that the Chinese Communist Party had proposed abolishing term limits for China's president and vice-president from the State Constitution, an old meme comparing President Xi Jinping to Winnie the Pooh resurfaced on Sina Weibo and Tencent's WeChat. It elicited numerous online reactions. The state-owned CCTV's report on this proposal was shared nearly 10,000 times within hours before the comments section was shut down.

The same day, Li Datong, a former editor of the official newspaper of China's Communist Youth League (CYL), issued an "open" statement on WeChat addressed to Beijing's deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC). Li Datong wrote that abolishing term limits would "sow the seeds of chaos. If there are no term limits on a country's highest leader, then we are returning to an imperial regime. My generation has lived through Mao. That era is over. How can we possibly go back to it?" He ended with a call to the NPC deputies not to vote in support of the Bill. Separately, Wang Ying, a businesswoman, who has advocated government reforms, wrote on WeChat that the Communist Party's proposal was "an outright betrayal" and "against the tides." She said, "I know that you (the government) will dare to do anything and one ordinary person's voice is certainly useless. But I am a Chinese citizen, and I don't plan on leaving. This is my motherland too!" Both WeChat posts were soon deleted, but not before they had been shared thousands of times.

The First Session (March 5-20, 2018) of the Thirteenth National People's Congress (NPC), which consolidated the process begun by Xi Jinping of the Party being preeminent and dominating every sphere of endeavour in China, added to Xi Jinping's preeminent

status when it amended the Constitution to abolish term limits on the posts of China's president and vice-president. While the 19th Party Congress last October invested Xi Jinping with greater power, his status was further enhanced when at its first meeting after the 19th Party Congress, the Party's new 25-member Politburo described him with the honorific – *lingxui* - hitherto used only for Mao! Soon thereafter, the official CCP newspaper *People's Daily* publicly acknowledged Xi Jinping's elevated status by referring to him as "the helmsman of the nation" and the "guide of the people", both terms very similar to those used to refer to Mao Zedong. During the heyday of the Cultural Revolution, Mao was called the "Great Helmsman" and "Great Teacher". Highlighting this emerging personality cult was the remark on March 8, 2018, on the sidelines of the NPC session when Wang Guosheng, Party secretary of Qinghai province which includes a part of Tibet, claimed that the rural people of the province – which includes large portions of erstwhile Tibet – referred to Xi Jinping as a 'living Buddha'!

Popular resentment at Xi Jinping's moves to further concentrate power and elevate his stature seems to be spreading among China's intellectuals and youth. On March 13, a poster captioned "Protest China's Pseudo-Constitution and Xi Jinping" appeared in the building of the Students Union of the Shanxi University of China, on the campus billboards and other public places in the university. The poster was almost identical to those put up by overseas Chinese students in schools in different countries. These posters, in English and Chinese, stated: "We never recognized the Chinese Communist Party, pseudo-Constitution, or pseudo-chairman;" "He is not my chairperson," etc. This is the first time that a protest poster identical to those put up by overseas Chinese students has appeared in a Chinese university. One Shanxi University student who posted the posters said in an interview that Xi Jinping is repeating the history of Mao Zedong!

Later, on May 4, a 73-year old Peking University alumnus, Fan Liqun, despite the usual heavy security presence in the area, posted a 24-page big-character poster near the Biology Building and Geological Building of Peking University. The title was "Maintaining the Party Constitution. China must be resolute. Opposing individual worship

and sticking to the Constitution, state leaders must implement the tenure system, that is, the limited system." He was soon escorted away by public security personnel and student Party activists but news of the incident attracted journalists who contacted several departments of Peking University on May 7 seeking details. Fan Liqin wrote: "I've been through the ages. I'm a survivor who has suffered hardships. In my lifetime, there are people who dare to engage in personal worship of my own and I have never dreamed." He criticised Xi Jinping as "just for more power, for a long time, power has great enthusiasm, greediness is a common problem among people in ancient and modern China and abroad, it is addictive like opium. This is bad psychology and behaviour." Another alumnus of the university praised Fan Liqin and added that he reflects Deng Xiaoping's line and so has support within the Party and that "the strength of his big poster should not be underestimated."

Sporadic protests have continued indicating the restiveness among China's intellectuals and students caused not only by the move towards increased authoritarianism, but also by the steadily growing stringent Party controls on academia. On July 4 morning, a young woman live-streamed herself splashing ink on an image of Xi Jinping in front of a Shanghai office building while speaking out against one-party rule in China. The woman, surnamed Dong, shouted in protest: "I oppose Xi Jinping's autocratic rule and tyranny!" and then splashed black ink onto Xi Jinping's face in a "Chinese dream" poster located on the street in front of the HNA Building in Pudong. She also claimed to have been under Chinese Communist Party "mind control" for the past year, asking international organisations to intervene and investigate this issue. Dong then went on to taunt the Chinese president, declaring, "Xi Jinping, I'm waiting here for you to catch me! I splashed ink onto your portrait in front of your property." Around 3 pm that day, Dong posted a photo on Twitter of what appeared to be multiple officers standing outside her door and wrote, "Right now, there are people in uniform outside my door. Once I get changed, I will go out. I haven't done anything wrong. The ones who have done wrong are the people and organizations that hurt me."

On July 24, Unirule, the liberal economic think-tank in Beijing, published an essay in the form of a 'Ten Thousand Word Petition' by

Tsinghua University legal scholar Xu Zhangrun which has sparked wide interest inside China and abroad. The article was republished on the website of the Hong Kong-based Initium Media and has been widely shared and discussed by intellectuals and scholars inside and outside China. It is essentially a protest against the China that Xi Jinping is hoping to create. Initium said in a tweet that “this text carries out a systematic critique of the retrograde tendencies in Chinese social and political life, in particular since the end of 2017.” It explicitly points out, and warns against, the danger of the return to totalitarianism, and calls for a stop to the cult of personality and the resumption of term limits on the post of the state chairman. The piece has become one of the few direct criticisms of contemporary ills in China among the intellectual class. Xu Zhangrun ended the essay with: “I’m done talking; I leave my own life and death to destiny, the rise and fall of the nation to Heaven.” Xu Zhangrun was on an academic tour in Japan when the essay was published and there is no word yet on what awaits him when he returns, but he is likely to be penalised. Xu Zhangrun is, according to reports, suffering from cancer.

There was another protest, though masked, on August 1, 2018. Some alumnus of the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing published a letter calling for the dismissal of another professor, Hu Angang, for “misleading policy-making”. Born in 1953, Hu Angang is an economics professor at Tsinghua University and a known strong supporter of socialism and the CCP. The call for Hu Angang’s dismissal can be viewed as criticism of Xi Jinping’s policies, especially on the economy. The protests have not, however, been confined to universities and students. There has been at least one indication of a faculty member of the Central Party School in Beijing recalling, in a thinly-veiled criticism, Deng Xiaoping’s policy of ‘lie low, bide your time’. In September 2017, just prior to the 19th Party Congress, Luo Jianbo, head of the China Foreign Policy Centre at the Central Party School in Beijing cautioned against over-estimating China’s strength and said the people need to guard against “arrogance” and “conceit”. He recalled that though the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the US had already surpassed that of Great Britain in 1900, it had waited patiently till the middle of the century before it fully took on its role

as world leader. He made particular mention in this context of the nationalist fervour generated by the BRI and the BRI Forum in April 2017.

There are other pools of discontent and dissatisfaction in China too. A WeChat group named “Changsha Tower Crane Operators Federation” posted an “open letter” on April 25 asking construction, crane, and mechanical equipment operators and engineers in China to trigger a wave of simultaneous strikes among crane operators around the country. It issued a call for a united strike on the eve of International Labour Day of May 1, in Changsha’s May First Square. On April 26, the spokesman for crane operators in Hainan published a video on Weibo calling on all operators in the province to join the national strike on the morning of May 1. On the same day, crane tower workers in Zigong, Sichuan province, held a demonstration demanding wage hikes. The following day, workers in the following eight cities in eight provinces also held banners and circulated photographs of their protests online. Protests were held in : Nanchang in Jiangxi, Tianshui in Gansu, Zhumadian in Henan, Xiantao in Hubei, Qingzhen in Guizhou, Huaian in Jiangsu, Hengyang in Hunan, Xiamen in Fujian. By April 30, crane operators staged demonstrations, held banners, called slogans with their demands, and shared photos or footage online, in 19 provinces and 27-30 cities.

On June 11, 2018, mass protests were staged by truck drivers across 9 provinces and municipalities in China to voice their anger over high costs, decreasing wages, excessive highway tolls, changing government policies and police harassment. Reports said some truck drivers shouted “Overthrow the CPC”.

Worth noting in these strikes were not the protests themselves, but that they were able to coordinate and organise the nationwide strikes. Considering that China’s security apparatus is pervasive and the CCP Central Committee’s Propaganda Department claims it can remove all offending posts within minutes, it is certainly of interest that both the organisations were able to organise the strike and communicate via WeChat. This suggests that elements in the CCP apparatus either connived with the strikers or were indicating passive resistance.

That opposition to Xi Jinping exists was hinted at by Ding Xuexiang, director of the CCP CC General Office and a close aide to Xi Jinping, at a meeting attended by departments under the Party Central Committee in February 2018. Ding Xuexiang said that almost all the officials who were investigated after the 18th National Congress had “political issues” and some even had the intention to “usurp the Party and seize power.” He revealed that over the past five years, more than 440 provincial level officials were the subject of investigations and most of them belonged to Jiang Zemin’s faction.

Xi Jinping’s policies have undoubtedly distressed numerous sections of Chinese society. People born around 1974 would know, including from accounts whispered by family members, how millions suffered in the tumultuous Cultural Revolution decade and those born earlier fear the recurrence of disorder and chaos. In the present times, the PLA has seen more than 40 percent of its officer strength depleted due to arrests on charges of corruption. Political commissars, who have been given enhanced powers, and auditors have ensured more stringent adherence to rules. Academics, students and Party members are subject to Party controls and supervision even in classrooms. The social credit management system has bluntly infringed the personal lives of people and is a constant reminder of the Party’s supervisory presence in their daily lives. After 30 years of relaxed controls and open door policy, the imposition of such strict controls by the Party will face resistance from the Chinese people who will be reluctant to be again put into an ideological straitjacket. The current trade war and strained relations with the US threaten to accelerate the slowdown of the Chinese economy. If that happens, Xi Jinping and the CCP leadership will face difficult times.

# CHINA'S NEW DIPLOMACY UNDER XI JINPING

MADHU BHALLA AND SANJEEV KUMAR

## INTRODUCTION

The announcement by Chinese President Xi Jinping of a “third era” in the history of Communist China is no empty pronouncement. Apart from Xi’s own ambitions to be enshrined with China’s greats, it speaks to the periodisation of China’s post 1950s experience from a new China, an emerging China, and a China which is now a great power. These are clear lines of transition. The first era of Mao Zedong and the second of Deng Xiaoping each changed the lives of millions of Chinese citizens, and global debates and power hierarchies. The “third era” of Xi will do the same but with greater confidence that the future of China and the fate of the world are now inseparable. It is no accident that Xi now speaks of the Chinese Dream, a “community of common destiny” and global values with “Chinese characteristics”. The era of low profiles and defensive positions is now over. Not surprisingly, the fifth generation of leadership, under the guidance of the great “helmsman” has put together a tool kit of concepts and strategies to meet the objectives of the “third era”.

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## MARKERS FOR THE "THIRD ERA"

Xi Jinping's speech at the 19th Party Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was remarkable for the way in which it distilled many of the ideas which will be the bedrock of the "third era". These echo some familiar debates and concepts from previous Party Congresses but the manner in which they were fine-tuned at the 19th Party Congress indicates a consensus on China's economic achievements, its global influence, and its unique and exemplary route to these achievements. The 19th Party Congress, Xi announced, was "a meeting of great importance taking place during the decisive stage in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects" and was being held "at a critical moment as socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era." This was an era where the "culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics (has)... blaz(ed) a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization... while preserving their independence, and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind." It was also "an era that sees China moving closer to centre-stage and making greater contributions to mankind" as it realises the "Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation."<sup>1</sup> Xi Jinping has built on the consensus around this set of beliefs to develop the tenets of a "new diplomacy".

## THE CHINESE DREAM

At the heart of the many different aspects of Xi's new diplomacy is the notion of the Chinese Dream. While the term is not new, having emerged in a more robust context as the title of a 2010 book by the PLA's Senior Col Liu Mingfu, Xi's version of it is less threatening.<sup>2</sup> The idea of the Chinese Dream was one part of the debate on China's "peaceful rise", a term that was quickly changed to "peaceful development" to

1. Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era", Speech delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017, *Xinhua* | 2017-11-03 17:17:13 | Editor: ZDhttp://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c\_136725942.htm. Accessed on January 27, 2018
2. Liu Mingfu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Position of China in the Post-US World* (Beijing: Zhonguo Youyi Press, 2010). Referenced in Alexander Lukin, *Pivot To Asia: Russia's Foreign Policy Enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New Delhi: Vij Books, 2017), p. 208; Jinping, *Ibid.*

assuage neighbourhood anxieties. But it has recently been recrafted to include the idea of “rejuvenating” a great civilisation and national pride in its modern achievements, both debates on course at least since Jiang Zemin. But the current definition of the Chinese Dream stands in stark contrast to the “century of humiliation” discourse, indicating a generational shift in China towards the country’s more assertive policies and larger presence abroad.

Given that the Chinese Dream is built on the reality of China’s current economic and political influence, it pulls together many strands in China’s global posture. First, the Chinese Dream places China on par with the US as a provider of public goods by proposing an alternative to the American Dream. Second, the Chinese Dream is an inclusive one for many developing nations which fall outside the liberal political framework. As Xi noted, “The dream of the Chinese people is closely connected with the dreams of the peoples of other countries.” Third, since the fulfilment of the Chinese Dream depends on a stable international order, China is likely to have more robust initiatives safeguarding that order. China’s twin centenary goals, one for the centenary celebrations of the founding of the CCP in 2020 when it intends to be a stable middle income economy and the other for the centenary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) when it hopes to become a global power, makes this all the more urgent.<sup>3</sup> These aspects of the Chinese Dream underscore Xi’s “major country diplomacy”, translated into interaction with the US on an equal level as also the projection of its regional and global interests as befits a big country.<sup>4</sup>

### **A COMMUNITY OF COMMON DESTINY**

Xi’s notion of the community of common destiny has become perhaps the most oft repeated concept in all major speeches by Chinese officials and scholars. While the concept of a community of common destiny was first used in 2007 in the context of Taiwan, Xi Jinping revived the concept during his September 2013 visit to Central Asia and then his

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3. Jinping, *Ibid.*

4. Thomas Heberer, “China in 2013: The Chinese Dream’s Domestic and Foreign Policy Shifts,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 54, no. 1, *A Survey of Asia in 2013* (January/February 2014), pp. 113-128. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2014.54.1.113> Accessed: 20-08-2018 07:41 UTC. Accessed on August 20, 2018.

visit to Southeast Asia in October the same year. He elaborated this idea at the Boao Forum in March 2015 as a community based on respect and equality, concerns drawn from the Five Principles of Coexistence, a set of principles fashioned at the height of the Cold War and meant to draw red lines around sovereign rights. The elaboration hit the right notes in reiterating solidarity among members but obscured the question of whose destiny was being defined as common and how this common destiny was to be realised. In fact, there seemed to be many different communities categorised by neighbourhood, regions, continents and, finally, all of "humankind". By the time Xi's speech at the 19th Party Congress highlighted the promotion of "a community with a shared future for mankind" the contours of the concept and its practical implications were clearer. The idea was seen in China as providing a direction to the evolution of the global governance system, of translating China's confidence into a role of provider of global ideas and as recognising contemporary shifts in global power. Hosting the 22nd Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Meeting in Beijing, the G20 2016 Summit in Hangzhou, and the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Summit in Xiamen was seen as China's dynamic leadership of multilateral institutions and engagement in global governance, with evolving a new kind of multilateral order and establishing a stronger set of partnerships which would apprentice the world to China's new global posture.

Central to the notion of a community of common destiny is Xi's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which hopes to create a common interest in Chinese style development along its trajectories. Leading Chinese experts like Tsinghua Professor Yan Xuetong have identified China's BRI as the key to realise Xi Jinping's vision to "turn China's neighbourhood areas into a community of common destiny". The Belt and Road Initiative has made headway since its announcement in 2013, with China committed to expensive infrastructure projects in its neighbourhood. What had started out as part of a "going out" strategy for Chinese corporations after the 2008 global financial crisis and the contraction of the global export markets, conceptualised as an ambitious geoeconomic initiative, one that would meet both domestic economic concerns as well as position China as a global

economic centre.<sup>5</sup> In the event, at the 19th Party Congress, it was enshrined in the Party's Constitution as an initiative in which the Party and its future were invested. However, many ambiguities exist both in the concept as well in its application. For one, the principle of equality and respect is not uniformly applied when it comes to regional security. In the Asia-Pacific and the South China Sea this is particularly noteworthy. A White Paper on "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation" (January 2017) notes: "Small and medium-sized countries need not and should not take sides among big countries".<sup>6</sup> This contradicts the idea of respect and equality that Xi placed at the centre of his concept. China's unilateral actions in militarising disputed islands in the South China Sea also do not uphold the notion that discussion and consultation are central to create a community of common destiny. Its investments in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), likewise, violate the respect for sovereign rights as far as India is concerned. Finally, China has not been able to square the circle of its own great power ambitions and its posture as a spokesperson for the developing South. At the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs (hereafter Foreign Affairs Conference) in June 2018, there was some irony in Xi's comment, "The major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics will endeavor to build a community with a shared future for mankind."<sup>7</sup>

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5. China's new investment in 53 countries along the BRI stood at \$11.18 billion between January and October 2017, accounting for 13 percent of total outbound investment in the period. New engineering contracts in 61 countries along the Belt and Road, were valued at \$102.07 billion, an increase of 21 percent year-on-year; business volume amounted to \$57.52 billion, a year-on-year increase of 9.1 percent. <http://english.mofcom.gov.cn/article/statistic/>. Accessed on January 28, 2018. Zheng Xin, "Chinese Investment in B&R Economies Exceeds \$70b." China has invested more than \$70 billion in countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative since its inception in 2013, with commodity trade exceeding \$5 trillion. China has set up 75 overseas economic and trade cooperation zones, with an investment exceeding \$27 billion and created jobs for more than 200,000 local people. In addition, China's Silk Road Fund has inked 19 projects with committed investment of \$7 billion. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201805/17/WS5afcf76ca3103f6866ee8fb6.html> Accessed on August 20, 2018.
  6. "China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation", January 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1429771.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml). Accessed on May 15, 2017.
  7. "Xi Jinping Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics", Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, June 2018, 2018/06/23 [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1571296.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1571296.shtml). Accessed on August 20, 2018.

## MAJOR COUNTRY DIPLOMACY

The objectives of the Chinese Dream and national rejuvenation are to be achieved by what Xi has called “major country diplomacy”.<sup>8</sup> The concept of major country diplomacy has evolved over time. While State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi saw its function in reshaping global relations towards an integrated “community of common destiny”<sup>9</sup>, Xi has provided a roadmap for its execution and to project a more dynamic diplomacy. Xi’s address at the Foreign Affairs Conference in 2018, where he elaborated the concept, was both an appeal for better diplomatic practices in taking China’s message to the world as well as the recognition that an ascendant China could least afford to ignore opposition and hostility to its rise. The Obama years saw a deteriorating relationship with the US, relations with Japan and South Korea were distinctly frosty, world opinion on the South China Sea arbitration was critical and the response of neighbours to the BRI was to step up to connectivity plans of their own. China’s core interests were being threatened.

At a more fundamental level, Xi has turned on the pressure for Party cadres to stick to the Party line on the “third era”. Xi’s speech at the 19th Party Congress was in large part an exhortation to support “the great struggle, great project, great cause, and great dream” outlined by him as important to achieving the ends of the “third era”. This translated in China’s foreign policy establishment as “enhancing the Party-building in institutions abroad so as to form a management mechanism catering to the requirements of the new era” and called on “foreign affairs cadres to ...upgrade their competency and overall quality” to meet the demands of an active and assertive foreign policy that will need to deal with the complexity of a multi-pronged foreign policy.<sup>10</sup>

The crux of the new diplomacy is to improve diplomatic communication, build a network of global partnerships, forge better

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8. “Major-Country Diplomacy”: CGTN airs six-episode political documentary series transcript. [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d517a4d77454464776c6d636a4e6e62684a4856/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d517a4d77454464776c6d636a4e6e62684a4856/share_p.html). Accessed on August 24, 2018.

9. “Chinese FM Highlights Diplomatic Agenda in 2018”, *Xinhua*, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/08/c\\_137025133.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/08/c_137025133.htm). Accessed on 24 August 2018

10 “习近平：努力开创中国特色大国外交新局面” available at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c\\_1123025806.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c_1123025806.htm), “Xi Jinping Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics”, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1571296.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1571296.shtml). Accessed on August 24, 2018.

relations with neighbours and other developing countries, be more active and confident in regional and international affairs<sup>11</sup> and “build a new platform for international cooperation and create new drivers of shared development” through the BRI.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, the National Institute of Strategic Communication (NISC), set up at Peking University in 2015, has two permanent offices in Islamabad and Karachi, the first along the BRI. The objective of these offices is to “foster effective dialogue” on issues related to the BRI.<sup>13</sup> Chinese experts maintain that China’s “major-country diplomacy” increases its capability to shape the world.

From a larger power shift perspective, Xi’s use of the “major country” label for China was also an assertive announcement of China’s global stature, in the same league with the only other major power. Xi’s reassurance to world leaders at Davos at the height of Trump’s disruptive announcements on globalisation, established this. Yet, as is often pointed out, major country diplomacy does not sit well with the nationalistic tone of either the Chinese Dream or of the notion of national rejuvenation. There is the additional question of how confident China feels in its ability to shape the global order according to Chinese characteristics, given its domestic concerns, the beginning of a trade war with its largest trade partner, and the fact that the global environment seems no longer to provide the stability that it needs to meet its two centennial goals.<sup>14</sup>

## CHINA’S NATIONAL CORE INTERESTS

The debate within China now distinguishes among core, important and ordinary interests. For Xi, as with Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin before him, core interests remain the reunification and territorial integrity

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11. Su Xiaohui, “Major-Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics”, [http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2018-03/14/content\\_40251823.htm](http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2018-03/14/content_40251823.htm). Accessed on August 2, 2018
  12. Yang Jiechi, “The 19th CPC National Congress and China’s Major Country Diplomacy in the New Era.” English Edition of *QiuShi Journal*, vol.10, no.1, issue no.34, January-March 2018. Updated: 2018-Feb-11 16:01 [http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-02/11/c\\_1122395899.htm](http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-02/11/c_1122395899.htm) (originally appeared in *QiuShi Journal, Chinese edition, No.23, 2017*). Accessed on August 20, 2018.
  13. <http://www.nisc.org.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=lists&catid=14>. Accessed on August 20, 2018.
  14. Kerry Brown, “China’s ‘Major-Country Diplomacy’ is a Balancing Act,” August 12, 2018, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/08/12/chinas-major-country-diplomacy-is-a-balancing-act/>. Accessed on August 20, 2018.

and security of China, its economic development and prosperity and internal stability.<sup>15</sup> Given the blowback to China's assertiveness on territorial issues both in the eastern seas and on the Indian frontier, there has been some effort to indicate a level of accommodation. It is noteworthy that while addressing the 18th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit at Qingdao on June 10, 2018, Xi said: "We should respect each other's choice of development paths and *accommodate each other's core interests* and major concerns". This is a welcome statement but one that has not yet had an impact on the Chinese military build-up in the disputed islands in the South China Sea.

Xi's focus on "national rejuvenation", the Chinese Dream and "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has added a new dimension to the definition of core interests tied as these concepts are to China's trajectory to a global power by the mid-century. Many of these interests are also tied to the position of the Party within China and its role in shaping and controlling domestic and external policy. Therefore, Xi's concern with strengthening the Party and bringing it back to its ideological roots, placing the Party at the centre of all strategic and domestic policy and reeducating the people on the role of the Party is not surprising. Over the last forty years, China's domestic social and political environment has been transformed and the Party and its ideology are no longer central to the people's lives in a marketised economy. Nationalism has become much more crucial as an organising principle. The preservation of power in the hands of the Party is seriously threatened and its ideology questioned. Much of Xi's efforts since coming to power has been directed to reviving the fortunes of the Party, the power of its leadership (now leader) and to its ability to present a strategic direction to China's rise, one that is capable of presenting an alternative to the neo-liberal model of growth and prosperity. Thus, "the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China; the greatest strength of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China; the Party is the highest force for political leadership."<sup>16</sup>

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15. n.7.

16. Jinping, n.1.

## SOUTH ASIA: QUEST FOR INFLUENCE

In the South Asian context, almost all of China's new diplomacy is at play. The notion of community, the BRI, the Chinese Dream and alternative frameworks for development are all applied to the policies around the South Asian market for trade and investment, connectivity potentials and power rivalries. However, the earlier objective to "change the distribution and relations of power in the region to secure its periphery"<sup>17</sup> still remains prominent given the territorial conflicts over borders with India and the fact that China's domestic periphery remains vulnerable to internal conflict. Therefore, the dominant state in South Asia has been viewed by China with an element of distrust. In this context, China has tried to deepen relations with the smaller countries of South Asia through an economic and cultural outreach. In brief, it could be said that China's relations with Nepal have been strengthened, especially in the context of the BRI initiative. China upgraded bilateral ties with Bangladesh to a strategic partnership of cooperation during President Xi's visit to the country in October, 2016. Further, it could be said that China and Pakistan are allied *de jure*. However, China's model of investment has not been appreciated by many in the region. Generally, Chinese companies import Chinese materials and equipment as well as labour. This creates tension with local populations. Further, lack of transparency about costs, interest rates and financial mechanisms pushes countries towards a 'debt trap'. The case of Sri Lanka has become an outstanding example.

Despite China's forays into the smaller states in South Asia, the bilateral relationship between India and China is one of the most significant bilateral relationships in the world. President Xi Jinping's visit to India (September 2014) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to China (May 2015) strengthened closer development partnership between the two countries. However, peace and tranquillity at the border has become a prerequisite for smooth development of bilateral relations in the last five years. China tried to change the status quo in Depsang (2013), Chumar (2014) and Doklam plateau (2017) in the border areas. This has negatively affected the

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17. Madhu Bhalla, "The Guiding Principles of China's Foreign Policy: The Persistence of Ideology," in C V Ranganathan and Sanjeev Kumar, eds., *China and the Eurasian Region: Geographic and Geopolitical Influences* (ICWA, 2018), p. 1.

relationship. While the journey from the informal summit in Wuhan to the bilateral meetings in Qingdao and Johannesburg has created a forward looking momentum in India-China bilateral relations, with both leaders taking an interest in following up work on the ground, it is also noteworthy that the meeting at Wuhan brought out differences between the two countries on some issues. Within China there is some realisation that the weakening of globalisation and regionalism, which earlier provided the fora for enhancing relations between competitive states marks a shift to bilateral interactions.<sup>18</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The combination of the Chinese Dream, the community of common destiny, major power diplomacy and the BRI have spelled out an alternative geopolitical, geoeconomic and ideational framework. For Chinese scholars who have been studying what makes the United States the world's dominant power, this is the formula that works. China's power ambitions, its targets for economic growth and military strength have always been measured by the capacities of the world's dominant powers. In the early days of economic restructuring, Mao measured success in relation to the United Kingdom, for long the chief colonist and industrial power. In later years, the measure has been the US. For all that Xi's new diplomacy uses the terminology of globalism and is camouflaged in nationalistic language, much of the policies of the PRC still come down to actions in specific regions and on specific issues that seek to enhance China's power. Xi's aim for now remains to control a Party that becomes a vanguard of the agenda for the "third era".

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18. Talk by Yan Xuetong, "Emerging Bilateralism in Globalization," August 28, 2018, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.

# HAS THE CHINESE ASSISTANCE MADE PAKISTAN SECURE?

SHALINI CHAWLA

Pakistan has been extremely proud of the unstinted support it has been receiving from Beijing for over five decades now. China's assistance has been consistent for Pakistan even in the most troubled periods for Pakistan, when it's international credibility was tarnished and it faced severe criticism for harbouring Osama bin Laden. Pakistan has been importing a major share of its military equipment from China and owes its nuclear weapon programme to the Chinese assistance. China-Pakistan alliance expanded beyond a military and strategic alliance with the signing and implementation of the \$60billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Pakistan's relationship with China was formalised with a major step by the two countries in 1963 with the signing of the Shaksgam Valley agreement. The partnership since then has continued to grow consistently given Beijing's strategic interests in the region and its strong desire to neutralise India's growth and counter US dominance. For Pakistan, Beijing served the purpose of not only fulfilling its defence requirements but also providing Islamabad strategic and diplomatic support against India and United States on various occasions.

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Pakistan was inclined towards China citing its requirement for military equipment and diversification of the sources of weapon acquisition (given its threat perceptions) in mid 1960s. Pakistan saw a trusted partner in militarily and economically powerful China, which shared the common objective of containing India. Pakistan's inherent insecurities and perceived threat perceptions drove the nation towards external alliances from the late 1950s and early 1960s and it became a member of Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). It will be useful to analyse the question that whether an all-round Chinese assistance in the last five decades has made Pakistan secure? The paper looks into the Sino-Pak alliance and evaluates whether the alliance has helped Islamabad to counter its insecurities.

### THE BEGINNING

The beginning of the Sino-Pak alliance can be traced back to as early as 1951 when the diplomatic relations between the two nations were established. In 1955, during the Bandung Conference, Premier Zhou Enlai held two friendly talks with the Pakistani Prime Minister Mohammad Ali, and exchanged the idea that cooperation between the two nations should be strengthened in various fields.<sup>1</sup> China's aim was to wean Pakistan away from the military alliance led by the United States against the Soviet-PRC military alliance.

The informal Sino-Pak alliance grew and a border agreement was negotiated between the two nations in 1962. In March 1963, the two countries signed the boundary agreement on "China's Sinkiang and the contiguous areas the defense of which was under the actual control of Pakistan".<sup>2</sup>

The agreement becomes very important in the history of Sino-Pakistan relationship as it provided the base for future defense and military collaborations between the two nations. The 1965 India-Pakistan war provided a new dimension to the Sino-Pakistan relationship. Beijing demonstrated open support for Islamabad which was a member of SEATO 'basically constructed to counter communist

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1 "The Bandung Conference of 1955" , *CHINA Daily*, at, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/20/content\\_435929.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/20/content_435929.htm), accessed on June 2, 2012.

2 *The Boundary Agreement Between China and Pakistan, 1963*

expansion'. Pakistan faced severe US arms embargo post 1965 war leading to the suspension of the US supplies. This development added to Pakistan's inclination towards China for weapon supplies and further military assistance.

### **PAKISTAN'S MILITARY AND NUCLEAR BUILD-UP**

China is today Pakistan's largest defence supplier. Pakistan has not only imported the maximum types and number of defence equipment from China but managed to build up its indigenous defence capability with the Chinese assistance.

Chinese support to Pakistan has been on three critical fronts: Nuclear and missile assistance, export of conventional weapons and support to defence production.

#### *Chinese Nuclear and Missile Assistance to Pakistan*

One of the most important outcomes of China-Pakistan strategic nexus is China's extensive support to Pakistan in building up its nuclear capabilities. Nuclear proliferation analyst, Gary Milhollin, was not wrong when he argued, "If you subtract Chinese help, there wouldn't be a Pakistani program."<sup>3</sup>

For Pakistan, nuclear weapons were expected to "neutralize" India's conventional military superiority and hence, increase Pakistan's military and psychological capacity to continue its fight for Kashmir. The nuclear weapon programme started in 1972 under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and continued to develop under the leadership of Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s. 1990s saw a wide expansion of Pakistan's weapon programme with the acquisition of missiles from China. Pakistan sought external assistance for its nuclear weapon programme and China has been the most important source for nuclear exports to Pakistan. While there are reports of financial support from the Muslim world, China, allegedly provided direct assistance to Pakistan's nuclear weapon programme in the past, which includes the supply of the warhead designs, highly enriched uranium (HEU) and a variety of nuclear products and services. Pakistan's economy in the 1990s was on a total downslide with a decreasing GDP growth rate which

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3. Gordon Corera interview with Gary Malhollin, Washington, D.C., December 14, 2005, as cited in Gordon Corera, *Shopping for Bombs*, (New Delhi, Foundation Books, 2006), p. 45.

stood at an average of around 2.5%. But ironically, Pakistan's nuclear programme was kept up and acquisitions from China continued.

Pakistan's missile development programme has been carried out with the Chinese assistance and to some extent from North Korea after the United States imposed sanctions on China. Chinese missile assistance to Pakistan ranges from providing equipment, training to transferring the complete missiles. The Chinese M series of SRBMs commenced development in the early 1980s and the three versions are known as the M-9, M-11 and M-18. Pakistan did acquire the series of missiles – Hatf-I, Hatf-II, Hatf-III, Hatf-IV, Hatf-V and Hatf-VI, which are reportedly variants of the Chinese M-11 and M-18.

### *Chinese Supply of Conventional Weapons to Pakistan and Support for Defence Production*

China began arms aid to Pakistan in 1965 after the US embargo on Pakistan, when the leadership in Islamabad felt the need for diversifying its sources of weapon supply. Undoubtedly, China is today Pakistan's largest defence supplier. Pakistan has not only imported the maximum types and number of defence equipment from China but managed to build up significant indigenous defence capability with the Chinese assistance. Chinese equipment turned out to be much cheaper as compared to equipment from the West and the Chinese sales were further facilitated by availability of credit from China on relaxed repayment terms. In the 1960s, and later in the 1970s, Pakistan received interest free economic aid and also a significant amount of free weapons from China and became the only non-Communist third World country to receive generous assistance from it. Chinese military assistance came in not only in the form of arms but also development of infrastructure for repair and overhaul. The Chinese supplies included: F-6s, T-59 MBTs, T-60 Light Tanks and T-63 Light Tank and Type 531 APC. By the early 1980s, China had provided Pakistan with more than 70 per cent of its tanks.

Sino-Pakistan defence collaboration further flourished under the umbrella of the US sanctions in the 1990s and, in the process, the two nations entered into deals for the co-development of a fourth generation fighter aircraft, the JF-17 (earlier called the FC-1), the K-8 jet trainer had earlier been jointly produced. Pakistan's former

Chief of Air Staff, Mahmood Ahmed, in an interview to *Jane's Defence Weekly* said, JF 17 would essentially form the backbone of the PAF.<sup>4</sup> Pakistan has also managed to acquire the Chinese AWACS (ZDK-03). On the naval front, the significant acquisitions include C-802/CSS-N-8 anti-ship missiles and four Jiangwei II class frigates.

The 1980's and the 1990's saw a wide expansion of defence production activities within Pakistan and a large number of varied projects were undertaken in this period. China has been the main support in establishment of defence production units in Pakistan often provided free of cost. Some of the major defence production units established with the Chinese assistance are; *Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT)*, *The F-6 Rebuild Factory (F-6 RF)* and *Heavy Mechanical Complex LTD. (HMC)*.

### CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT

China has in the past been shifting its stand on Kashmir which encouraged Pakistan in its illegitimate control of the valley. The 1963 Sino-Pak agreement allowed transfer of Shaksgam valley of J&K to China, which was an attempt to legitimise Pakistan's occupation of parts of J&K (south of Xingjiang). Chinese stand on Kashmir in early 1964, was certainly one of the motivating factors for Pakistani thinking, which believed in exploring a military solution for Kashmir. Air Commodore Jasjit Singh very rightly stated China's stand on Kashmir:

"In February 1964, China had changed its two-decade old stand and now sided with Pakistan's position of the solution through plebiscite in Kashmir, but without specifying the prior withdrawal of Pakistani forces from the state as required by the UN Resolutions."<sup>5</sup>

In 1964, China accepted POK as part of Pakistan and later constructed the Karakoram Highway. China did extend support to Pakistan during and after the 1965 and 1971 wars. During the 1965 war, China not only supported Pakistan diplomatically but also provided military equipment. Asghar Khan went to Beijing in the middle of the war requesting China for military help.

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4 Interview, Air Chief Mahmood Ahmed, Pakistan's Chief of Air Staff, *Janes's Defence Weekly*, April 4, 2007, p.34.

5 Jasjit Singh, *The ICON: Marshal of the Indian Air Force ARJAN SINGH, DFC*, (New Delhi, Knowledge World, 2009) p 167.

Chinese weapons supply to Pakistan grew at a faster pace post 1965 war, facilitating Pakistan with relaxed payment modes for the acquisitions. During the 1971 war, Pakistan did not receive any military equipment from China, but China did provide Pakistan economic, political and moral support after the 1971 war. In 1972, China used its first ever veto to hold the recognition of Bangladesh as a gesture to support Pakistan.

In the 1980s China's position turned less aggressive in its support to Pakistan on Kashmir and it held the view that Kashmir was a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan that should be solved peacefully. Even though China adapted neutral posture on Kashmir in the 1980s, its nuclear assistance to Islamabad did strengthen Pakistan's policy of terrorism.

During the Kargil war, China maintained absolute neutrality and Pakistan did not receive any direct military assistance during the war. Post Kargil War, Pakistan has been extremely focused on building its air force and maritime strike capabilities of the Navy, primarily with the Chinese supplies and the US equipment (which it received post 9/11).

There have been apprehensions and thoughts that China might try to mediate between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue due to Beijing's vested economic and strategic interests in Pakistan. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and India has raised serious opposition to the project. However, China has denied any plans of mediation between India and Pakistan and has maintained a stance that it would let Kashmir be resolved bilaterally.<sup>6</sup>

Beijing's diplomatic support to Pakistan (directly and indirectly) has been witnessed in the past during the times of India-Pakistan crisis. China, along with Pakistan, strongly opposed India's bid to the Nuclear Supplier's Group membership. Although Beijing has been focused on Pakistan's defence capabilities, it has never questioned Pakistan's strategic calculus against India. On the contrary, China has opposed any Indian move that demands action against Pakistan on account

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6 "China denies shift in stand on Kashmir issue", *The Economic Times*, July 12, 2018  
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-denies-shift-in-stand-on-kashmir-issue/articleshow/58498861.cms>, accessed n July 25, 2018.

of conducting terrorism. China blocked India's move at the United Nations to seek action against Pakistan for releasing Zaki-ur-Rahman Lakvi, mastermind behind the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. China also blocked India's attempt at the UN to ban Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar.

### **CHINA–PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND CHALLENGES FOR PAKISTAN**

The CPEC with an investment of approximately \$60 billion, was inaugurated in August 2013 and is viewed as a *game changer* for both Pakistan and China. The Corridor carries immense potential to upgrade and revive Pakistan's infrastructure and also, cater to Islamabad's energy crisis. The corridor involves building of highways, railway lines and oil and gas pipelines and will connect Pakistan's Gwadar port to China's autonomous region of Xinjiang.

CPEC will significantly enhance the importance of Gwadar in the region and it will serve as a gateway for trade between China, the Middle East and Africa. Gwadar would eventually emerge as the key shipping hub providing mass trade to Central Asian Republics through Pakistan and China, and important naval base. China's involvement in Gwadar is undoubtedly a response to China's emerging energy requirements - China being the world's second largest oil importer. Approximately 70% of Chinese oil supply comes from the Middle East and Africa through sea. China is expanding its energy procurement efforts and has adopted the strategy of series of ports along the oil shipment routes which would allow China to safeguard and monitor energy flows.

From the military point of view Gwadar is a decongestion point for the Pakistan Navy and it will provide it a berthing point for its submarines and surface warships. Gwadar port area has been designated as the "sensitive defense zone" by the Government of Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> Although there has been no official Chinese announcement on the subject but various reports are indicative of Gwadar being a future berthing point for the PLA-Navy fleet of the Indian Ocean, facilitating China's military presence in the region.

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7. "PNS Gwadar" at, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/pakistan/pns-gwadar.htm>, accessed on March 15, 2013.

CPEC is seen by Pakistan as not only an economic opportunity but also a security guarantee of Beijing's commitment towards Pakistan. The center point of CPEC has been development of Gwadar which will allow Islamabad to exercise influence over the Middle East and the Indian Ocean region.<sup>8</sup>

Although the Pakistani leadership seems to be confident of the economic and strategic benefits of the corridor, it is certainly not free of challenges. One of the most critical challenges highlighted in a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is the significant repayment obligation for Pakistan with this huge investment in the future. According to the IMF report:

“Repayment obligations to CPEC-related government borrowing, including amortization and interest payments, are expected to rise after FY 2020/21 due to the concessional terms of most of these loans. Combined, these CPEC-related outflows could reach about 0.4 percent of GDP per year over the longer run.”<sup>9</sup>

The report highlighted likely impact on inflows:

“During the investment phase, as the “early harvest” projects proceed, Pakistan will experience a surge in FDI and other external funding inflows. A concomitant increase in imports of machinery, industrial raw materials, and services will likely offset a significant share of these inflows”<sup>10</sup>

It further states that the CPEC-related capital inflows (FDI and external borrowing) are expected to reach around 2.2 percent of the projected GDP in the FY 2019-20. The CPEC-related imports would reach around 11 percent of the total projected imports in the same year for Pakistan.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Hussain Haqqani, *Reimagining Pakistan: Transforming A Dysfunctional Nuclear State* (Harper Collins, India, 2018)p. 241

9 Pakistan Twelfth and Final Review Under the Extended Arrangement, Request for Waivers of Nonobservance of Performance Criteria, and Proposal for Post-Program Monitoring- Press Release; State Report; And Statement by the Executive Director of Pakistan, *IMF Country Report 16/325*, October 2016, p.25

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

There are strong voices within Pakistan opposing the CPEC and warning the state against the fallouts of the corridor. Pakistani government is being accused of not protecting the rights and interests of its people. Senator Tahir Mashhadi, chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Planning and Development, said: "Another East India Company is in the offing; national interests are not being protected. We are proud of the friendship between Pakistan and China, but the interest of the state should come first."<sup>12</sup>

The Senate's Standing committee on Planning and Development has expressed serious fears that the corridor "could build or ruin Pakistan and its future if the country's interest were not safeguarded."<sup>13</sup> There are fears and apprehensions attached with CPEC, for example: fear of clash of culture between the two nations and whether Pakistan would get the appropriate share of benefits. There is also a fear that the small scale industries which are at the stage of infancy might feel the hit with increased Chinese investments within the country. Flooding of the Chinese products in the Pakistani markets is something which needs to be analysed, given the history of Beijing's economic and trade pattern.

There has been strong resentment from the Baluch over the corridor. While Gwadar will become the hub of economic activities, the locals, Baloch, still struggle for their basic rights from the Pakistani government. The region has been facing constant violent opposition from the locals. The implementation and success of the CPEC is likely to get affected by the regional conditions and stability. Even though the port of Gwadar has been developed and is functional, Gwadar remains deprived of even clean drinking water and basic necessities of life. Locals are being driven out in order to accommodate the Chinese workforce and this has added to the existing resentment in the region. The local fishermen are not allowed to fish near the port, which is a significant problem as a large portion of the population in Gwadar is dependent on fishing for their livelihood.

The Baloch separatist groups have vowed to resist the project and their activities are bound to hinder the implementation of the

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12 Syed Irfan Raza, "CPEC could become another East India Company", *DAWN*, October 18, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1290677>, accessed on February 20, 2017.

13 Syed Irfan Raza, "Senate panel wants Pakistan's interests fully protected under CPEC", *DAWN*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1317736/senate-panel-wants-pakistans-interests-fully-protected-under-cpec>, accessed on March 4, 2017.

CPEC. However, the Pakistani leadership has denied the objections of the Baloch separatist groups, claiming that it is taking care of the Baloch interests and the CPEC would benefit the region. CPEC may face security challenges in the future as the Baloch term the project as “colonization” of the region.

### **HAS BEIJING’S SUPPORT MADE PAKISTAN MORE SECURE?**

Pakistan turned towards Beijing owing to its (primarily) perceived threat perceptions from India. Pakistan opted for alliances with big powers (starting from late 1950s) to cater to military’s desire to modernize the armed forces. Pakistan’s dominant military lobby which defined the national objectives sought answers to nation’s insecurity in building the military muscle and building capabilities for sub-conventional war. Alliance with China, indeed, assisted Pakistan in modernizing its military, develop indigenous defence production capability and build-up (and expand) nuclear weapon capability. After the Kargil war in 1999, Pakistan has been focused on building the air force, maritime strike capabilities of the navy and force multipliers. On the nuclear front, Pakistan has a rapidly growing arsenal and claims to have acquired a nuclear triad fulfilling its objective of ‘full spectrum deterrence’. On the diplomatic front, Beijing has supported Pakistan and banning the UN designated terrorists has been a challenge for India. CPEC is a significant Chinese investment and promises a complete face change for Pakistan.

But does this enormous support make Pakistan feel secure? Pakistan has been dealing with numerous insecurities on varied fronts and the external assistance does not seem to be influencing this factor. Chinese support (and the US aid after 9/11) brought in much desired military equipment at a low cost, but that did not persuade Pakistan to alter its strategic option of using terror as a foreign policy tool. It has continued its proxy war against India with the support of state-sponsored terror groups- Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM). Military has pursued terrorism as a tool against India for four decades now and nuclear weapons with a ‘first use’ doctrine have served as a shield for continued acts of terror. Terrorism in Kashmir and other parts of India accelerated much more after

Pakistan acquired nuclear capability in 1987. Pakistan has used the threat of use of nuclear weapons to carry on terrorism and avoid a conventional war with India. Pakistan managed to acquire the land based ballistic missiles up to the range of 2,500 km and the cruise missiles – Babur and Ra'ad (indeed with Chinese assistance). It is very proud of developing the tactical nuclear weapons to be used in the battlefield to deter India from a conventional aggression and has claimed to be developing sea based missile capability which presumably would give Pakistan "second-strike" capability.

Pakistan has excessively relied on the nuclear weapons for the last three decades projecting its deep sense of insecurity. It has repeatedly threatened the use of nuclear weapons (directly and indirectly) in the past during crisis situations. Pakistan will continue to feel insecure even with a well-equipped modern military and expanded nuclear arsenal as it has failed to build up its own strengths. Its most daunting challenge is the economic crisis and the new cabinet under Imran Khan is struggling hard to find solutions. It is on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Grey List due to insufficient measures to curb money laundering and counter-terror financing. At the time of writing this article, Pakistan is under pressure to take appropriate steps for counter-terror financing to avoid being placed in the 'black list' of FATF. Pakistan's external debt and liabilities stand at \$ 91.8 billion and the nation is in urgent need of a bailout from the international financial institutions. Pakistan's balance of payment has consistently struggled due to lack of self sufficiency.

Its choice of terror as a foreign policy tool vis`-a-vis India and Afghanistan has had a major blow back and rising extremism in the society has been a challenge for the leadership. Multiple terror groups operate in Pakistan with varying relationship with the state. Recent terror attacks by the Islamic State (IS) show that IS finds Pakistan as an attractive destination after its defeat in Iraq and Syria. The religious and extremist factions have gained a strong footing in the country. General elections in July 2018 did witness an alarming development of Hafiz Saeed's party Allah-O-Akbar Tehreek (AAT) contesting the elections with over 200 candidates. Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which basically caught attention after the execution of Mumtaz Qadri, the convicted killer of Punjab governor Salman

Taseer, managed to swing a large number of votes in Karachi. These developments might not have a direct impact today but in future these are bound to deeply influence the political and social structure of the state adding to its existing struggles.

Most of the Pakistanis are quite optimistic about the CPEC and believe that it would be beneficial for the country's economy and infrastructure. However, the opaque plans of the project and high Chinese debt is likely to deepen the friction between the Centre and the provinces. The project, if not handled well can inflame existing tensions between the provinces and the Centre and fuel local grievances.

Internally, Pakistan has major issues to address including low levels of human capital base index. In fact, focus of prime minister Imran Khan's inaugural speech was the socio-economic development of Pakistan. Externally, Pakistan is facing stiff posturing from the Trump administration which decided for a significant cut in US assistance to Pakistan. US has repeatedly warned Islamabad to stop its support for the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network in Afghanistan. Although Pakistani leadership has stated in the recent past that the US assistance does not matter to Pakistan, but, the reality is US support is crucial for Pakistan on the international platforms.

Pakistan's role in Afghanistan is well known and the fact remains that Kabul cannot stabilise without Pakistan altering its strategic choices. General Musharraf's active role in the resurgence of Taliban 2004 is well known. President Ghani, who approached Pakistani leadership for assistance more than once has repeatedly expressed his antagonism on Pakistan's support to the Afghan militants.

Despite receiving significant Chinese support on all fronts, Pakistan continues to struggle to prove its credibility as a nation, continues to be warned by the US and consistently blamed by Afghanistan for its disrupting role. Its insecurity against New Delhi has not allowed it to discard terrorism as a state policy. Pakistan needs to realise that its security lies in building its own strength from within. Imran Khan has stepped in with a vision of "Naya Pakistan" and vows to focus on social and economic development. It remains to be seen if Imran will actually be able to address the challenges within which would in turn reduce Pakistan's insecurities.

# CMC AND PROPAGANDA UNDER XI JINPING: INVOKING MILITARY NATIONALISM TO ADDRESS THE CRISIS OF MORALE

**BHAVNA SINGH**

In 2016, Xi Jinping revamped the military apparatus by dissolving the four traditional organs of the Central Military Commission (CMC)<sup>1</sup> and creating 15 new departments as part of the ongoing military modernisation. The aim was to realise the Chinese dream of building a strong military and take a strategic step towards establishing a “modern military system with Chinese characteristics.” The emphasis was also on winning information age wars and bringing about concrete results before 2020 in the military administration and joint operational command, optimising the military structure, enhancing the policy systems, and civilian-military integration. The overhaul by the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and the CMC included the decision to form the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) general command, the PLA Rocket Force and the PLA Strategic

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1. The Central Military Affairs Commission is the main body constituted by 7 person (previously 11) through which the Party controls the armed forces and their nuclear arsenal.

Support Force to strengthen consolidated national defence.<sup>2</sup> Guided by Mao's dictum that "political power grows out of the barrel of the gun," Xi Jinping made innovation and technological development the core for "enriching the state and strengthening its military power".

More importantly, besides the restructuring of these traditional modes of warfare, Xi Jinping revitalised<sup>3</sup> the emphasis on "propaganda"<sup>4</sup> and set preeminence on "military thought" in shaping China's military and technological rise. The renewed impetus to military propaganda, which can be broadly understood as an aggregate of methods and means of ideological impact aimed at domestic consensus-building,<sup>5</sup> showcases several elements of continuity and some disjuncture in the regime's struggle for survival as the Chinese military structurally moves to a Theatre Command model. Not surprisingly then, the Political Works Department<sup>6</sup> finds itself retained and employed with additional responsibilities of instilling ideological views and convictions in the soldiers' political consciousness (*sixiang juewu*) and shaping the Chinese military discourse through the use of the media and technology.

### **A MORAL CODE FOR THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER**

China's military might has been steadily built up over the industrial complex of a booming economy with an infusion of defence spending at an average of 15.9 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from

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2. "China Inaugurates PLA Rocket Force as Military Reform Deepens, *Xinhua News*, January 1, 2016 [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/01/c\\_134970564.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/01/c_134970564.htm). Accessed on July 27, 2018. Li Zuocheng is the commander of the PLA Army, and Liu Lei its political commissar. Wei Fenghe is the commander of the PLA Rocket Force, and Wang Jiasheng its political commissar. Gao Jin is the commander of the PLA Strategic Support Force, and Liu Fulian its political commissar.
  3. Political indoctrination has been one of the main courses offered by the Whampoa Military Academy (1924) and other military academies across China to convey the Party's ideology.
  4. Various definitions of propaganda by various scholars emphasise the different properties of this phenomenon – "influencing the way of thinking of a group of people", "managing society by means of forming firm social beliefs and stereotypes in recipients", "manipulating the verbal and visual part of the message in order to achieve certain political results".
  5. It is important to refer to China's strategy of the 'three warfares' in the media, legal and psychological domains but that is not the focus of the article.
  6. Previously denoted as the People's Liberation Army General Political Department under the CMC, renamed on January 11, 2016.

1998 to 2007, levelling off at 10-12 percent annually since then. China spends roughly \$145 billion on the world's second largest military, projected to reach \$217.5 billion by 2020 and \$290 billion by 2025.<sup>7</sup> In March 2018, China announced an official budget of \$175 billion, an 8 percent increase on the previous year, though actual defence spending is speculated to range anywhere between \$200 to \$300 billion, given the reluctance of the Chinese government to disclose all its capabilities. Notwithstanding the progress, the PLA and the Chinese Navy (PLAN) face severe obstacles in terms of combat experience, training regimen, logistics systems and Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. In addition, widespread corruption in the ranks has posed a severe challenge to the CMC; as of 2015, 4,024 officers (including 82 generals) had been netted in the anti-corruption campaign.<sup>8</sup> To address these shortcomings, Xi Jinping launched a campaign through the central leading group of the CMC set up in March 2014<sup>9</sup> with an aim to "disrupt military oligarchs" and to study and apply the Party's guiding thoughts produced during the 18th Party Congress concerning the building of national defence and armed forces in the new environment.

Outlining the *mantra* of "being action ready", Jinping emphasised that national sovereignty and security had to be prioritised before any other consideration and the absolute command of the Communist Party of China had to be ensured over the army.<sup>10</sup> He made it necessary for the officers and soldiers to be educated and trained in the glorious traditions of the Chinese military developed under the previous leaders to intensify their ability to respond to adversity and crisis, so that "their commitment would remain firm, their work determined, their morale high and their discipline unwavering."<sup>11</sup> He also emphasised that theoretical and political education in the core values of the armed forces, which are: loyalty to the Party, love for

7. Richard A Bitzinger, "China's Double Digit Defence Growth", *Foreign Affairs* March 19, 2015, cited from David Shambaugh, *China's Future* (UK: Polity Press, 2016), p.169.

8. Yin Pumin, "War on Graft", *Beijing Review*, March 12, 2015.

9. A campaign was previously launched by the General Political Department in 2007 to disseminate the ideological guidelines which are currently in use in the Chinese armed forces.

10. Xi Jinping has also revisited and polished Deng Xiaoping's philosophy of "the Party commands the gun, the gun does not command the Party."

11. "Build up Our National Defence and Armed Forces", Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, November 16, 2012, p. 239.

the people, devotion to the country, dedication to the mission and respect for honour, was absolutely necessary to build contemporary Service personnel. Insisting that “power needs to be caged”, he called upon the CMC organs to be loyal, clean and responsible and consciously self-regulate their behaviour to overcome formalism and bureaucracy, thereby setting the highest standards in adhering to the principles of running the armed forces by law. Xi further highlighted that they must proactively cultivate an honest and upright political ecology so that all officers and soldiers can see a bright new image of the CMC organs and feel the “positive energy.”<sup>12</sup>

In view of the above agenda, the Political Work Department came out with directives at the new “*Gutian*” meeting (political works meeting in May 2013)<sup>13</sup> for organising the discourse on the political consciousness of the soldiers, indoctrinating them with the ideologies and principles of the CCP, and projecting China as a security maximising state to an international audience. Laying emphasis on frugality, the National Security Council, the leading group of the CMC for deepening reform of national defence and the army, issued ten rules on strengthening the constitution of the army, one of them stating, “no banqueting, no drinking, no gourmet meals.” These rules act as ‘prohibitory orders’, including a ban on troop formations for meetings, strict control on use of police cars, fewer and shorter meetings, no special art performances, no souvenirs and no more accommodation in local hotels. In an attempt to break down systematic, structural and policy barriers, modernise the organisation of the military, and unleash the combat capacity of the military, the troops have been downsized from 2.3 million to 2 million, outdated armaments have been phased out, new weapons systems are being developed and the size of the militia has been reduced. *Legal Standards for Military Violation of Duty* have been jointly issued by the Supreme People’s Procuratorate and the General Political Department, colloquially known as “40 military rules”, detailing standards on crimes such as defection, negligently leaking military secrets and maltreating subordinates.

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12. “Xi Urges Leaders of CMC Organs to Respect Party Discipline”, *Xinhua News*, 11/01/2016. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/11/c\\_134998851.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/11/c_134998851.htm). Accessed on July 24, 2018.

13. During this meeting, Mao and Zhu De had assembled a large number of farmers to join the Red Army (4th Army) based on the Soviet model in 1929 and no leader since has held the meeting there.

Cognisant of the fact that the CCP's original legitimacy to rule is intrinsically linked to the military victory of its armed forces, Xi Jinping has resurrected the image of the 'professional soldier' by promoting the military's image in the broader population. He has focussed on the day-to-day lives of grassroots infantry units, often sat down to eat with soldiers at the same table for a simple canteen meal, shaken hands with the cook-house squad and apologised for delays to soldiers and even urged unmarried soldiers to get married at the earliest. He has also made consistent efforts to patrol and scrutinise the naval vessels and long range strategic bombers, thereby revealing equipment and capabilities to outsiders as well as building *esprit de corps* by arousing the confidence and pride of all soldiers of the army and all citizens to support and admire their military forces.<sup>14</sup> CCTV coverage of Xi Jinping's visits to military bases, rarely seen previously, has brought the ground reality of the armed forces into the public eye, not only domestic Chinese, but also foreigners. For instance, during his visit to the *Jinganshan* vessel (which was the largest warship in the Chinese Navy before the aircraft carrier entered active service) in Sanya, the internal workings of the ship were exposed for the first time. The decision to grant amnesty to 10,000 prisoners, the country's first in four decades, as part of the celebrations at the military parade on September 3, 2015, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the victory over the Japanese, showcases Xi's pursuit of a larger humanitarian approach to authority and his confidence in China's penal system that was capable of remoulding criminals into law-abiding citizens, besides suggesting his total control over the nation's military.

This extremely personal style of involvement with the armed forces has earned him the trust of the forces and many of its senior leaders and also an endorsement of his important selected statements on national defence and army building, published in February 2014, which have been approved by the CMC for cadres above regimental commander. In April 2013, the CMC conducted an examination of the leadership above corps commander in the army and armed police force that was personally decided upon, and arranged by, Xi Jinping for nine months. It reflected a determination to correct the conduct of the officials hiring personnel for, and appointing to,

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14. This measure is meant to instil the feeling that joining the PLA provides something more than just financial reward.

posts, and test their adherence to the “value of endurance and group cohesion” – concepts central to the Chinese military. The CMC under his leadership put forth the document entitled *Decision on Several Problems about the Army Political Work under the new Conditions* which marks a significant shift from the document promulgated by the CMC in 1987 (*The Resolution on Military Political Work in the New Era*) which demanded the “revolutionization of the troops”, and was later revised by the CMC in 2004, laying emphasis on the professional qualities of the PLA soldier. These measures have received widespread endorsement as 35 senior generals expressed their support and loyalty to Chairman Xi Jinping in speeches published in the *People’s Liberation Army Daily* newspaper. After the 4th plenary session of the 18th CPC, 37 more generals published articles in the *Chinese Military* magazine in a strong array of support to Xi’s endeavours. Most of them abhor the complacency that had crept into the PLA due to the long-standing habits of peace-time and the spread of vanity in military units due to the lack of professional discipline (bitter medicine). The intention is also to warn the current leadership about the legacy of the Cultural Revolution which weakened military capabilities due to the domestic political demands on the PLA (including deployments to sustain industrial production and to replace the failing state bureaucracy, though these were sought to be addressed in the reforms by Deng Xiaoping).<sup>15</sup> In fact, Vice-Chairman of the Military Commission, Fan Changlong, instituted special requirements for true-to-life exercises, not simply for show.

An attempt to remould the discourse on the PLA and its contribution to the nation has been made by the General Official Department by expanding its outreach to the people through the press and public television broadcasts. In this narrative, the Chinese military is a major actor in the national saga, from founding the regime to rescuing the nation in times of crisis to caring for its children in peace-time, palpable in the goals that Xi Jinping has laid out for the PLA to achieve in a short span of time:

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15. The former Deputy Commander of the Nanjing Military Region, Wang Hongguang complained that some senior commanders have no memories of off-road jeep command vehicles and that though the army had been equipped with ‘warrior’ and brave warrior brand command vehicles, the senior and intermediate commanders rarely use them.

- to improve the ability of simultaneously coping with a wide range of internal emergencies and tactical or non-tactical military threats, which could endanger China's sovereignty at terrestrial, sea and air levels;
- to support the harsh and specific protection of the unification of the Motherland – an essential factor for achieving the great Belt and Road Initiative;
- to ensure China's security "in new contexts" – and here the reference is obviously made to the protection of the financial and industrial systems, besides the political one;
- to ensure the protection of China's interest overseas – the truly new strategic asset of China as a global economic power;
- to improve the efficiency of strategic nuclear and cyber deterrence, as well as the possibility of the PLA successfully launching a quick and highly dissuasive nuclear counter-attack;
- to increase the PLA's participation in international peace-keeping operations – a full recognition of China's role also at the military level;
- to strengthen the protection of the Chinese homeland against separatism and terrorism;
- to improve the PLA's ability to fully carry out its tasks during environmental and health crises – as was the case with the bird flu crisis in 2003 and in the following years.<sup>16</sup>

This is also reflected in the motto used for the PLA: "*A staunch force in maintaining peace*" at the celebration of its 90th anniversary, presenting the image of a responsible, dedicated and humanitarian army. However, unlike the previous practice of commissioning civilian artists in cinema to depict the domestic political role of the PLA as an element of continuity from the revolution of 1949 to the 'new China' of the 21st century, Xi has relied on popular film directors to identify their own themes and contribute to the state discourse out of free will. This does not mean that state-sponsored communication channels have taken a back seat but that private attempts are also increasingly accepted and hailed. For instance,

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16. White Paper on China's Military Strategy, State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, May 2015, Web Accessed: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content\\_20820628.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm). Accessed on July 23, 2018.

the movie *Wolf Warrior 2*, released in July 2017, a sequel to *Wolf Warrior*, released in 2015, where the protagonist enacts the role of a loose cannon soldier who takes on special missions around the world, in this case Africa, was not only hailed as a commercial success being the highest grossing Chinese film ever, but also received significant praise for its patriotic plot and was selected as the Chinese entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 90th Academy Awards.

What makes the movie relevant for academic discourse is the significant prominence it places on the “oceans”<sup>17</sup> or the role of the PLA Navy under the larger strategic planning of the Chinese military’s rise and the nationalistic impositions the soldier assumes in his quest to save the medical aid workers from local rebels and vicious arms dealers. First, there is an open admission of China’s indifferent attitude to regime changes in African countries and the domestic faultlines that deter domestic growth in countries abroad. On the other hand, there is a strong projection of China’s might in terms of protecting its citizens and assets abroad, by means of force, if necessary. A promotional poster of the movie showed Leng Feng with the slogan, “Anyone who offends China, no matter how remote, must be exterminated.” The constant references by the local leaders of “do not touch the Chinese”, “we need the Chinese on our side if we want to hold onto power”, and “the Chinese are a member of the UNSC and, therefore, powerful” are meant to act as a power projection tool from the other side of the coin. The missiles that are launched from the aircraft carriers patrolling the Indian Ocean off the coast of Madagascar, depict not only China’s technological prowess but also are being employed as means to deter China’s adversaries by revealing its capabilities. The movie fits well within Xi Jinping’s vision of using the media and contemporary propaganda to psychologically scare its overseas enemies, as many film critics have admitted that the tone of Chinese nationalism in the movie is “definitely a product of Xi’s reign and the idea of China’s rejuvenation.”<sup>18</sup>

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17. Under its emphasis on building China as a maritime power, the Chinese Navy has inducted its first semi-submersible ship *Donghaidao* into its South China Sea fleet and world’s second largest semi-submersible *Xin Guang Hua* in 2016. A heavy lift vessel named *Zhen Hua 33* was commissioned in March 2017.

18. Tom Phillips, “China Finds its Own Top Gun and Rambo in Wave of Patriotic Movies,” *The Guardian*, September 23, 2017.

This is part of the larger attempt to promote a prestigious image of the Chinese military through the use of visual media.<sup>19</sup> Other means include the enhanced communication channels within the military through periodicals like the *National Defence* (1990), *China Military Law* (1993), the *PLA Daily* (1956) and televised programmes catering to the needs of building consensus and political indoctrination amongst the cadres, like *The People's Army*, a study of the PLA's large-scale fire rescue operation in Daxing'anling, aired in 1987, and *Burning Passion*, aired in 2001, which tells the story of three successive generations of PLA officer Shi Guangrong's family and their loyalty to the motherland. Another sequential, *General and I*, has been aired on Hunan Television since January 2017 with an intention to highlight the genius of China's military strategists and invoke the notions of sacrifice and pride.

### **MILITARY THOUGHT AND THE BATTLE FOR CHINESE HEARTS AND MINDS**

Though there is no evidence of a "Guns versus Butter" debate in China, Mao Zedong's Chinese dilemma on "Reds versus Experts" has resurfaced, presenting a challenge for the current leadership. The overall consensus seems to be that the military must be guided by the objective of building a strong army, carry out military strategies under the new circumstances and advance army building through the enhancement of political awareness. A case for renewing the culture and thinking of the Chinese military and doing away with the influence of conservative thinking has, therefore, been perceptible for some time now.<sup>20</sup> Beginning with the publications of the *People's Liberation Army Daily*, several accounts of how the Chinese looked on with horror at the 1991 Gulf War and possibilities of similar threats to China from the US have drawn attention to the need for creativity and more open thinking in the Chinese military structures.<sup>21</sup> Recent discourses pioneered by military strategists like Liu Mingfu [*The China Dream: The Great Power*

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19. Though the generally any dissenting versions of the PLA's depiction are not welcome, the General Political Department embraced Chen Kaige's movie – *The Great Parade* in 1986 as a new medium for military propaganda.

20. See Jiang Siyi ed., *A Seventy-Year History of the PLA Political Work* (1991).

21. "China Paper Warns Military Thinking Outmoded", *Reuters*, August 15, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-military/china-paper-warns-military-thinking-outmoded-idUSTRE67E07020100815>. Accessed on July 21, 2018.

*Thinking and Strategic Positioning of China in the Post-American Era* (2010)] have argued for a “military rise of China” to safeguard its economic rise, implying that while moralistic guidance can be sought in the traditional Chinese thought, a military backing would ensure the non-intervention of any external power in China’s domestic affairs.<sup>22</sup> The author postulates a “grand strategy” for China based on deterrence, balance of power and peace through strength to “become number one in the world” and restore China to a modern version of its historic glory. The book, however, concedes that though China’s rise would require displacing the United States, China will eschew hegemony and limit its role to acting as *primus inter pares* of the nations of the world.<sup>23</sup>

The impact of these nationalist discourses can be gauged from the massive response to the book by netizens, over 80 percent of who agreed that China should pursue global military supremacy to realise the Chinese dream, in a poll conducted by the *Global Times* (*Hanqiu shibao*). Under this stream of thought, the Chinese dream reflects a desire to become a first class global political power under a rather triumphalist view. Another work that Xi Jinping has recommended for senior cadres in the military is that of Jin Yanan, a professor at the University of National Defence, who argues that peace and security are two different concepts: peace can be gained in the absence of dignity and security is the effective safeguard of rights. He argues in favour of China pursuing national security and not peace without dignity. That dignity is essential to the Chinese discourse on humiliation was also highlighted by Liu Yazhou, the political commissar of the National Defence University, who believes that the true failure of the Sino-Japanese War was not the defeat of the army, but the failure of the state and the system, inflicting an everlasting “consciousness of suffering.”<sup>24</sup> The basic premise guiding the current leadership’s military thought can, thus, be surmised in the words: “China loves peace but never compromises on sovereignty”

22. Li Yue, “Liu Mingfu: Zhong-Mei Jingzheng Shi Yi Chang Tianjingsai” [“Liu Mingfu: Sino-US competition is a track and field competition”] *Jingbao* (Shenzhen China), January 23, 2010. Online URL: [http:// http://jb.sznews.com/html/2010-01/23/content\\_941864.htm](http://http://jb.sznews.com/html/2010-01/23/content_941864.htm), “A military rise with Chinese characteristics that is defensive, peaceful, limited, necessary, important and urgent”. Accessed on July 21, 2018.
23. Address to the First Session of the 12th National People’s Congress, March 17, 2013, in *The Governance of China*, n.12.
24. Liu Yazhao, “Get out of the China-Japan War, Welcome Reform, Create Brilliance,” *People’s Liberation Army Daily*, May 15, 2015.

or “China does not want peace without dignity”. Liu Yazhou has also highlighted the need to derive lessons from history on morale and technology: “money can buy advanced weaponry and equipment, but it can never buy advanced military thoughts and culture”. Before the China-Japan War, the Qing government bought the world’s most advanced warships and weapons but the army was ruled by the corrupt Qing dynasty and a generation of backward ideologies and military tactics. This suggests that the morale and integrity of soldiers need to be given prime importance in assessing the strength of one’s own military capability.

In his address to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at its 90th founding anniversary on August 1, 2017, Xi Jinping also reiterated the fact that no one should expect China to swallow the bitter fruit that is harmful to its sovereignty, security or development interests and that though the Chinese people love peace and would never seek aggression or expansion, they have the confidence to be able to defeat all invasions: “We will never allow any people, organisation or political party to split any part of Chinese territory from the country at any time, in any form.”<sup>25</sup> It is perceptible that in terms of strategic thought, while Jiang Zemin had envisioned China’s military thinking under the “limited warfare under high-technology conditions”, Xi Jinping has outlined an expansive vision for a streamlined PLA under his “fight and win modern wars” or what is being termed as the third shift.<sup>26</sup>

In practical terms, these persuasions have resulted in an overhaul of the military structures where, equipped by the powers of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), Wang Qishan has managed to purge the higher levels of the armed forces. Xi Jinping has attempted an ambitious restructuring of the military which includes removal of the senior pillars of the PLA that were infiltrated by Jiang, an absorption of the paramilitary People’s Armed Police and a dramatic realignment of the respective strengths of the land, air, sea, cyber and outer space forces, with a particular focus on the electronic and electromagnetic field capabilities. He has also ‘redesigned the geography of the guns’; hereafter there is a provision

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25. “China Loves Peace, but Never Compromises on Sovereignty: Xi”, *Xinhuanet*, August 1, 2017, Accessed [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/armyday/2017-08/01/content\\_7702811.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/armyday/2017-08/01/content_7702811.htm). Accessed on July 24, 2018

26. The first period was the disarmament of millions led by Deng Xiaoping in 1985, and the second period was the Gulf War in 1991.

for China to have one unified joint battle command with five new combat zones: North, South, East, West and Central. The Northern Zone is meant to tackle the threats from the Koreans as well as the Russian Far East and Mongolia. The Western Zone is responsible for dealing with threats of separatism and terrorism from Tibet and Xinjiang at home and the Belt and Road territories of Pakistan and Afghanistan abroad. The Eastern and Southern Zones are to focus on the choppy waters of the East and South China Seas, while the Central Zone is responsible for protecting Beijing.<sup>27</sup> Yet the prevalence of the differentiated “zoning technologies” within the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the graded rings of sovereignty applied to claim and flexibly manage Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan indicate that the issues of sovereignty and territoriality are not settled as the official discourse suggests. Regional terrorism, separatism and extremism are rampant, impinging upon the security and stability of China’s peripheries.<sup>28</sup> State sponsored attempts to revive and sustain military nationalism through the use of the popular media are, therefore, generous.

Political indoctrination through selection and dissemination of exemplars continues to be the favoured norm for reconnecting the PLA to the Chinese society; the fact that Shen Jilan’s<sup>29</sup> posters were splashed across military newspapers and media along with Xi Jinping’s on the day of the military parade was aimed at displaying the inherent Chinese respect for war veterans and their continued rigour to acknowledge service and patriotism and enhance civil-military relations. Recently, Xi Jinping identified the PLA Academy of Military Science as the leading force of scientific research in the military as a part of the larger reshuffling of military research and educational institutions which brought 43 military education institutions, including two -- the National Defence University of the PLA and the National University of Defence Technology -- directly under the CMC, as well as provisioned for 35 more, specialised in

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27. Jeanne-Marie Gescher, *Becoming China* (UK: Bloomsbury, 2017), p.676.

28. White Paper on China’s Military Strategy, The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, May 2015, Beijing, Online URL: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content\\_20820628.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm). Accessed on July 24, 2018.

29. The only person in China to be elected 12 consecutive times as a member of China’s Parliament, after she was appointed to China’s first National People’s Congress (NPC) in 1954.

specific armed services, and six of the armed police forces.<sup>30</sup> He also awarded merit citations to Professor Xiao Fei, head of a research institution at the Naval University of Engineering, with a first-class merit; and Pan Weiqing, a professor at the former Second Military Medical University, and Xiao Longxu, chief engineer and researcher of the former equipment research institute of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Rocket Force with third-class merit citations.<sup>31</sup> These can be seen as a part of his larger efforts to build the military human resource policy system.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, Xi Jinping has been extremely cautious about subversion of these norms from within. This is why he did not reappoint two key CMC members despite them not yet having reached normal retirement ages—Fang Fenghui, who as director of the CMC's Joint Staff Department, played a critical role in operations, and Zhang Yang, who oversaw the PLA's political work system (responsible for personnel management and both internal and external propaganda), while their replacements, Li Zuocheng and Miao Hua, have been rapidly promoted. The rationale was, "Soldiers won't fight for corrupt officials; corrupt officials will not die for their country... How can such an army win victory?" He has, therefore, stressed on the need for civil-military integration for bringing about a holistic view of national security and realising China's national strategic goals. In addition, Xi Jinping created the pilot scheme of instituting a rank of master sergeant in a mechanised infantry brigade in early 2014, where 36 non-commissioned officers were appointed to achieve the transition from military technical study to the comprehensive transformative study of military affairs.<sup>33</sup> In this way, an attempt has been made to retain some of the military talent under a new

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30. "Xi Calls for World-Class Military Research, Educational Institutions", *Xinhuanet*, July 20, 2017, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/armyday/2017-07/20/content\\_7704139.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/armyday/2017-07/20/content_7704139.htm)

31. This was provisioned under the "Regulations on Reward and Recognition in the Army", issued by the four headquarters of the PLA, linking honour and recognition to actual combat performance.

32. Besides, political indoctrination is disseminated by a political instructor attempts to map out the sociological background of the troops and to monitor their reaction to party policy as well as study the impact of socio-economic reforms on new recruits.

33. "Observation of PLA Grassroots Reform from the Master Sergeant System", *Phoenix Military*, <http://news.ifeng.com/mil/special/sgzzd/>. Accessed on July 25, 2018.

nomenclature and by giving them new training and roles, thereby trying to contain resentment against him.<sup>34</sup>

However, the possibility that these attempts at civil-military integration by coopting military strategies as well as enforcing modernisation in bureaucratic structures may at some time become a source of friction for Xi cannot be ruled out for the following reasons: the new chain of command poses more hindrance to decision-making than it supports integration as the inter-departmental rivalry in terms of ranks and positions may not be easy to resolve; second, the efficacy of the Theatre Command system itself remains in doubt on the Chinese terrain and strategies of global repositioning – more emphasis on the Navy and the PAPF—may not go down well with the PLA. Third, the aggressive purges of military officials may give rise to tension within the PLA increasing the possibilities of resistance.

Nonetheless, in conclusion, it can be argued that there is a heavy reliance on indoctrination and appeal to military nationalism for political propaganda by the General Political Department of the CMC which the Party primarily uses as a means to gather feedback and secure the ‘authoritarian resilience’ of the regime.<sup>35</sup> By these means the PLA’s General Political Department has succeeded in crafting and diffusing a discourse that connects the PLA to both its political history and to the current aspirations of the Chinese society—an image of a glorified military dedicated to safeguarding the country rather than waging war. Xi’s institution of a moralistic tenor to the Chinese military will not only strengthen its organisational unity but also have long lasting implications for its integration with the civil society as well. The relaxations of military thought by means of accommodating innovation is then a political necessity thrust upon the leadership due to the lack of Communist precedents in their quest for a new or “modern Chinese military”.

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34. The downsizing of the military had resulted in demonstrations by demobilised soldiers in Zhejiang, Jiangsu province, which were quelled by the government.

35. Genevaz, n.34.

# IS CHINA'S AIR FORCE REALLY TOO TALL FOR THE INDIAN AIR FORCE?

**RAVINDER SINGH CHHATWAL**

China's rapid military modernisation since the 1990s has been the subject of a plethora of discussions where one often hears paeans being sung in favour of China's military capabilities. In these discussions, frequently, an impression being created is that the PLA's (People's Liberation Army's – the generic term for China's armed forces) numerical superiority makes it larger than life for the Indian military. While China's numerically superior military may be 10 ft tall for the smaller nations, this contention does not hold water against a large and strong India. The Chinese military has a numerical advantage against India but the numbers do not tell the full story. Taking an example of combat aircraft, it can be seen that the Chinese Air Force (also known as the PLAAF – People's Liberation Army Air Force) has a combat aircraft strength of 2,100 aircraft<sup>1</sup> (including those of the PLA Naval Aviation) against 759 of the Indian Air Force (IAF) (including 45 MiG-29s of the Indian Navy).<sup>2</sup> But, can the PLAAF deploy these 2,100 aircraft

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1. U.S. D.O.D. "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017," [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF). Accessed on August 4, 2018.
2. *Military Balance* 2017.

against India? The answer is no, because in any shooting war, China will need to set aside a sizable number of its Air Defence aircraft for protection of the National Capital as well as its East coast (the most prosperous region of the country), both of which are its Red Lines. Also, a considerable number of its offensive assets remain 'earmarked' for any likely offensive operations against Taiwan-another stated Red Line for the Chinese leadership. This and other factors will impose limitations on the PLAAF in conducting a sustained air campaign against India. If such be the case, the question to be asked is: does China have the capability to militarily coerce India in any crisis? *Prima facie* it does not appear so and China's numerous provocations after the 1962 War have been strongly countered by India. The most recent one was in Doklam in 2017 where India stood its ground and after a 72-day standoff, it was resolved diplomatically. This article assesses the PLAAF's capabilities against India and argues that the PLAAF is not 10 ft tall for the IAF.

### **PLAAF FIGHTER FORCE**

Almost 30 percent of the PLAAF's combat aircraft force comprises old generation fighter/attack aircraft like the J-7 (MiG-21) and J-8 (China has retired all Q-5s in 2017). The PLAAF is modernising its fleet at a rapid pace and these old aircraft will be replaced in the next few years with new fourth/ fifth generation aircraft. The PLAAF has a strength of almost 600 fourth generation fighter aircraft like the J-10, SU-27, J-11/ SU-30 and this number is likely to increase in the coming years with the PLAAF soon becoming a majority fourth/fifth generation fighter fleet.

China has built a new stealth fighter called the J-20 which entered service in September 2017.<sup>3</sup> China is also making another stealth aircraft, the J-31, which is still under development. The J-20 is a single seat, twin-engine, fifth generation fighter. It is also bigger and heavier than the American F-22 Raptor and the Russian PAK FA T-50/ SU-57.<sup>4</sup> Not many details are available about the J-20's performance but from available open source information and imagery, a brief

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3.. "China's J-20 Fighter Jet put into Service: Spokesman," *Xinhua*, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2017-09/28/content\\_4793397.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2017-09/28/content_4793397.htm) , September 28, 2017. Accessed on August 10, 2018.

4.. "J-20 Black Eagle [Black Silk?] (Jianji-20 Fighter Aircraft 20) / F-20", <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/j-20.htm>. Accessed on August 10, 2018.

assessment can be made of its capabilities. The chined nose and flat lower fuselage can reduce the J-20's frontal RCS (Radar Cross-Section). The J-20 design also includes front canards which increases RCS. It is for this reason that no stealth aircraft like the F-22, F-35, or SU-57 has canards. The RCS of any aircraft is different from each side of the airframe. While the J-20 has frontal stealth features, it will not be very stealthy from other sides of the airframe. Another problem the J-20 faces is that of aero-engines.<sup>5</sup> China's aviation industry has not been able to develop high performance fighter jet engines for their advanced fighters. The J-20s first flight was with Russian AL-31 engines, and they are now powered by the indigenous WS-10B as a stop gap measure till such time the under development and more powerful WS-15 engine is ready. The WS-10B is not powerful enough to provide super cruise capability, whereas the WS-15 will provide super cruise capability. China tried to procure Russia's super cruise capable Saturn 117S engines for the J-20 but the Russians were hesitant to offer them, knowing the Chinese propensity to reverse engineer and copy. The Chinese, therefore, decided to buy 24 SU-35 fighter aircraft from Russia to give them access to the SU-35s' Saturn 117S engines.

China has received 14 SU-35s from Russia and the balance 10 aircraft will be delivered by end 2018.<sup>6</sup> The SU-35 is a single-seat, twin-engine air superiority Russian fighter aircraft. It is an advanced version of the SU-27SK and SU-30MKK models which China had previously procured from Russia.

The induction of the SU-35 by China marks the first time that Russia has supplied China a more powerful fighter aircraft compared with what it has supplied to India. In the past, the opposite was the rule. For example, the SU-30MKK fighters Russia sold to China were no match for the SU-30MKIs supplied to India at about the same time. The Chinese planes had inferior radar and were without the thrust vectoring engines

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5. Minnie Chan, "Why China's First Stealth Fighter was Rushed into Service with Inferior Engines," *South China Morning Post*, February 10, 2018, <https://m.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2130718/why-chinas-first-stealth-fighter-was-rushed-service?amp=1>. Accessed on August 10, 2018.
  6. Zachary Keck, "China's Last Order of Russia's SU-35 Fighter is Coming this Year." *The National Interest*, June 3, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/chinas-last-order-russias-su-35-fighter-coming-year-26076>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.

the Indian version had. This time, the situation has been reversed, with the SU-35 having more powerful engines and more sophisticated radar, weapons and avionics compared to the SU-30 MKI.<sup>7</sup>

Till about 2017, the technological asymmetry between the IAF and PLAAF was in India's favour, with the SU-30 MKI of the IAF being superior to China's SU-30 MKK. But the induction of the SU-35 and J-20 has tilted the balance in favour of China. The balance will again tilt in favour of India with the induction of the Rafale in 2019. The Rafale, with its advanced Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, Meteor Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles and super cruise capability will be superior to both the SU-35 and J-20. While the J-20 has frontal stealth, it could be exposed from the sides.

Once China succeeds in developing the WS-15 engines for the J-20, it will again give the PLAAF a technological advantage. India will have to fast track its own stealth projects and deploy counter-stealth systems to face the challenge from the PLAAF

#### **ASSESSMENT OF PLAAF CAPABILITY FOR AIR OPERATIONS AGAINST INDIA**

The PLA is organised on a regional basis with the country divided into five Theatre Commands – Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern and Central Theatre Commands. The one opposite India is the Western Theatre Command (WTC) which is the largest and has its headquarters at Chengdu. Earlier, China had seven Military Regions (MRs) with two MRs opposite India: Lanzhou MR and Chengdu MR. These two MRs have now been combined to form the WTC. As part of China's military reforms and to improve joint operations capability the Theatre Commands were created on February 1, 2016.<sup>8</sup> The WTC covers the Xinjiang and Aksai Chin sectors and the Tibetan region. Tibet is a high altitude plateau, with the airfields mostly at heights of more than 3,000 m. At these high altitudes, aircraft operations suffer from load penalties due to the reduced density of air. This will be a serious limitation for the PLAAF considering that its tanker fleet is also limited to just 10 aircraft of the H-6 class and three IL-78s. China

7. *The Hindu*, March 8, 2013 <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-dragon-gets-a-bear-hug/article4485335.ece>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.

8. "China's Military Regrouped into Five Theatre Commands," *Xinhuanet*, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-02/01/c\\_135065429\\_2.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-02/01/c_135065429_2.htm). Accessed on August 1, 2018.

has built a new heavy lift transport aircraft, the Y-20. This aircraft can be modified for the tanker role and once that is done and it is available in sufficient numbers, the PLAAF's aerial refuelling capability will greatly improve.

In Tibet, the main airfields are Gonggar/ Kongka Dzong (South of Lhasa at an elevation of 3,570 m, main runway length is 4,000 m and second runway length is 3,600 m), and Hoping which is close to Shigatse city and is about 160 km west of Kongka Dzong (elevation 3,809 m, runway length 5,000 m). There is one dual use civil and military airfield in Ngari prefecture of Tibet, Gar Gansa (elevation 4,274 m, runway length 4,500 m), which serves the city of Shiquane. The airfields opposite the northeastern part of India are Bangda/Pangta (elevation 4,334 m, runway length 5,500 m, it is the world's longest runway) which is about 170 km from the Indian border, and Linzhi in Nyingchi prefecture. Linzhi is a civil airfield at an elevation of 2,949 m, with runway length of 3,000 m, which was opened in 2006, and is just 30 km from the Indian border in Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to these, there are two airfields in Xinjiang: Kashgar and Hotan. Kashgar is a civil airfield and is about 570 km from Leh. From this distance, the PLAAF can launch counter-air strikes but for sustained air support to the PLA land campaign, the large distance will be a limitation. Hotan and Gar Gansa airfields are closer, with the distance to Leh being about 330 to 350 km.

Airfields for fighter aircraft operations have to be located at reasonable distances (approximately 200 to 300 km), from each other so that they are mutually supporting. The three airfields in the northern sector—Hotan, Kashgar and Korla—are not mutually supporting. The distance between Hotan and its nearest airfield, Kashgar, is 450 km; between Hotan and Korla, it is 750 km; between Hotan and Gargansa, it is 550 km. Thus, there is no mutual support between these airfields.

In western Tibet, there is only one airfield, Gargansa, which has no supporting airfield. If this one airfield is bombed by the IAF, there will be a gap of almost 1,500 km between Hoping and Hotan, thus, severely denting PLAAF operations in western Tibet.

**Fig 1: Distances in km between Airfields in Tibet and Adjoining Areas**



Note: Distances in km between Airfields in Tibet and adjoining Areas, Author's own. Map not to scale.

In the eastern sector, opposite Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, China has made major investments in developing infrastructure for airfield construction. A majority of the airfields are within 300 km from the LAC. Hoping and Kongka Dzong are two well developed military air bases, with Linzhi and Pangta also operational as dual use airfields. Hoping and Kongka Dzong are mutually supporting of each other, with the distance between them being just 160 km. From this, we can infer that eastern Tibet seems to be the most strategic sector from China's viewpoint. PLAAF airfields supporting this sector include Kongka Dzong (Lhasa airfield), Hoping, Linzhi, and Pangta.

From available open source imagery, it can be seen that these airfields do not have blast pens for parking of fighters in hardened aircraft shelters. This means the aircraft will have to be parked in the open, thus, exposing them to IAF counter-air strikes. IAF strike aircraft, armed with sensor-fused weapons can destroy these aircraft on the tarmac. Airfield infrastructure capabilities and limitations can significantly affect fighter operations. The PLAAF will have to

considerably improve these airfields for sustained operations. A detailed analysis of airfield suitability would require more current and detailed data that cannot be obtained from open sources, but it is evident that the PLAAF at present does not have adequate facilities at the air bases in Tibet. If the PLAAF decides to upgrade all these facilities, it will take a minimum of two years to construct all the requirements. India will have to keep a close watch on these airfields and monitor any developments taking place there.

China is going to build three new airfields in Tibet for which work is going to start in 2019 and is planned to be completed by 2022.<sup>9</sup> These new airfields are at Shannan (also called Lhoka), Xigaze (Shigatse), and Ali (Burang). All these airfields are at an elevation of more than 3,900 m and although they are being made for civil purposes, they can also be used for military purposes. Shannan is opposite upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh and Burang is near the trijunction of Nepal, Uttarakhand and Tibet, and both are just about 60 km from the LAC. Shigatse already has an existing dual use civil and military airfield. It seems another new airfield will come up nearby for civilian use.

Burang is at a distance of about 220 km from Gargunsa and, from a military point of view, it will provide mutual support to Gargunsa. Therefore, the IAF would need to sector this in while conducting counter air operations in this sector. While these three new airfields will be available to the PLAAF for logistics purposes, their use for offensive air operations will only be possible if the PLAAF builds the necessary infrastructure for sustained air operations.

In contrast to the PLAAF, the IAF has the advantage of operating from most of its airfields in the plains from where aircraft can take off with a full bomb load. The IAF has a sufficient number of airfields in Western Air Command, Central Air Command and Eastern Air Command to sustain the air campaign against China.

### **LIKELY PLAAF CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS**

The Chinese Army has a large number of Air Defence (AD) weapons to provide cover not only for the armoured formations but also for the

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9. "Tibet to Build Three More Airports", *Xinhua*, June 9, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/09/c\\_137240626.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-06/09/c_137240626.htm). Accessed on August 10, 2018

infantry, artillery and other elements of the PLA Army in the Tactical Battle Area (TBA). The PLAAF has a robust Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) with mobile Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs), Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) guns and army AD elements integrated into the system. The PLAAF concept for air defence of the TBA is based on the Soviet model of deploying a multi-layered mix of different weapons of varying performance capabilities and features so that there is dense coverage, from low level to high level and extending into the enemy air space. The Soviet concept was to give full freedom to Ground-Based Air Defence Weapon Systems (GBADWS) in the TBA. Anti-aircraft guns with a very high rate of fire like the Schilka ZSU-23 were also deployed in this mix to tackle low level targets. The PLAAF will also follow a similar concept in the TBA, with a dense mix of mobile HQ-9 class of advanced long range SAMs for area defence, medium range HQ-16 SAMs, Tor M-1 short range quick reaction SAM, HQ-7, shoulder fired IR guided SAMs, and high rate of fire AAA guns.

Keeping the limitations of the airfields in Tibet in mind, and its reliance on SAMs and AD guns, the PLAAF is likely to rely heavily on GBADWS to achieve air superiority and move its army formations under heavy air defence cover. The airfields in Tibet are likely to be deployed with a small number of interceptor aircraft for area air defence of gaps in the missile cover. While the PLAAF may consider reliance on GBADWS to be a good strategy, the system will have its limitations. The mountainous terrain and undulations in the Tibetan plateau will constrain the effectiveness of AD and fire control radars due to line of sight limitations.

The concept of using GBADWS to gain air superiority is not new. It was used by the Egyptians against Israel in the 1973 War with impressive initial gains but the final result was disastrous for the Egyptians.

In this war, the Egyptian Army crossed the Suez Canal under dense overlapping layers of lethal Soviet SAMs and AAA, with its MiG fighters also flying in the same air space. The Egyptians inflicted heavy losses on the Israeli Air Force but fratricide due to poor air space management led to the Egyptians shooting down 15 to 20 per

cent of their own aircraft.<sup>10</sup> The Egyptians lost a total of 450 aircraft in the war out of which 60 to 90 aircraft were shot down by their own air defence system. Apparently, the coordination between the Egyptian air defence system and the Egyptian Air Force was not up to the mark.

After the initial losses, the Israeli Air Force developed counter-measures for the Egyptian SAMs and carried out extensive Suppression of Enemy Air Defences (SEAD) and Destruction of Enemy Air Defences (DEAD) missions to gain air superiority. Once the Egyptian AD system was neutralised, the Israeli Army counter-attacked and had the Egyptian Army on its knees.

In the India-China context, China is likely to use the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) conventional ballistic and cruise missiles as the main weapon for long range precision strikes against India. This will leave the TBA air space free for GBADWS to operate with full freedom, without fear of fratricide. Fighter aircraft are likely to be used selectively for counter-air after insuring proper coordination with the AD organisation.

It will be a daunting task for the IAF to neutralise the PLAAF AD assets for which the IAF will have to invest heavily in building up DEAD/SEAD capability. To target the mobile AD systems, the IAF will require 24x7 Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) on enemy targets. If this capability is not there, then the IAF needs to build up this capability now and train itself to attack targets in mountainous terrain.

### **PLARF BALLISTIC AND CRUISE MISSILE THREAT**

On December 31, 2015, as part of its military reforms, China upgraded its second artillery as an independent new service like the army, air force and navy and renamed it as the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). Earlier, the Second Artillery Force (SAF) was only an independent arm of the PLA.<sup>11</sup> The PLARF is responsible for the country's strategic 'nuclear' and conventional ballistic and cruise

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10. AVM R. A. Mason, RAF, ed., *War in the Third Dimension: Essays in Contemporary Air Power* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1986).

11. Ministry of National Defence, The People's Republic of China, "China Establishes Rocket Force and Strategic Support Force", January 1, 2016, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/ArmedForces/second.htm>. Accessed on August 2, 2018.

missiles but in this article, only conventional capabilities will be discussed.

China has a large ballistic and cruise missile force. Table 1 gives the strength of China's Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) and Short Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs) forces which are likely to be used for long range precision strikes with conventional warheads. Ballistic and cruise missiles are inherently difficult to defend against and, thus, armed with conventional warheads, provide China a lethal tool to destroy enemy air defences and aim for air superiority in regional conflicts. Since the 1990s, China has been developing its conventional missile capabilities and has been able to improve their accuracy with advances in information technology. Their major emphasis has been on improved accuracy, use of solid fuel rockets and increased survivability with road mobile capability.

**Table 1: China's Missile Force**<sup>12</sup>

System	Missiles	Estimated Range
Ballistic Missiles		
MRBM (DF-21)	200 – 300	1,500 km +
SRBM (DF-11, DF-15, DF-16).	1,000 - 1,200	<1,000 km
Cruise Missiles		
GLCM (DH-10/CJ-10)	200 - 300	1,500 km +
LACM/ALCM	200 - 300	1,500 km +

Note: In addition to these missiles, China has inducted the DF-26<sup>13</sup> Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) in April 2018, having a range of 3,000-4,000 km.<sup>14</sup>

Source:

According to Table 1, China's major force comprises about 1,000-1,200 SRBMs of up to 1,000 km range and 200-300 Ground Launched/Land Attack Cruise Missiles/Air Launched Cruise Missiles (GLCMs/LACMs/ALCMs) of more than 1,500 km range. The MRBMs form a force of about 200 -300 missiles with a range of up to 3,000 km.

12. US DoD, n.1.

13. "Dongfeng-26 Ballistic Missile Commissioned: Defense Ministry," *Xinhua*, July 26, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/26/c\\_137139014.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/26/c_137139014.htm). Accessed on August 4, 2018.

14. Range figures are from Eric Tegler, "China's New Ballistic Missile Puts Guam in the Crosshairs," <http://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/a17182/chinas-missile-df-26/> September 2, 2015. Accessed on August 2, 2018.

Most of these missiles are deployed on China's east coast, targeted at Taiwan. One brigade of DF-15 is reported to be deployed in Chengdu, targeted at India.<sup>15</sup>

The missiles which will take on the role for conventional long range attacks will be the DF-21 MRBM; DF-16, DF-15 and DF-11 SRBM; and the DH-10/CJ-10 cruise missile. The DF-26 IRBM has been recently inducted and can be armed with conventional warheads. In addition, China has developed a new CJ-20 ALCM (airborne version of the CJ-10) which has a range of more than 1,500 km.<sup>16</sup> China has upgraded its older H-6 bombers with new avionics and better turbofan engines and designated them as H-6K. These H-6K bombers can carry the CJ-20 ALCMs giving the PLAAF long range standoff precision attack capability.

China's 53 Missile Base at Kunming, and 56 Missile Base at Xining are the ones which are of concern to India due to their location and capability of striking at India. Indian targets in the north, east and central India are within reach of China's DF-21 ballistic missile and DH-10/CJ-10 Land Attack Cruise Missile (LACM). The DF-26, with its 3,000-4,000 km range, can cover the entire Indian territory. No missile brigade has been observed to be permanently located in Tibet but the MRBMs, SRBMs and cruise missiles are mobile systems and can be moved to Tibet if required. The missile brigades at Delingha and Da Qaidam near Golmud are connected to Tibet by the Qinghai-Tibet Railway (QTR) line and the road network to Lhasa. They can easily be moved up to Tibet to enhance their reach into India.

To counter China's missile threat, the IAF needs to upgrade its terminal air defences. The planned procurement of long range S-400 SAMs from Russia and the Medium Range SAMs (MRSAMs) will provide some ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) capability against China's ballistic missiles. Cruise missiles fly at low levels and to counter them, the first requirement is detection. The IAF needs to consider development of low cost aerostat radars to pick up cruise missiles. To destroy cruise missiles, deployment of Close in Weapon Systems (CIWS) of the Phalanx class needs to be considered. These CIWS guns coupled

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15. Kevin Lin, "PLAs Conventional Guided Missile and the Balance of Military Power between Taiwan and China", <https://web.duke.edu/pass/pdf/warpeaceconf/p-lin.pdf>. Accessed on August 12, 2018.

16. n.1.

with modern SAMs and interceptor aircraft having “look down shoot down” capability, will strengthen air defences against cruise missiles.

The IAF will have to have a robust plan to absorb, recoup and retaliate against Chinese missile attacks. Passive methods like dispersal and quick runway repair, at dispersed locations, will have to be developed to absorb damage by missiles which get through the defences. The IAF will need to have a firm dispersal plan for its High Value Assets (HVA)—the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and tanker fleet – and fighter aircraft, to avoid being targeted by these missiles. The IAF also needs an adequate number of Hardened Aircraft Shelters (HAS) to park fighter aircraft. Another passive method which needs to be explored is deployment of modern means of runway repair material to keep runway down time to the minimum. In the recently held exercise, Gagan Shakti, in April 2018, the IAF demonstrated its capability to operate from diverse airfields under realistic conditions.

The IAF has the advantage of a large number of airfields in the east and west, so even if some airfields are down, operations can continue from other locations. China cannot take out all the IAF airfields.

Another way to counter China's missiles is to deter them by developing similar capabilities so that India can strike targets deep in China. In this case, geography favours China as apart from targets in Tibet, other targets are far inside China which may be beyond the range of our strike aircraft. To attack these targets with missiles, India will have to develop them with sufficiently long range and in adequate numbers. These missiles will be costly and, therefore, India will have to carefully weigh the cost benefit ratio to avoid getting into a spiralling arms race. Perhaps, developing them in limited numbers will be adequate to provide conventional deterrence. India's plans to develop the hypersonic Brahmos-2 cruise missile and subsonic 1,000-km range Nirbhay cruise missile need to be stepped up so that they are available to provide the necessary deterrence.

India also needs to have persistent ISR capability to locate Chinese missile movements against India. Satellite reconnaissance has its limits in terms of swathe and revisit time. We need to increase the number of our satellites for ISR and also consider procurement of High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to carry out persistent ISR over Chinese targets.

## CONCLUSION

With the present state of airfield infrastructure in Tibet and the constraints of high altitude mountainous terrain, the PLAAF is not capable of achieving air superiority against the IAF. The PLAAF's concept of deploying a dense array of GBADWS in the TBA to achieve air superiority is an old model which proved to be counter-productive in the 1973 Arab-Israel War.

The main advantage that the PLA has is in its PLARF's conventional capability. However, given the diversity of airfields available to the IAF, and the accuracy required to shut down these airfields for an adequate period of time, the PLARF does not have the numbers to pose a significant missile threat. The IAF has proved during Exercise 'Gagan Shakti' that it has the capability to absorb Chinese missile attacks and operate from alternate airfields

India does not need to match the numerical superiority of the PLA in terms of manpower and equipment. There is no need for India to get into an arms race with China and match its inventory, weapon by weapon. India needs to concentrate on maintaining a technological asymmetry to deter China from any attempts at coercion or to resolve disputes by use of force.

The induction of the Y-20 heavy transport aircraft in the PLAAF as an aerial refuelling tanker, in the coming years, will significantly enhance China's long range strike capability. This is a trend which India will have to watch. Indian planners need to plan for suitable counter-attack capabilities to attack PLAAF tanker and fighter bases in the rear areas.

The IAF has been the dominant air force in the India-China context due to its advantages of geography, technological superiority and better training. The entry of the SU-35 and J-20 in the PLAAF has given it a temporary technological advantage which will change in India's favour once the Rafale aircraft enter service in the IAF in 2019. The PLAAF can never be too tall for the IAF as long as the IAF maintains its technological lead with the PLAAF, and the PLAAF remains hamstrung with its geographical limitations for conducting a sustained air campaign against India.

# CHINA'S 'GREY ZONE' OPERATIONS: HOW 'MARITIME MILITIA' AND 'LITTLE BLUE MEN' ARE CHANGING THE MARITIME WAR LANDSCAPE

**POOJA BHATT**

Beijing's need to assert its maritime claims amongst the competing claims of its littoral neighbours, while, at the same time, keeping the possible chances of warfare with the other South China Sea (SCS) stakeholders below the conventional level, has been the primary motive for Beijing to evolve the strategy of "grey zone" operations in the SCS (as a unique solution). Deployment of the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (hereafter, maritime militia) helps in working under the covers, avoiding any international backlash that a belligerent navy might otherwise receive. This paper, therefore, seeks to analyse the purpose of the maritime militia as a grey zone tactic, its organisational structure within the PLA as well as the operations that have taken place over the past few years. Such a study is helpful in understanding the Chinese psyche while asserting itself in previously

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uncontested spaces such as the maritime region by gradually creating unsuspecting conditions, establishing the activities of its personnel as 'normal' and, finally, pushing the boundaries forward with a formal backing by the PLA and the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG). The uniqueness of these operations render it complex for the international community to adequately challenge and deter them.

## **BACKGROUND**

The current international system has been shaped by the peculiar position wherein countries are engaging sub-conventionally with each other without resorting to full-fledged conventional warfare to resolve their disputes. Several reasons could be attributed to this, such as the involvement of the so-called 'liberal world order' and its institutions that infuse an element of diplomacy and negotiation between the countries. Secondly, technological advancements have taken war-fighting to the next level, supported by surveillance and preemptive strike capabilities. However, the most important reason that any state will find unavoidable before it can think of getting into the war-zone is 'economics'. War-fighting and maintaining force superiority is an expensive endeavour as systems and technologies are getting more complex and expensive. Additionally, no country can now bear the disruption to its domestic as well as international trade and commerce that is the 'lifeline' of every country. A war or war-like conditions destabilise the established trade exchanges, thereby weakening the country internally. As a panacea to these issues, grey zone operations enable states to maintain their claims in a manner that doesn't attract attention.

A recent and relevant example of 'grey zone operations' could be the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent activities in the country since then. The Russian presence in Crimea did not involve soldiers in military formations; however, it involved "little green men" – soldiers and other agents without any uniforms or any other identifiable insignia – fighting the war. Till date, the Kremlin continues to deny its support or linkage to the separatist movement, even as the fighting continues.

China's maritime assertions in the South and East China Seas have similar characteristics. The scope of the paper covers China's grey zone tactics in the SCS. Over the past few years, China has been active in the

South China Sea, asserting its maritime and territorial claims, based upon its 'historical rights'. The landmark July 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration verdict – after the Philippines made a formal complaint at the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS) Arbitration Tribunal – struck down the Chinese 'nine-dash line' claims in the South China Sea. China disregarded the verdict for the reasons it provided, but thereafter, it followed the verdict in letter if not spirit. In other words, since the judgment, Beijing's official statements have avoided mentioning the 'nine-dash line' to avoid international attention, even though the country's claims resurface every now and then, in an ambiguous manner, established by its actions in the SCS. For example, each time a foreign ship comes close to the territories it claims in the SCS such as the Paracels and Spratlys, China issues a notice stating these are 'Chinese waters', without clarifying what that means. Additionally, satellite images confirm that the country has carried out reclamation of artificial islands in the SCS, built up military infrastructure and carried out military activities such as placing fighter bombers in Woody Islands (in the Paracel group of islands) and large scale drills of its only aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, with the entire carrier battle group. Such actions point to China's assertive position – albeit its less than conventional approach – to claim these SCS territories.

A holistic understanding of the evolving Chinese maritime behaviour needs an examination of its larger objective in the region. Since 2013, China has been attempting to build a large project internationally, now formally known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connecting to more than 60 countries, through physical infrastructure as well as trade<sup>1</sup>. The said value of the project is approximately \$1 trillion, making it crucial for China to ensure its success both domestically and internationally. Seen as a revival of the ancient "Silk Road", the project is dependent on land- and sea-based connectivity to the western parts of Europe, Africa and some parts of West Asia. The maritime route connects the South China Sea to the Mediterranean Sea via the Indian Ocean. Strategically speaking, on the other hand, Chinese Gen Liu Huaqing in the mid-1980s is known to have developed the PLA Navy (PLAN) strategy

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1. XinhuaNet, "Full Text of President Xi's Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum", May 14, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c\\_136282982.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm). Accessed on August 3, 2018.

of 'offshore defence' pronouncing the need to protect its Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) in these waters for securing China's maritime trade from any likely disruption. This provides adequate reason to the Chinese PLAN to be present in the SCS waters for the protection of its BRI maritime routes. However, it still doesn't explain the presence of the Chinese maritime militia and the CCG – along with their larger than required sized vessels as well as the nature of weapon systems installed in them – threatening fishermen and military vessels of other countries in the region.

These positions cannot be clearly categorised as either 'peace-like or war-like' and, hence, they are now continuously being referred to as the grey zone wherein the claims and approaches of the country remain obscure to adversaries. The next section briefly details the concept of the grey zone and its utility in the prevailing global scenario.

### **GREY ZONE OPERATIONS: CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

A grey zone, as the name suggests, lies somewhere in the middle of a war-fighting or a peace-like scenario. The definition, posited by Hal Brands in his 2016 paper, puts the concept into perspective:

..the goal of grey zone approaches is to reap gains, whether territorial or otherwise, that are normally associated with victory in war. Yet grey zone approaches are meant to achieve those gains *without* escalating to overt warfare, *without* crossing established red-lines, and, thus, *without* exposing the practitioner to the penalties and risks that such escalation might bring.<sup>2</sup>

This definition provides the essence of why and how countries pursue grey zone operations to achieve their objectives by means 'other than full-fledged war' in the 21st century. In fact, a full-fledged war can invite international sanctions in various forms that can be made avoidable by remaining under the threshold level. A grey zone conflict draws its strength from ambiguity – right from the conceptual understanding, approaches, and on to its operational aspects. However, the same ambiguity is the conceptual weakness as it fails to explain

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2. H. Brands, "Paradoxes of the Grey Zone," Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 5, 2016. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/02/paradoxes-grey-zone/>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.

when a grey zone conflict stops being a conflict and converts into a war.

Nevertheless, the same cannot be said about the objectives behind conducting grey zone operations. The questions whether operations under grey zone are meant to avoid a war or are precursors to a war, remain unclear. Moreover, the grey zone tactics can range from cyber and technology-based attacks, to use of non-state actors as terrorists, and so on. It is not the newness of the concept that is confusing, but the scale and scope of it that necessitates a relook into the matter. Therefore, the methods and approaches utilised in these operations are likely to be helpful in providing an insight about the psyche of the new warfare tactics unfolding before us.

There are at least two bases to the conceptual understanding of grey zone operations in the Chinese context. One is the 1999 book by two PLA colonels titled *Unrestricted Warfare* that is said to have remained unnoticed by the Western world for a long time<sup>3</sup>. The book takes US victory in the 1991 Gulf War as the reference point when it asserts that “..instead, war had evolved to using all means, including armed force or non-armed force, military and non-military, and lethal and non-lethal means to compel the enemy to accept one’s interests.”

Another basis that provides a foundation to China’s maritime militia and the grey zone operations is the concept of the “people’s war doctrine” put forth by the Chinese government in 2006 in which civilian and military sectors are integrated<sup>4</sup>. Civilians are protected under customary international law in the eventuality of a war. Employing civilian fishermen as militia can, thus, promote Chinese interests without inviting provocation.

## **MARITIME MILITIA AND ‘LITTLE BLUE MEN’: FUNCTION AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The Chinese maritime militia is said to have existed before the

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3. N. Benhasel, “Darker Shades of Grey: Why Grey Zone Conflicts Will Become More Frequent and Complex”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2017, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/02/darker-shades-grey-grey-zone-conflicts-will-become-frequent-complex/>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.

4. J. Kraska and M. Monti, “The Law of Naval Warfare and China’s Maritime Militia”, US Naval War College, vol. 91, 2015, published by the Stockton Centre for the Study of International Law, <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1406&context=ils>. Accessed on August 7, 2018.

People's Republic of China (PRC) came into power,<sup>5</sup> however, its functions before 1950 are not clear. History shows that it was post 1950 that the maritime militia played a coercive and belligerent role in assisting the PLA in the seizure of the islands (the western portion of the Paracels in 1974, Scarborough Shoal in 2012, and so on), harassment of military vessels (the US ship *Impeccable* in 2009), survey ships (the Vietnamese *Viking II* and *Binh Minh*, in 2011), as well as fishing vessels, and fishermen over these years. It played a noteworthy role in 2014 when Vietnam objected to China's placement of its oil rig, the HY-981, near the former's continental shelf. In retaliation, China sent at least 80 ships with just seven military vessels to support the rig.<sup>6</sup> The rest were believed to have been CCG and maritime militia vessels.<sup>7</sup> The PLA's official newspaper is said to have stated about the maritime militia, "Putting on camouflage, they qualify as soldiers, taking off the camouflage they become law abiding fishermen."<sup>8</sup> Hence, the terms "Blue Hulls" or "Little Blue Men" unofficially illustrates the position of the Chinese maritime militia within the PLA.

However, the current strength, structure and relevance of the maritime militia can be contextualised in the Chinese desire to become a great maritime power as declared by China's former President Hu Jintao in 2012.<sup>9</sup> China's maritime militia has a place in the organisational structure of the PLA. The militia has two components: an 'ordinary' reserve of registered male citizens and a 'primary'

5. A. Erickson and C. Kennedy, "China's Maritime Militia", Centre for Naval Analyses, [https://www.cna.org/cna\\_files/pdf/chinas-maritime-militia.pdf](https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/chinas-maritime-militia.pdf). Accessed on August 5, 2018.
6. E. Bower and G. Poling, "China-Vietnam Tensions High over Drilling Rig in Disputed Waters", Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-vietnam-tensions-high-over-drilling-rig-disputed-waters>. Accessed on August 5, 2018.
7. M. Green and K. Hicks, et al, "Counter-Coercion Series: China-Vietnam Oil Rig Standoff", Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-oil-rig-standoff/>. Accessed on August 7, 2018.
8. A. Erickson and C. Kennedy, "Irregular Forces at Sea: Not 'Merely Fishermen' - Shedding Light on China's Maritime Militia", Centre for International Maritime Security, 2015, <http://cimsec.org/new-cimsec-series-on-irregular-forces-at-sea-not-merely-fishermen-shedding-light-on-chinas-maritime-militia/19624>. Accessed on August 5, 2018.
9. Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, "Full Text of Hu Jintao's report at 18th Party Congress", 2012, [http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/18th\\_CPC\\_National\\_Congress\\_Eng/t992917.htm](http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/18th_CPC_National_Congress_Eng/t992917.htm). Accessed on August 3, 2018.

force more readily mobilised to respond to various contingencies. The primary force receives dedicated resources, troops demobilised from active duty, and training from the PLA. Within the primary force, maritime militia units are the smaller and specialised units formed solely at the tactical level of organisation. They are deployed to more sophisticated maritime operations that involve monitoring, displaying presence in front of, or opposing, foreign actors.<sup>10</sup> By doing so, they supplement the PLAN and coast guard in functions and duties. The maritime militia also follows a military structure, with platoons and squads.<sup>11</sup> According to China's 2016 *Ocean Yearbook* and 2016 *Fisheries Yearbook*, China's fishing industry employs 20,169,600 workers, mostly in traditional fishing practices, industry processing and coastal aquaculture<sup>12</sup> making it the world's largest fishing fleet. The maritime militias are reportedly drawn from China's fishing fleet, which also includes 439,000 motor boats. The best-known militia is based in Hainan province, the southernmost part, where local communities have long-standing historical and commercial interests in the South China Sea.<sup>13</sup>

The fishing boats used by the Chinese maritime militia need a mention here, too. The boat size of the militia is one of the largest in the world. Based upon the veracity of the available reports:

Tanmen's Maritime Militia, for instance, has 29 new 500-ton vessels<sup>14</sup>. With a special mention of larger motherships, another report highlights that Danzhou's Maritime Militia has sent 30 100-plus-ton trawlers led by a 4,000-ton command and supply

10. A. Erickson and C. Kennedy, "Directing China's Little Blue Men: Uncovering the Maritime Militia Command Structure", Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, 2012, <https://amti.csis.org/directing-chinas-little-blue-men-uncovering-the-maritime-militias-command-structure/>. Accessed on August 7, 2018.

11. Ibid.

12. A. Erickson, "China's Three 'Navies' Each Have the World's Most Ships", *War is Boring*, 2018, <https://warisboring.com/chinas-three-navies-each-have-the-worlds-most-ships/>. Accessed on August 7, 2018.

13. "Little Blue Men: The Maritime Militias Pushing China's Claims", *The Guardian*, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/16/little-blue-men-the-maritime-militias-pushing-chinas-claims-in-south-china-sea>. Accessed on August 5, 2018.

14. A. Erickson and C. Kennedy, "From Frontier to Frontline: Tanmen's Maritime Militia's Leading Role", Centre for International Maritime Security, 2016, <http://cimsec.org/frontier-frontline-tanmen-maritime-militias-leading-role-pt-2/25260>. Accessed on August 8, 2018.

ship and a 1,500-ton cargo ship on a 40-day trip to the Spratly fishing grounds.<sup>15</sup>

Speaking about the peculiar nature of the water cannons and their 'grey zone' utility in the international waters, another report further mentions:

The boats these leading units operate are largely new-constructed using fairly typical and traditional designs and equipment by international standards—regular fishing trawlers in terms of capability, save for their reinforced hulls, water cannons and, reportedly in some cases, weapons and ammunition lockers. There is nothing advanced about them compared to any other modern fishing boats operated anywhere else in the world.<sup>16</sup>

...What distinguishes leading People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (or, Maritime Militia) vessels are their water cannons and sovereign employment, aspects that could be added to most fishing boats around the world.<sup>17</sup>

If the facts provided here are considered, Beijing's fishermen and fishing vessels do not present an innocuous picture. The increasing size of vessels fitted with reinforcements has a utility beyond just warding off the pirates in the open seas. The fishermen are now venturing to farther coasts ranging from Indonesia to the coasts of Africa<sup>18</sup> as a part of China's 'distant water fishing fleet'.

## COMMAND STRUCTURE AND LEGAL POSITION

In terms of the command and control chain, authority resides within multiple entities, including both the military organs, i.e. the grassroot People's Armed Force Departments (PAFD), Provincial Military District

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15. A. Erickson, and C. Kennedy, (2016), "Trailblazers in Warfighting: The Maritime Militia of Danzhou", Centre for International Maritime Security, <http://cimsec.org/trailblazers-warfighting-maritime-militia-danzhou/21475>. Accessed on August 8, 2018.

16. n. 9.

17. Ibid.

18. C. Wong, "Chinese Fishermen: The New Global Pirates?", *The Diplomat*, 2016, URL:<https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/chinese-fishermen-the-new-global-pirates/>. Accessed on August 7, 2018.

(MD) and Military Sub-District (MSD) headquarters (in increasing order of authority) and their government/Party counterparts.<sup>19</sup> The maritime militia receives its orders from the civil-military joint command structure, passed by the chain through the grassroot level armed force departments managing the zone/region. In return, the maritime militias report to authorities based upon the mission they are employed in. Andrew Erickson, a leading scholar on the Chinese maritime militia, provides a clearer picture of its command and control operations: "Maritime Militia reconnaissance detachments report their findings directly to MD Headquarters, while another detachment summoned to assist with maritime law enforcement would be commanded by the China Coast Guard (CCG) in cooperation with their MD."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the maritime militias, seen as a 'reserve force', are controlled by, and support, the local Chinese military forces. The fact that China has stepped up its maritime patrols, employing ships from its coast guard and maritime militias rather than using its navy drives home the point of its use of 'grey zone' tactics.<sup>21</sup>

Over the years, the nature of the militias' missions has evolved: from undertaking tasks such as the transport of PLA and CCG troops, vehicles, providing navigation and infrastructure assistance to them in addition to other rescue operations as was described by the "Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China 2007." The term 'militia' appears only twice (Articles 14 and 28), each time after the PLA and PLA Armed Forces<sup>22</sup> in that order, that is a telling sign of their official status within the country. Article 33 of China's *Regulations on Militia Work 1991*, further states, "Militia organizations in land-sea frontier defense areas and other key combat readiness areas should, in accordance with the requirements of higher-level military organs, carry out joint defense with the PLA and the People's Armed Police forces stationed in the area".<sup>23</sup>

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19. Erickson, n.12.

20. Ibid.

21. n.5.

22. Law of China, "Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China 2007", <http://www.lawinfochina.com/Display.aspx?LookType=3&Lib=law&Cgid=96791&Id=6358&SearchKeyword=&SearchCKeyword=&paycode=#menu1>. Accessed on August 5, 2018.

23. n.9.

Since 2013, the militias' missions seem to have evolved to display presence in the East and South China Seas to manifest sovereignty, and coordinate with the needs of national, political and diplomatic issues. They are involved in actions such as law enforcement in coordination with the Maritime Law Enforcement (MLE) forces, island landings, and work in the disputed waters of the East and South China Seas. The militias also train for some independent missions, such as anti-air missile defence, light weapons use, and sabotage operations, with a special focus on reconnaissance and surveillance exercises.<sup>24</sup>

Involving the maritime militia enhances the active workforce considerably, besides the PLAN and coast guard personnel. They acquire the tactical knowledge of the region such as local maritime topography, etc. which is an additional factor that can contribute towards faster and better responses. Lastly, it impacts the mass-psychology and public opinion amongst the Chinese locals who would see such operations as part of national development, and desire to be a part of them. The large participation of people emboldens the Chinese Party and its narratives of "historical rights and interests", especially in the maritime region, as declared in the 2012 Defence White Paper. Several recent Chinese official documents view the SCS as a part of China's maritime rights and interests.<sup>25</sup> Hence, the presence of the maritime militia in the SCS is a confirmation of Beijing's official stance on the subject.

### **PROTECTED UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW**

The composition of the maritime militia also provides it protection from international law. Being constituted of civilian fishermen safeguards the maritime militia under one of the key tenets of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) as "civilians and civilian objects should be protected in case of any armed attack". The objective of the principle of distinction is to protect civilians, and ameliorate the effects of warfare upon them, and, therefore, the legal status of China's maritime militia risks blurring beyond recognition

24. Kraska and Monti, n.4.

25. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Position Paper of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Matter of Jurisdiction in the South China Sea Arbitration Initiated by the Republic of the Philippines", 2017, URL: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1217147.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1217147.shtml). Accessed on August 5, 2018.

the line between fishing vessels and naval functions.<sup>26</sup> International law scholars such as Kraska and Monti have argued about the nature of challenges that these maritime militias pose. The large number of fishing vessels in the SCS is making it a challenge for the other navies in the area to distinguish between civilian fishing fleets and those belonging to the Chinese maritime militias. As this paper describes, the intelligence gathering as well as surveillance related activities that these militias resort to, is another issue that the navies of other countries find difficult to tackle. In short, the militias act as 'force multipliers' for the PLAN in the maritime waters, and as the eyes and ears for the Chinese military, despite which they remain under the protection of international law in the case of unlawful activities, as the laws of the 'Geneva War Conventions' do not apply to civilians.

The difficulties involved in dealing with irregular maritime forces were seen in 2015 when an American destroyer, the *USS Lassen*, passed close to a newly-built artificial island on Subi Reef in the Spratlys. As described by a U.S. Navy source: "...there were Chinese merchant vessels present that were not as demure as the Chinese Navy. One came out of its anchorage in the island and crossed the destroyer's bow but at a safe distance, and the *Lassen* did not alter course as the merchant ship circled around." Fishing vessels in the area added to shipping traffic in the immediate area, the source said, but the ship did not have to manoeuvre around them. But the extra craft seem to have been present, the source noted, "because they anticipated the *Lassen's* transit".<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The paper overviews China's third maritime force: the maritime militia. Positioned after the Chinese PLA Navy and armed forces as a third force, the maritime militia demonstrates a *sui generis*<sup>28</sup> problem for the international community. The militia, disguised as fishermen, has been an issue of contention between China and its neighbours such as Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines amongst others. However, as illustrated in the paper, its status places it somewhere between

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26. Benhasel, n.3

27. Bower and Poling, n.6.

28 Latin term denoting 'unique or its own kind'.

the military and civilians, making it difficult for the international community to adequately address the challenge.

The militia is seen as an 'official' Chinese force, way low in its hierarchy and power, and subsumed within the PLA's military structure. It receives orders from, and reports back to, the PLA military, present at the provincial level, from where the information travels up to the highest in the hierarchical structure of the PLA military. The militia also finds a legal position within the domestic system. Nevertheless, this status pales into insignificance when seen from the vantage point of international waters of the South and East China Seas. The civilian status of the ships and the crew tests the responses of the international laws such as Geneva Convention, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) and impedes the responses from the international community.

In a nutshell, the episode of China's use of traditional rights to make historic claims in the South China Sea points towards a 'system' that has been normalised by the country over the decades and centuries, assisted by the fact that the international community has overlooked it, and that has eventually been used to provide the reasons for appropriation of resources and making assertions. "Traditional fishing rights" was one of the bases for China's claim on the nine-dash line resources. However, the Chinese claims are not entirely accurate. Fishermen from China, and also from other coastal communities in the neighbouring countries, have been fishing in these waters since several centuries and taking shelter at the unclaimed landforms in the SCS. Nevertheless, 'these' activities were used to put forward Beijing's claim on the basis of 'customary international law'<sup>29</sup> in May 2013, that was struck down in the landmark PCA judgment in July 2016. Grey zone operations can further create conditions in the high seas for similar claims in the future.

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29. Customary International Law consists of rules of law derived from the consistent conduct of states acting out of the belief that the law required them to act that way. It includes the following:

- the widespread repetition by states of similar international acts over time (state practice);
- the requirement that the acts must occur out of a sense of obligation (*opinio juris*); and that the acts are taken by a significant number of states and not rejected by a significant number of states.

Finally, Chinese fishing trawlers have been also reported near Indian waters. For example, in August 2011, a Chinese vessel, camouflaged as a fishing trawler, was spotted by the Indian Navy near the Andaman Islands. The Indian authorities concluded that the mysterious visitor was on an espionage mission and was most likely being commanded by personnel of the PLA.<sup>30</sup> The presence of fishing vessels and ships of non-military nature near the Indian waters over the years has been a noteworthy development that requires attention from New Delhi.

Taking a leaf from the book of experiences in the SCS, it would be prudent for countries such as India, having maritime rights and interests, to understand the 'grey zone' operations at the conceptual and operational levels. India has its own vision of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as explicated by the Ministry of External Affairs<sup>31</sup>. The vision includes "... enhancing capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories and interests; deepening economic and security cooperation; promoting collective action to deal with natural disasters and threats like piracy, terrorism and emergent non-state actors." It also resonates with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), as a clear, high-level articulation of India's vision for the Indian Ocean.

At the supra-regional level, India and other Pacific Ocean countries are currently working towards establishing the 'Indo-Pacific' as a normative and strategic theatre of cooperation. Grey zone operations are capable of threatening the vision of a free, open, peaceful and prosperous IOR as well as Indo-Pacific Region.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, creating international awareness and working collectively against such grey zone tactics employed by China are the likely optimal solutions for the stakeholders. On the other hand, the non-urgent optics of these

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30. *NDTV News*, "China Ship with 22 labs Spied on India", 2011, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/china-ship-with-22-labs-spied-on-india-466101>. Accessed on August 8, 2018.

31. "Countries in Indian Ocean Responsible for its Stability: Sushma Swaraj", *The Economic Times*, 2018 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/countries-in-indian-ocean-responsible-for-its-stabilitysushma-swaraj/articleshow/60311911.cms>. Accessed on August 19, 2018.

32. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", Press Release, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29933/Shared\\_Vision\\_of\\_IndiaIndonesia\\_Maritime\\_Cooperation\\_in\\_the\\_IndoPacific](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29933/Shared_Vision_of_IndiaIndonesia_Maritime_Cooperation_in_the_IndoPacific). Accessed on August 22, 2018.

operations, causing them to be relegated to a low ranging security issue, can have serious regional security implications. An awareness of the grey zone operations can assist countries like India to be better equipped to address them in their maritime domains.

# CHINA'S NEPAL POLICY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: TIBET, SECURITY, AND CONNECTIVITY

RISHI GUPTA

The peculiar feature of Nepal lies in its geostrategic location. Lying between the two Asian giants, India and China, invariably makes it important, as its borders on both sides carry socio-economic, political and security relevance. Close cultural ties and an open border with India have been the defining features of Nepal's 'special relations' with India. On the northern front, civilisational links and the strategic Himalayan setting bring China and Nepal close. Modern-day China's policy towards Nepal has had one focus throughout, and that is Tibet.<sup>1</sup> Nepal, host to several thousands of Tibetans-in-exile and having shared age-old trade and people-to-people contacts with Tibet, has constantly been in the eyes of China, as any disturbance at the China-Nepal border could destabilise its security dynamics, eventually halting its economic development. In the past, China's Nepal policy was pursued through hardcore military might and financial assistance. However, China's economic and technological advancements are deeply reflected in the present-

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1. Parmanand, "Nepal's China Policy," *China Report*, vol. 16, no. 6, November 1960, p. 83.

day China's Nepal policy. Other than Tibet, India and the larger South Asian region work as a stimulator for the Chinese pursuit in Nepal. The present paper analyses the salient factors of China's Nepal policy.

### **TIBET UPRISING OF 2008 AND NEPAL'S RESPONSE**

Since 2008, China has been a close observer of the political developments in Nepal. While 2008 marked the first democratic elections in Nepal since its transition from a monarchy to a democracy in 2006, the year saw a rebuttal of interests with regard to an ultra-sensitive geopolitical entity for China—Tibet. Anti-China protests mounted in the busy marketplaces in the capital city Lhasa on March 10, 2008, to condemn the Chinese rule on the 49th anniversary of the Tibet uprising. In the follow-up, the preparation phase for the Beijing Olympics in 2008 witnessed further clashes between the Tibetans and the Chinese security forces in Lhasa. Also, just a day before the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, more than 2,000 Tibetan refugees, out of approximately 20,000 living in Nepal, along with their Nepali supporters, staged anti-China protests in Kathmandu.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese government was quick to approach its Nepalese counterpart to quash the protests and demanded stringent penal action.<sup>3</sup> In compliance, the Nepalese authorities acted, and assured Beijing that its three prime objectives in Nepal: “one, to put a full stop on clandestine border crossing by Tibetan asylum seekers; two, a *de-facto* ban on pro-Tibetan political mobilisation in Nepal; last, enrolling Nepal's intelligence and law-enforcement apparatus to provide up-to-the-minute intelligence,” would be protected.<sup>4</sup>

Despite being criticised by human rights advocates, the then Maoist party-led government in Nepal defended the actions of

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2. “Beijing Olympics: Tibetans and Nepalis Stage Anti-China Protests as Olympic Games Loom,” *The Telegraph*, August 7, 2008, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/olympics/2516008/Beijing-Olympics-Tibetans-and-Nepalis-stage-anti-China-protests-as-Olympic-Games-loom.html>. Accessed on July 13, 2018.
  3. “Appeasing China: Restricting the Rights of the Tibetans,” Human Rights Watch, July 23, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/tibetnepal0708/2.htm>. Accessed on August 6, 2018.
  4. “Under China's Shadow: Mistreatment of Tibetans in Nepal,” Human Rights Watch, April 1, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/01/under-chinas-shadow/mistreatment-tibetans-nepal>. Accessed on August 6, 2018.

the Nepalese security forces against the Tibetan protestors.<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda went ahead to observe the closing ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, thereby breaking the tradition of visiting India for his first foreign visit since assuming charge in 2008. The event had sent an alarming signal to New Delhi of growing resentment against India in the Nepalese establishment.

Marred by further political instability in the following years, China remained 'cautioned' and 'careful' in engaging with Nepal. Amidst the Chinese fear of protests by the Tibetan exiles in Nepal during the visit of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, the Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar had visited China in December 2011 to assure that no disturbance by the Tibetan refugees would occur during the visit.<sup>6</sup> Overall, Tibet remained the top priority of China in dealing with Nepal and it was reflected through the visit of Premier Wen in January 2012 which saw Tibet at the centre of China's discussions with Nepal.<sup>7</sup>

From 2008 onwards, Chinese White Papers on National Security have accused that the "forces working for 'Tibet Independence' have inflicted serious damage to national security and society."<sup>8</sup> In this regard, Beijing has had more immediate worries in Nepal. However, the deep Chinese pockets managed to bargain successfully with Nepal. China has increased its presence in Nepal through economic-aid packages and investments in security and infrastructure, in return

5. n. 3.

6. "Gachhadar Leaving for Beijing Today," *Kathmandu Post*, December 25, 2011, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2011-12-25/gachhadar-leaving-for-beijing-today.html>. Accessed on August 4, 2018; Nihar R Nayak, "Chinese PM in Nepal: A Short Visit but a Long Trail?," Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, January 18, 2012, [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/ChinesePMinNepalAshortvisitbutalongtrail\\_NiharNayak\\_180112](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/ChinesePMinNepalAshortvisitbutalongtrail_NiharNayak_180112). Accessed on August 3, 2018.

7. "Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Nepalese Prime Minister Bhattarai," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, January 14, 2012, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2752\\_663508/2754\\_663512/t896571.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2752_663508/2754_663512/t896571.shtml). Accessed on: August 04, 2018.

8. See Chinese White Papers on National Security 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, [https://fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/2008DefenseWhitePaper\\_Jan2009.pdf](https://fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/2008DefenseWhitePaper_Jan2009.pdf), <https://china.usc.edu/prc-state-council-chinas-national-defense-2008-january-20-2009>, [http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/1\\_1a.pdf?\\_=1316627912](http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/1_1a.pdf?_=1316627912), <https://china.usc.edu/prc-state-council-chinas-national-defense-2010-march-31-2011>, [http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2016-07/13/content\\_4768293.htm](http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2016-07/13/content_4768293.htm), [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2016-07/13/content\\_7153396.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2016-07/13/content_7153396.htm), <https://china.usc.edu/prc-state-council-chinas-military-strategy-2015-may-26-2015>. Accessed on July 25, 2018.

receiving the latter's assurance to keep a close and controlled check on the Tibetan exiles in Nepal.<sup>9</sup>

At present, Tibet remains an integral part of the Chinese foreign and security policy framework on Nepal. The visit of the Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli to Beijing in June 2018 saw Tibet as the cardinal factor in their bilateral talks. Meanwhile, the current approach of the Chinese seemed to have broadened the spectrum of the initiatives. From having hardcore security assurances from Nepal, China has chosen to link the ongoing developments in Tibet to Nepal, providing a close-eye look to China on the state of affairs concerning the Tibetan exiles living in Nepal. During his week-long sojourn in China, Prime Minister Oli had visited Tibet where he conveyed that Nepal is "firmly committed to the One-China policy. We are also committed to not allowing our territory to be used against the core interests of China."<sup>10</sup> This reaffirmation from Nepal came in the light of the centrality of Tibet in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China.

Further, China and Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during KP Oli's visit to China in 2018 to negotiate a Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and a Treaty on Extradition, to strengthen cooperation on the administration of border areas and fight against illegal border crossing and transnational crimes. In case the agreed mechanism results in a legal framework, it shall directly affect the lives of undocumented Tibetans living in Nepal.<sup>11</sup> Also, any fresh attempts by Tibetans fleeing to Nepal might meet stringent action from the Nepalese side.<sup>12</sup> However, any extradition or action by the security forces in Nepal will be in violation of Nepal's "Gentleman's Agreement" with the

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9. Sangeeta Thapliyal, "Nepal's Policy Towards SAARC," *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 3/4, Winter 2014-Spring 2015, p. 124.

10. "Reply Speech by The Rt. Hon. K P Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal at the Dinner hosted in his honour by H. E. Mr. Qi Zhala, Chairman of the People's Government of Tibet Autonomous Region of China at Lhasa," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, June 22, 2018, <https://mofa.gov.np/reply-speech-by-the-rt-hon-k-p-sharma-oli-prime-minister-of-nepal/>. Accessed on August 15, 2018.

11. "Joint Statement between Nepal and the People's Republic of China," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal, Kathmandu, June 21, 2018, <https://mofa.gov.np/joint-statement-between-nepal-and-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>. Accessed on August 16, 2018.

12. Rishi Gupta, "Analysing Prime Minister Oli's Visit to China," *In Focus*, Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), [http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS\\_Infocus\\_RG\\_00.pdf](http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_Infocus_RG_00.pdf). Accessed on August 16, 2018.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which guarantees Tibetans “who reach its territory safe passage to India, where they can obtain refugee status. International law prohibits Nepal from forcibly repatriating Tibetan refugees because they would be at risk of torture or persecution in China.”<sup>13</sup>

### **MILITARY COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND NEPAL**

Since 2005, China’s military aid to Nepal has continued to grow. This grew in 2008 in the light of the free-Tibet protests in Nepal. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) had given military aid of US\$ 2.6 million to the Nepal Army in 2008, followed by an announcement of US\$ 3 million in 2009.<sup>14</sup> Ram Bahadur Thapa, the defence minister of Nepal, was invited as an observer to the military exercise ‘Warrior 2008’, and during his meeting with his Chinese counterpart, he was further assured of a military aid package of US\$ 1.3 million to Nepal.<sup>15</sup> In February 2011, in a not so common event, Gen Chen Bingde, chief of the PLA, along with a high-level PLA delegation, visited Nepal.<sup>16</sup> It was after ten years that a military delegation of this size had visited Nepal. The visit took place in the backdrop of the Tibetan leader-in-exile in India, the 14th Dalai Lama, stepping down as the political leader of the Tibetan government-in-exile.<sup>17</sup> In view of the possibility that his stepping down may give rise to extremism in the free-Tibet movement, a check on the issue was initiated through Gen Chen’s visit to Nepal. During the visit, China agreed to provide military aid worth US\$ 7.7 million to Nepal.<sup>18</sup> While in Kathmandu, PLA

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13. “Nepal: Increased Pressure from China Threatens Tibetans,” Human Rights Watch, April 01, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/01/nepal-increased-pressure-china-threatens-tibetans>. Accessed on July 11, 2018.

14. Uddhab Pyakurel, “Nepal Weekly Brief,” Vivekanand Foundation, October 24, 2011-October 30, 2012, <https://www.vifindia.org/weeklybrief/nepal/2011/43>. Accessed on August 11, 2018.

15. Satish Kumar, “Nepal and China,” *The India Journal of Political Science*, vol. 24, no. 1, January-March, 1963, p. 82.

16. Deepak Adhikari, “With an Eye to India and Tibet, China Courts Nepal,” *Time*, March 29, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2061794,00.html>. Accessed on: July 25, 2018.

17. Sanjay Upadhyaya, *Nepal and the Geo-Strategic Rivalry between China and India* (USA: Routledge, 2012), p. 158.

18. Ananth Krishnan, “China, Nepal Agree to Deepen Military Ties,” *The Hindu* (Kolkata), July 25, 2013.

Chief Chen mentioned that China-Nepal cooperation is important to “world peace and the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>19</sup> His comments clearly reflected China’s strategic fixture of Nepal in its foreign and security policy which is not limited to South Asia but extends to Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. The visit was reciprocated by the Nepal Army chief’s visit to China in July 2013 which had seen China’s further financial and infrastructural assistance to Nepal.<sup>20</sup>

Notably, the political instability in Nepal from 1996-2015 has favoured as well as cautioned China at the same time. A 10-year-long Maoist insurgency which lasted up to 2006, saw China’s proximity with the royal regime. Chinese support to the royal regime during the civil war was obvious as the political organisation in Nepal had fallen prey to disintegration. Hence, it was the king who proved to be a better bargain, and the person in power. However, soon after the ouster of the monarchy and the grand victory of the political Maoists in the first democratic elections in 2008, China had reservations about trusting the Maoists who were now in power, as in the past, China had been quick in condemning the Nepalese Maoists for defaming Mao and his ideological preaching, and did not recognise them as revolutionaries.<sup>21</sup> It was later, to address the free-Tibet uprising that China engaged with the Maoist government to which Prime Minister Prachanda responded positively.<sup>22</sup>

The Nepalese leadership has been an active force in the country’s engagement with China. The present Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, during his first stint as prime minister, paid a visit to Beijing in 2016. His visit took place at a time when Nepal’s relations with India were tense over an alleged border blockade in 2015. Oli’s visit to China was multi-dimensional in terms

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19. Adhikari, n. 16.

20. “Nepal Army Chief Returns from Official Visit to China,” *People’s Daily*, July 29, 2013, <http://en.people.cn/90786/8343870.html>. Accessed on June 13, 3018.

21. Akhilesh Upadhyay, “West Ignoring Nepal’s Civil War at its own Peril,” *Dawn*, June 23, 2002; Nabhiha Gul, “Question of Nepal: Political Instability and Maoist Insurgency,” *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 55, no.3, July 2002, p. 35.

22. Robin Seemangal, “Disaster Diplomacy: After Nepal Earthquake, China and India Race to Give Aid,” *Observer*, January 1, 2015, <http://observer.com/2015/05/in-nepal-china-and-india-engage-in-disaster-diplomacy/>. Accessed on August 17, 2018; Monalisa Adhikari, “Between the Dragon and the Elephant: Nepal’s Neutrality,” *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 1/2, June-December 2012, p. 93.

of engagement in the fields of connectivity, infrastructure and hydroelectricity development, and investment. Discussions on a joint military exercise between the PLA and the Nepal Army also took place. As a result, in April 2017, China and Nepal held the first-ever joint military exercise 'Sagarmatha Friendship' in Nepal. While no official statements or unease emanated on India's part, a provocation was quickly released in state-owned Chinese media which read that "the Indian security and strategic circle has watched the joint drill between Beijing and Kathmandu closely, because of India's long-held South Asian hegemonic mentality."<sup>23</sup> The joint exercise was aimed at training the Nepalese Army in counter-terrorism.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that Tibetans-in-exile are categorised as terrorists by China,<sup>25</sup> and through the joint drill, China intended to send a strong message to them.

Further, with considerable political stability achieved through local and parliamentary elections in 2017 under the controversial Constitution of 2015, followed by the rise of a new political Left by the merging of the Maoist Party in the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified-Marxist-Leninist), the Chinese attempts to penetrate the domestic political fora of Nepal are now in the open. Having emerged as a popular leader in the 2017 elections, KP Oli's assurances with regard to Tibet, business and security have been reassuring to Beijing. Soon after the parliamentary elections in 2017, while Oli was the prime minister-in-waiting, a delegation led by Maj Gen Zhao Jinsong of the Western Command of the PLA was in Kathmandu to strengthen military cooperation between Nepal and China.<sup>26</sup> While India remains the prime player in training the Nepal Army and providing military assistance, increased military cooperation

23. Liu Zongyi, "Indian Worry Over China-Nepal Drill Outdated," *Global Times*, April 20, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1043393.shtml>. Accessed on August 17, 2018.

24. "Nepal, China Begin First-Ever Joint Military Exercises," *South China Morning Post*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2088059/nepal-china-begin-first-ever-joint-military-exercises>. Accessed on July 19, 2018.

25. "Dalai Lama's Prayers for Tibetans 'Terrorism in Disguise', China says," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/19/dalai-lama-prayers-tibetans-terrorism>. Accessed on August 11, 2018.

26. Binod Ghimire, "Nepal-China Military Drill in Sept," *The Kathmandu Post*, July 21, 2018, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-07-21/nepal-china-military-drill-in-sept.html>. Accessed on August 04, 2018

between China and Nepal needs to be seen through the strategic prism in New Delhi.<sup>27</sup>

## REGIONAL PRESENCE OF CHINA IN SOUTH ASIA THROUGH NEPAL

“China’s new proactive regional posture is reflected in virtually all policy spheres—economic, diplomatic, and military—and this parallels China’s increased activism on the global stage.”<sup>28</sup> Considering the larger geographical importance and security vulnerability and potential of the South Asian region, no one can deny the exceeding interest of the world powers in, and the need to be watchful of, the region.<sup>29</sup> China, through its presence at various regional and international platforms, is attempting to portray its economic and diplomatic potential which might provide the regional countries with a better bargain. In one such bargain, in 2005, the King of Nepal came in full support of China’s application for membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). While SAARC is an exclusive group of the South Asian countries, China’s unilateral attempts were unsuccessful until an understanding between China and Nepal was reached over the former’s entry into SAARC in the light of the royal takeover by King Gyanendra during the peak time of the Maoist insurgency in 2005 and India’s denial of arms supplies to the Royal Nepal Army (RNA).<sup>30</sup> King Gyanendra and RNA officials visited Beijing in April and November 2005, and as a result, “18 Chinese military trucks had arrived at the Nepal-China border on November 25, 2005.”<sup>31</sup> In response, the king supported

27. Nihar R Nayak, “Nepal and Bhutan in India’s Security Architecture,” in Satish Kumar ed., *India’s National Security* (New Delhi: Pentagon Publishers, 2018), pp. 237-238; also see Gupta, n. 12.

28. David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order,” *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, Winter 2004/05, p. 64; Evan Medeiros and R. Taylor Fravel, “China’s New Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no. 6, November/December 2003, pp. 22-35.

29. Cuiping Zhu, *India’s Ocean Can China and India Coexist?* (Singapore: Springer, 2018), p.165.

30. Ashish K Roy, “The Maoist Movement in Nepal,” in Anjali Ghosh, et. al., *India’s Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2009), p. 134.

31. “Dead on Time - Arms Transportation, Brokering and The Threat to Human Rights,” Amnesty International, May 6, 2006, index number: ACT 30/008/2006, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/68000/act300082006en.pdf>. Accessed on July 25, 2018; also see “Hu Jintao Meets with King Gyanendra of Nepal,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, April 23, 2005, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/hjtfw\\_665840/t193903.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/hjtfw_665840/t193903.shtml). Accessed on June 29, 2018.

a five-point proposal put forward by Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing for China's entry into SAARC.<sup>32</sup> Even though China could not succeed in becoming a full-time member of the sub-regional grouping, it was admitted as an observer at the 14th SAARC Summit held at Delhi in 2005.<sup>33</sup> China's inclusion in SAARC has been projected in terms of dispelling the fears about Indian hegemony among the smaller member states, leading to greater economic integration and equilibrium.<sup>34</sup> However, the Chinese economic strength has hardly been outcome oriented in this sub-regional grouping.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, at present, China's success in bringing the South Asian countries except India and Bhutan, on board to join the BRI, allows it to utilise surplus capital and pump in the finished products in the local markets of the region.<sup>36</sup> The existing economic asymmetry amongst the South Asian countries has resulted in a trust deficit between the geographically smaller countries and India.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the "small state"<sup>38</sup> syndrome complements China in influencing any further rapprochement between India and its neighbours, with which China wants to fix the BRI according to own incentives. Further, Chinese President Xi Jinping's address to the Pakistani Parliament on April 21, 2015, had the important

32. Kumar, n. 15.

33. Niranjana Bhattarai, *Nepal and China: A Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2010), pp. 123-127; V R Raghava, *Internal Conflicts in Nepal: Transnational Consequences* (New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt Ltd, 2011), p. 192.

34. Xi Jinping, "Building a China-Pakistan Community of Shared Destiny to Pursue Closer Win-Win Cooperation," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, April 21, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/t1257158.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1257158.shtml). Accessed on: August 7, 2018.

35. Jyotishman Bhagawati, "China's Increasing Forays in South Asia: Prospect for More Integration?" Vivekananda International Foundation, February 15, 2017, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2017/february/15/chinas-increasing-forays-in-south-asia-prospect-for-more-integration>. Accessed on August 11, 2018.

36. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "China's OBOR Initiative May Create Political and Economic Instability in Southeast Asia; India Wary" *Economic Times*, May 4, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/chinas-obor-initiative-may-create-political-and-economic-instability-in-south-asia-experts/articleshow/58505187.cms>. Accessed on July 22, 2018.

37. M Manir Hussain and Ronald C. Duncan, "The Political Economy of Regionalism in South Asia," *Economic Division Working Paper*, National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, no. 1, 1998, p. 9, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/156615484.pdf>. Accessed on August 24, 2018.

38. Leo E. Rose and Roger Dial, "Can a Mini-state Find True Happiness in a World Dominated by Protagonist Powers?: The Nepal Case," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 386, November, 1969, pp. 89-101.

elements of China's desperation to strengthen its presence in South Asia. In his speech, he mentioned:

South Asia is where the land and maritime Silk Roads meet. It is, therefore, a focal area and important cooperation partner for advancing the Belt and Road Initiative. Good progress has been made in building the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor which are closely connected with the land and maritime Silk Roads. The building of these two economic corridors will give a strong boost to the economic growth of the related countries and provide a strong new force for deepening regional cooperation in South Asia.<sup>39</sup>

While India has conveyed its reservations on joining the BRI, China has been trying to convince New Delhi to do so. However, Nepal's official association with the BRI in May 2017 has been more of a symbolic triumph for China as a number of projects signed between China and Nepal under the BRI framework, especially on connectivity, remain "complicated and arduous."<sup>40</sup>

### CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN CHINA AND NEPAL

Nepal, a geographically landlocked country, surrounded by India from three sides and China on the north, with no access to the sea and limited connectivity with China, relies heavily on India for its third country trade and transit. Facilitated first by the Treaty of Trade and Transit in 1960, followed by a fresh Treaty of Transit in 1991, renewed in 1999 and 2006, a total of 65 per cent of Nepal's total third country trade takes place through Indian ports.<sup>41</sup> However, Nepal, over the years has been in search of alternate transit routes via China as tensions with India have often affected its trade and transit. King Birendra's proposal to declare Nepal a "Zone of Peace" was an ardent phenomenon during the 1970s in this regard.

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39. n.34.

40. Anil Giri, "Kathmandu-Kerung Railway Project 'Complicated and Arduous,' Report says," August 17, 2018, <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2018-08-16/rail-project-complicated-and-arduous.html>. Accessed on August 17, 2018.

41. Rishi Iyengar "What the Nepalese Prime Minister's Visit to China Says about the Wider Politics of Asia," *The Times*, March 24, 2016, accessible at: <http://time.com/4270239/nepal-prime-minister-oli-visit-china-beijing-india/>. Accessed on July 26, 2018.

Nepal joined the Chinese mega ambitious project, the BRI, in May 2017. The government's decision to join the BRI came in the backdrop of the strained relationship between Kathmandu and New Delhi. The discussion on joining the BRI had begun in 2016 after the then Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had signed agreements to strengthen "connectivity, further step-up the land and air links and improve the land transport infrastructure" with China under the purview of the BRI framework.<sup>42</sup> With the fall of the Oli government within eight months in July 2015, clouds of doubts prevailed over the BRI being the priority of the new Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda. However, in a surprise move, the Prachanda Administration signed the initiative after months of closed-door discussions on May 12, 2017. Even though India decided not to comment on the event, New Delhi's scepticism regarding the issue was visible through the media houses in India.

During his election campaigning in 2017, Oli had promised to balance Nepal's relationship with China. It was convincing to the masses as an anti-India wave had struck the political clouds with the blockade at the India-Nepal border that had affected the supply of petroleum products, emergency supplies of medicines, and other food items when an earthquake of 7.2 magnitude occurred in April 2015. While India was one of the first few countries to swiftly dispatch rescue and recovery teams to Nepal, the later phase was not so pleasant for India. Nepal accused India of siding with the *Madhesi* protestors, involved in the blockade in response to their unhappiness over the newly implemented Constitution in October 2015, which India denied, but it had already done substantial damage to India. The present deal under the BRI framework on the "Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network to enhance railway, port, aviation, and communication"<sup>43</sup> is a renewed effort on the part of Nepal to seek transit through China.

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42. "Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and Nepal," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, March 23, 2016, accessible at: <https://mofa.gov.np/joint-press-statement/>. Accessed on June 11, 2018.

43. "Press Note Issue at Tribhuvan International Airport on Official Visit of the Rt. Hon'ble Prime Minister to China," June 24, 2018, <https://mofa.gov.np/translation-of-press-note-at-tia-kathmandu-on-24-june-2018-on-official-visit-of-the-rt-honble-prime-minister-to-china/>. Accessed on June 30, 2018.

## CONCLUSION

At present, China-Nepal relations have entered into development and economic cooperation which involves a strategic line of China's aspirations to strengthen its security, regional presence, trade and connectivity with Nepal. Above all, Tibet remains at the heart of the current Chinese pursuit, and in doing so, China strives to utilise its economic strength. However, the political instability and the mounting ethnic crisis within Nepal pose a daunting challenge to China in executing its high-end development plans. Further, knowing Nepal's close socio-cultural and economic relations with India, China's "symbolic" call for "trilateral cooperation,"<sup>44</sup> by bringing India on-board stands unviable due to the existing bilateral tensions between the two. Meanwhile, Nepal also needs to frame a timely inward looking cautionary line towards China's investments by taking cognisance of the recent 'debt trap' problem in Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Philippines, and Malaysia being the most recent.<sup>45</sup> The agreement on the 'trans-Himalayan Railway corridor' from the Chinese border town of Kerung to the Nepalese capital city Kathmandu in July 2018 comes with a hefty cost of approximately US\$ 3 billion which will have a larger bearing of Chinese loans to Nepal. Hence, Nepal needs to be clear about the "shares of the construction costs for the railway line."<sup>46</sup> Also, the use of delicate foreign policy mishaps, especially with India, should be avoided by the leadership in Nepal in creating political mileage with China for a long-term regional and bilateral balance.

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44. "China Wants to Advance Trilateral Cooperation," *The Himalayan Times*, October 19, 2016, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/china-wants-advance-trilateral-cooperation/>. Accessed on September 22, 2017.

45. Umesh Moramudali, "Sri Lanka's Debt and China's Money," *The Diplomat*, August 16, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/sri-lankas-debt-and-chinas-money/>. Accessed on August 11, 2018; see Alvin A Camba and Kuek Jia Yao, "China's Belt and Road Initiative Paved with Risk and Red Herrings," *East Asia Forum*, June 26, 2018, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/06/26/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-paved-with-risk-and-red-herrings/#more-133406>. Accessed on July 11, 2018; also see "Malaysia Can't Afford \$22 Billion Beijing-Backed Projects, Mahathir Tells China," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/malaysia-cant-afford-22-billion-beijing-backed-projects-mahathir-tells-china-1534850997>. Accessed on August 21, 2018.

46. Giri, n.40.

# CHINA'S INTEREST IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

**SARVSURESHTH DHAMMI**

Djibouti plays an important role in the economic and strategic affairs of world politics owing to its geostrategic location. Being an old French colony, it remains close to Western policy-makers in influencing the strategic affairs of the Horn of Africa (HoA),<sup>1</sup> West Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). However, the economic boom in China and the availability of natural resources in the Third World countries inspired the Chinese to explore the African continent to fulfil their economic and security interests. China's engagement with Africa began in 1954, during the peak time of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and later, through its economic engagement with Egypt in 1956, Morocco in 1958, Sudan in 1959, and Ethiopia in 1970. Meanwhile, the tangible expansion of Chinese footsteps in Africa began with the opening of its first ever military base abroad at Djibouti in the HoA region. In this line of Chinese activism in the HoA, the importance of the HoA and its dynamics in the strategic endeavours of China requires a timely analysis.

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1. "The Horn of Africa" comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia and the greater Horn of Africa, consists of eight countries namely Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE HORN OF AFRICA

The HoA is one of the most significant regions in the world. The Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) which pass through the region link the European countries with Asia via the Suez Canal. More than 20,000 ships, which comprise 8 percent of the world's trade and 45 per cent of the European energy demand, get transported through the HoA.<sup>2</sup> However, the political violence in Somalia and South Sudan, and the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen pose serious challenges to Chinese engagement in the HoA. The HoA's geostrategic location has involved the region into regional and global power politics. China's wild rush, with the opening of a military base in July 2017, and its economic and political engagement through infrastructure financing have changed the dynamics of world strategies which also has implications for India.

## CHINA'S ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

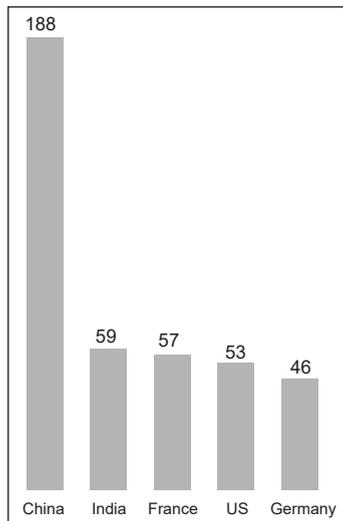
In the last two decades, China has emerged as the largest economic partner of Africa, with approximately 20 per cent growth every year.<sup>3</sup> Initially, China's economic interest in the HoA was driven by the exploration of natural resources, which further enlarged to supply of Chinese products in the HoA market. The HoA is one of the important markets for Chinese goods which directly supports the decreasing industrial output and economic development in China. Cheap Chinese products get easy access to the HoA market as compared to European and American goods. Djibouti and Ethiopia are two of the main countries in the HoA that have become the hotspots for Chinese investment. Ethiopia has the potential to help the Chinese products in getting tariff-free access in the US market in the ongoing trade war between the US and China as Ethiopia is a member of the Common Market for Eastern

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2. Marianne Stigset and Gelu Sulugiuc, "Suez Canal, Carrying 8% of Trade, Open Amid Unrest," *Bloomberg News*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-01-31/egypt-s-suez-canal-carrying-8-of-world-trade-remains-open-amid-violence.html>. Accessed August 13, 2018.
  3. Jayaram Kartik, Kassiri Omid, and Sun Irene Yuan, "The Closest Look yet at Chinese Economic Engagement in Africa," McKinsey & Company, June 2017, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/the-closest-look-yet-at-chinese-economic-engagement-in-africa>. Accessed on August 1, 2018.

and Southern Africa (COMESA), and has signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the US.<sup>4</sup>

Chinese companies are engaged in rail, road and air infrastructure investment. Landlocked Ethiopia has got connected with the Red Sea through the Ethiopia-Djibouti rail link built by China. In January 2018, Africa's first transnational electrified railway was started by a Chinese company, and had transported over 11,000 containers and 30,000 passengers until May.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Export-Import Bank of China has provided 85 per cent funding to development projects in Ethiopia. The African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa has been built with Chinese funding and projected as 'China's gift to Africa' to popularise, and get African support for, the Chinese foreign policy agenda.

**Fig 1: Africa's Top Economic Partner by Segment Goods Trade, 2015.**



(Figures in US\$ billion)

Source: **McKinsey&Company**

URL: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/the-closest-look-yet-at-chinese-economic-engagement-in-africa>

4. "Ethiopia," Office of the United States Trade Representative, Executive Office of the President of the United States, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/east-africa/ethiopia>. Accessed on August 2, 2018.
5. Liben Habtamu, "Spotlight: Chinese Engagement in Ethiopia's Economic Boom in a Nutshell," *Xinhua News Agency*, May 11, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/11/c\\_137170412.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/11/c_137170412.htm). Accessed on August 2, 2018.

In Djibouti, the Chinese government has invested heavily in building new ports, i.e. Doraleh multipurpose port, and shopping malls, airports, including basic infrastructure through an ongoing US\$ 322 million water pipeline project from Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> The newly built Djibouti International Free Trade Zone (DIFTZ), the biggest in Africa, built at a cost of US\$ 3.5 billion by China, projects the importance of this tiny East African country for China. The DIFTZ is a part of China's multi-trillion dollar "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) which aims to invest in building road and railway infrastructure and power grids in West, Central and Southern Asia, and including Africa and Europe.<sup>7</sup> But, the flow of money in Djibouti through investment in infrastructure, loans and political investment has led to fears about a 'debt trap' by the Chinese, threatening the nation's sovereignty, similar to the handing over of the strategic Hambantota port to China by Sri Lanka, after struggling to repay its debt to the former.<sup>8</sup>

Chinese investment in Africa has changed the political, economic and strategic dynamics in the region. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by the Chinese has increased at an annual growth rate of 40 percent.<sup>9</sup> An evaluation of the Chinese investment in the HoA through investment stock, trade, infrastructure financing and aid reveals the depth of China's foreign policy engagement with resource-rich and strategically located countries.

### CHINA'S POLITICAL INTEREST

Political stability is an important element for the development of an economy. Economists have categorised economic instability, leading to a frequent change of policies, as creating an insecure environment

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6. Zhou Laura (2017), "How a Chinese Investment Boom is Changing the Face of Djibouti," *South China Morning Post*, April 17, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2087374/how-chinese-investment-boom-changing-face-djibouti>. Accessed on August 2, 2018.
  7. Abdi Latif Dahir, "Thanks to China, Africa's Largest Free Trade Zone Launched in Djibouti," *Quartz Africa*, July 9, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1323666/china-and-djibouti-have-launched-africas-biggest-free-trade-zone/>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.
  8. Gerard du Cann, "Empire of Debt China 'Colonising Smaller Countries by Lending them Massive Amounts of Money They can Never Repay in Bid for World Domination,'" *The Sun*, August 25, 2018, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7037663/china-colonising-smaller-countries-by-lending-them-massive-amounts-of-money-they-can-never-repay-in-bid-for-world-domination/>. Accessed on August 25, 2018.
  9. Ibid.

for industrial development, which directly impacts on the macroeconomic policies of a country. However, others argue against this, and claim that political instability, especially in democracies, leads to growth.<sup>10</sup> Despite contradictory views on political instability and economic development, China has been a major factor in keeping the HoA countries at low growth dynamics. Between 2000-03, due to political instability in Africa, the average time of change of political leaders and their Cabinet has been two years which is extremely dangerous for economic growth and development.<sup>11</sup>

Political stability has been a prerequisite for China. Its industrial outputs are based on its exports to high consumer markets and the African countries fit well into the setting. The HoA provided a platform to Chinese companies to sell their products at a lower price as compared to European and American products. As a result, the HoA has become a testing ground for China in facilitating its future foreign policy in the region. But the presence of Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, piracy, insurgency, illegal migration, Internally Displaced People (IDP), border conflicts between HoA countries and the expanded Gulf crisis between Yemen and Saudi Arabia all pose a direct challenge to the Chinese investment and activities in the region.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the influence of other contending powers (especially the US and European countries), health issues, water crisis, unemployment and uncertainty in the political environment in the region are other challenges to China in securing its political interests in the region.

Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper and Mandy Turner, in explaining the nexus of reconstruction and conflict transformations write:

From the mid-1990s onwards, academics and policymakers have become increasingly concerned to understand the political economy of contemporary so-called 'civil conflicts', particularly given the way in which groups such as the Revolutionary United Front in

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10. Fing Yi, "Political Stability and Economic Growth," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 27, no. 3, July 1997, pp. 391-418.

11. Aisen Ari and Francisco J Veiga, "How Does Political Instability Affect Economic Growth?," *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol 29, 2013, pp. 151-167.

12. James M Dorsey, "Gulf Crisis Expands into The Horn of Africa, And China Sits in Eye of the Storm," *South China Morning Post*, January 13, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2128064/gulf-crisis-expands-horn-africa-and-china-sits-eye-storm>. Accessed on August 11, 2018.

Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia have traded resources to fund conflict. The advent of the UN's Peacebuilding Commission, formally inaugurated in July 2006, also testifies to a growing international interest in reconstruction and conflict transformation.

In this light, Chinese foreign policy-makers understand their dependence on the cooperation and support of the African countries on the issues of international politics at the multilateral fora. The African countries have approximately 35 per cent of the votes in the UN Security Council. Post-Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, heavy sanctions were imposed on China, which hampered its economic growth and development. Out of 54 African countries, only six countries supported China during the Tiananmen unrest.<sup>13</sup> Hence, it realises the importance and potential of the African countries.

China initially started participating in anti-piracy missions in the HoA and sent its forces for UN Peace-keeping Operations PKOs). The cooperation with the HoA opened the doors for China to reach out to almost all the countries in Africa. It gave an edge to Chinese diplomacy in getting more involved in the region and maintaining a strong position in the international market, its stand on Taiwan, Tibet, the Indian Ocean Region, and as a world leader. The support of the African countries strengthens China's stand on its One-China policy in international politics.

China is now a part of the global network of the economy, and most of its industrial investments are in countries where it can successfully avoid taxes and get free trade access to other parts of the world. China's investment in Ethiopia is part of its political, economic and strategic interests. Ethiopia comes under the American Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), and by investing in Ethiopia, China can avoid paying taxes to export its products to the US.<sup>14</sup> The cost of the ongoing trade war is already being paid by some African countries with the suspension of their duty-free status under the AGOA, but Ethiopia is still out of the impact. To fulfil the objective of its foreign

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13. Yun Sun, *Africa in China's Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2014), p. 4.

14. Tapiwa Gomo, "US-China Trade War, a Wakeup Call for Africa," *NewsDay*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/07/us-china-trade-war-a-wakeup-call-for-africa/>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.

policy, the Chinese administration invited Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn to attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) in which Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi focussed on “Strengthening International Cooperation and Co-Building the ‘Belt and Road’ for Win-Win Development”.<sup>15</sup>

On the sidelines of the 30th African Union Summit on January 29, 2018, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopian Foreign Affairs Minister Workneh Gebeyehu and Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong announced the strengthening of their strategic partnership, with emphasis on the partnership in development endeavours.<sup>16</sup> Even though the social unrest, the rise of foreign exchange shortages and the government debt in Ethiopia have led the Chinese to explore other countries in the region, Ethiopia remains the connecting agent (as a most developed country in the region) for China in the greater HoA.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Chinese political interests rely on peaceful developments in the HoA in which Djibouti and Ethiopia play a very important role.

## SECURITY CHALLENGES FOR CHINA

Considering the geographical location of the HoA, it does not pose any direct threat to China. However, the geostrategic location of the HoA is important for China’s economic, political and strategic interests. Since 2000, with the increased demand for raw materials and energy resources, China’s economic activities and investment in the HoA have taken a big leap forward, making it one of the biggest investors in the region. China has invested in infrastructure, rail and road transportation, interlinked with its investments in mining and oil in the region, especially in Sudan and South Sudan which stand as important assets of China’s overseas oil exploration investment.

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15. “Ministry of Foreign Affairs Holds Briefing for Chinese and Foreign Media on President Xi Jinping’s Attendance and Chairing of Related Events of the BRF,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of People’s Republic of China, April 18, 2017, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjz\\_663304/wjz\\_663308/activities\\_663312/t1455115.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjz_663304/wjz_663308/activities_663312/t1455115.shtml). Accessed on 4 August 2018.

16. “Ethiopia, China Vow to Deepen Ties in Strategic Areas,” *Xinhuanet*, January 01, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/29/c\\_136933905.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/29/c_136933905.htm). Accessed on August 4, 2018.

17. John Aglionby and Emily Feng, “China Scales Back Investment in Ethiopia.” *Financial Times*, June 3, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/06b69c2e-63e9-11e8-90c2-9563a0613e56>. Accessed on August 4, 2018.

While oil from Sudan does not contribute directly to the Chinese mainland energy demand, it comprised 40 per cent of total overseas oil production for the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) between 2003 to 2007.<sup>18</sup> In the last two decades, Chinese national oil companies have become prominent players in the international oil industry. Their investments in Sudan and South Sudan have given a new experience of political risk management in the greater HoA to China.

Chinese investments in the HoA and Sub-Sahara African transportation system play a key role in ensuring politico-economic leverage to China in Africa. However, the volatile political situation in the region has figured as the prime threat to Chinese human resources and investment in the region. Social unrest, border conflicts between the Horn countries, insurgency, warlords, piracy, terrorism, and attacks on Chinese citizens and their properties are critical issues for its presence in the region. The statistics given below (Table 1) on incidents involving threats to Chinese human resources and capital investments show the vulnerability of Chinese investments in the HoA:

**Table 1: Attacks on Chinese Nationals and Ventures in HoA<sup>19</sup>**

Sr.	Date	Attacks
1	April 25, 2007	Chinese oil company attacked in Ethiopia.
2	October 19, 2008	Nine Chinese workers kidnapped in Sudan.
3	November 14, 2008	The Chinese fishing vessel <i>Tianyu No. 8</i> seized by Somali pirates.

18. Patey Luke, "Learning in Africa: China's Overseas Oil Investments in Sudan and South Sudan," *Journal of Contemporary China* vol. 26, no. 107, 2017, p. 5.

19. [http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2007-04/25/content\\_8166770.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/news/txt/2007-04/25/content_8166770.htm). Accessed on July 18, 2018; 2. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-10/19/content\\_10219751.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2008-10/19/content_10219751.htm). Accessed on July 13, 2018; 3. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2008/11/14/news/Piracy.php>. Accessed on July 21, 2018; 4. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=abw5Nrj-6SivU&refer=Africa>. Accessed on July 25, 2018; 5. <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=16671&-geo=6&size=A>. Accessed on July 26, 2018; 6. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11704306>. Accessed on July 26, 2018; 7. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-258452451.html>. Accessed on July 27, 2018; 8. <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/indian-navy-thwarts-pirate-attackrescues-chinese-vessel-crew-103889>. Accessed on July 27, 2018; 9. <http://world.huanqiu.com/roll/2012-01/2391169.html>. Accessed on July 20, 2018.

4	December 17, 2008	The Chinese fishing boat <i>Zhenhua 4</i> was hijacked on the way back to Shanghai.
5	October 23, 2009	The Chinese bulk carrier owned by COSCO Qingdao captured by Somali pirates.
6	June 9, 2010	The Singapore-flagged Chinese- chartered chemical tanker <i>MV Golden Blessing</i> hijacked in the Gulf of Aden.
7	November 6, 2010	Vessel <i>Yuan Xiang</i> captured in the Arabian Sea.
8	June 9, 2011	Chinese carrier <i>MV Full City</i> attacked by Somali pirates.
9	January 31, 2012	29 workers kidnapped at SinoHydro's construction site.

### DIPLOMATIC INTERESTS OF CHINA

The HoA is a testing ground for China's ability to influence the other parts of the African continent, and the success of its policy is directly linked to its prestige in internal and international power politics. It helps China's policy-makers to decimate the influence of other contending powers in the region. The communication of its diplomats with the government, opposition parties and business entities is dependent on a secure working environment. But, due to the social unrest and instability in the region, the job of its diplomatic missions has become very challenging. Moreover, the security protection for Chinese missions is provided by private Western security companies which are seen as unreliable, providing symbolic rather than substantial effective security.<sup>20</sup> To overcome these security challenges, China has strengthened its diplomatic communications and increased military cooperation with the countries of the HoA and African Union. As a result, China has opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti to provide security to its missions in Africa.<sup>21</sup>

20. Zhao Yabin, "Should China Have Its Own Blackwater/中国应该有自己的"黑水"吗?," *Ren Wen Yu She Hui*, April 1, 2012, <http://wen.org.cn/modules/article/viewarticle.php/3195>. Accessed on July 1, 2018.

21. Lily Kuo, "China has Officially Opened its First Military Base in Africa," *Quartz Africa*, August 1, 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/1043185/china-has-officially-opened-its-first-overseas-military-base-in-djibouti-in-the-horn-of-africa/>. Accessed on August 01, 2018.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

The strong Chinese footsteps in the HoA have a three-fold impact on India in terms of political, economic and security factors.

One, the SLOCs passing through the western Indian Ocean that connect the Red Sea and Arabian Sea, play a very important role in fulfilling India's energy needs, and facilitate trade with Africa and West Asia. An energy deficient India's demands can also be fulfilled by the oil imports from Sudan, South Sudan and Nigeria. Africa is now the 5th largest oil exporter to India, with the larger share of oil being imported from Nigeria. This oil import can be improved with the right political negotiations with Sudan as it has not extended the licence to the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh (ONGC Videsh) of India after its contract with the Sudanese Greater Nile Oil Project expired in 2016.<sup>22</sup> China has 40 percent stake in the same project, and the Chinese hand in the non-renewal of the licence to ONGC Videsh cannot be denied.<sup>23</sup> This is a direct case of power politics waged between India and China in the greater HoA. The growing Chinese influence needs to be countered by better handling of the weak HoA countries. China has an advantage of sensing the political force-in-waiting in politically unstable countries in the HoA and has been successful in putting in the required diplomatic efforts to enhance its political, economic and strategic leverage. It has also succeeded in exploiting situations like the civil war in Sudan that resulted in the formation of Sudan and South Sudan. Hence, the time is ripe for India to make use of the opportunity.

Two, on the security front, the opening of China's first overseas base at Djibouti is a matter of concern for India's maritime security and its operations in the East and North African countries, especially, as India does not have a diplomatic mission in Djibouti. The long-term diplomatic neglect of Djibouti has not been in India's favour. Hence, to become an important player in the former, and achieve its foreign

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22. Sanjeev Choudhary, "Sudan Won't Extend ONGC's Licence to Operate Oil Block," *Economic Times*, April 24, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/sudan-wont-extend-ongcs-licence-to-operate-oil-block/articleshow/58333314.cms>. Accessed on August 4, 2018.

23. "Sudan Wants India's ONGC Videsh to Withdraw Arbitration over Oil Payment Dues," *Economic Times*, August 17, 2018, <https://auto.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/oil-and-lubes/sudan-wants-indias-ongc-videsh-to-withdraw-arbitration-over-oil-payment-dues/65436660>. Accessed on August 18, 2018.

policy objectives, India needs to make active efforts, showcasing the extraordinary geopolitical significance of Djibouti. The presence of the Chinese military in the Red Sea at Djibouti and Gwadar port in Pakistan is a strategy to obstruct India's engagement in the HoA and West Asia. Both the military bases complement China's grand strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative and its foreign policy objectives in the region.<sup>24</sup> The visit of the president of India to Djibouti and Ethiopia on October 17, 2017, is a step towards India's new strategic approach to engage with the HoA countries to neutralise the Chinese influence.<sup>25</sup> At this juncture, it is important for India to strengthen its diplomatic presence by taking on more responsibility for regional and international security to restore its goodwill and active role in the security of the HoA and the SLOCs.

Three, in terms of the political implications for India, China's growing influence in the internal political affairs of the resource-rich yet underdeveloped HoA countries, and its deep pockets have provided a much-needed playing field for China which may prove inimical for India. This influence may not be limited to the African continent and also may help China to influence the African countries in their voting pattern against India in its claim for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

## CONCLUSION

China's influence is backed by its strong economy and its active involvement in the HoA region. The other objective of China's presence in the HoA is to break the US monopoly in the international power politics and increase its own influence in the Indian Ocean Region by claiming its stronghold in the African continent. Its active engagement with regional political leaders has helped China in influencing the regional countries into becoming seemingly 'neo-colonial' in their outlook. However, this might not provide China with long-term benefits as the Chinese interventionist approach has seen political protests in the HoA and at international fora. In

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24. C Raja Mohan, "India and Djibouti's Geopolitical Scrum," *Indian Express*, October 3, 2017, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/raja-mandala-india-and-djiboutis-geopolitical-scrum-ram-nath-kovind-abroad-visit-4871697/>. Accessed on August 3, 2018.

25. *Ibid.*

this light, for India, there is a need to evolve policies for the HoA. The bilateral trade of India with the HoA has reached \$ 90 billion and is expected to improve further. Hence, the HoA holds both strategic and economic prospects for India, and to ensure its long-term cooperation in the region, India needs policies to address the increasing Chinese influence. Most of the HoA countries are going through political and social turmoil, leading to political instability, insurgency, terrorism, and piracy in the region. In this light, India can also play the role of a peace-maker through the ongoing international peace efforts. However, New Delhi's defence diplomacy can also help India to increase its cooperation with the weaker members of the HoA countries. Lastly, for achieving new objectives, India's foreign policy and strategic community needs to review the existing policy frameworks and modernise its power dynamics in the HoA to examine, and deal with, the challenging issues in the region.

# DOKLAM EPISODE AND AFTERMATH: INDIA-CHINA BILATERAL RELATIONS

RAJ MONGIA

The dragon's misadventure in the landlocked Himalayan borderland, Bhutan, in 2017, once again exhibited a fixation on military intimidation and infiltration into its economic sphere, culminating in the incessant desire to redraw borders and rewrite history. China has been successful in having unprecedented foreign exchange reserves by adopting a policy of offering investments and extracting disproportionate economic and strategic benefits.<sup>1</sup> This policy has helped China in building its capacity to invest further. The dragon is fast becoming a global powerhouse, projecting a strategic ambition beyond its immediate territory and shores.

## LOOKING BACK TO ENVISAGE WHAT LIES AHEAD

India and China both have a history of colonisation, but have different perspectives. China takes a selective approach to colonial history.<sup>2</sup> It has mastered the art of historical revisions and distortions

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1. "China's Current Security Strategy: Features and Implications", RAND Monograph Report, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1121/mr1121.ch4.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1121/mr1121.ch4.pdf). Accessed on May 28, 2018.
2. Jian Junbo and Donata Frasher, "Neo-Colonialism or De-Colonialism? China's Economic Engagement in Africa and the Implications for World Order", <http://www.academicjournals.org/journal/AJPSIR/article-full-text-pdf/32E051147336>. Accessed on June 1, 2018.

to justify the redrawing of its frontiers and expanding its arena of influence. China selectively interprets colonial era decisions to suit its prerogatives and accepts colonial era accords and treaties when doing so is in consonance with its agenda.

It ignores and dishonours agreements when they do not fall in line with its goals. For instance, China rejects the McMahon Line as a colonial era accord but repeatedly quotes the 1890 Anglo-Sikkim Convention in the case of the Doklam scenario. This lopsided posture is perhaps because the former is inconvenient for Beijing's geopolitical ambitions while the latter fits into it. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has a penchant for manipulating history. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has utilised its own version of history to glorify the Party, consolidate its position and reestablish national identity. The PRC's claim to have come out triumphant in China's war with Japan is a case in point. The hollowness of the proponents of this assertion becomes evident given the fact that the fifteen-year war in Asia ended in 1945, while the PRC came into existence only in 1949.<sup>3</sup>

By exacerbating its economic and political influence beyond Asia, stretching to Africa and further, Beijing's expansionist agenda is, indeed, becoming successful in giving wings to the 'Great Chinese Dream' of reclaiming its stature as the Middle Kingdom by multiple means. The master stroke in this direction is the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that has the potential of becoming the defining legacy of Xi Jinping's tenure.<sup>4</sup> China could well become the centre of the world over land and sea links through Beijing's Maritime Silk Route and Silk Road Economic Belt. These projects could well be the launch pads from which the dragon aims to reshape the Asia-Pacific strategically. China had a staunch ally in the USSR, well nurtured in the 1950s. The relationship which started with a bang, unfortunately, ended in a whimper with the Sino-Soviet split. In today's context, China's dominance in almost every regional forum amply exhibits the complex nature of Asia's regional equations. The Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) or the proposed Asia-Pacific Free Trade Area (APFTA) had been spearheaded by

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3. "The Chinese Revolution and Chinese Communism", <http://acienciala.faculty.ku.edu/communismnationssince1917/ch9.html>. Accessed on June 3, 2018.

4. Ashok K Kantha, "The Rise and Rise of Xi Jinping", *The Hindu*, November 4, 2017.

China. Positive synergy between the nations in the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean security arenas does not seem feasible because of the dragon's constant attempts to alter the status quo. Xi Jinping's strategic focus remains limited to reestablishing the Middle Kingdom and building an affluent, strong, socialist modern country by 2049. The challenge facing the major powers in Asia today is to coordinate more closely or else there would be serious ramifications for Asia's future, more so as China seems to have abandoned Deng Xiaoping's dictum of "hide your capability, bide your time", and is exhibiting more aggression militarily.

The Doklam standoff continuing for almost 73 days in 2017 perhaps comprised the reverberations of China's long standing revisionism agenda. The world took notice when China proclaimed that its sovereignty extends right till Doklam. Its audacious attempt to launch a misleading campaign from June 16 to August 28, 2017, was globally exposed. Beijing made a vigorous attempt at muscle flexing, bullying and misinforming by launching a media campaign against India and Bhutan. The Chinese provocation stems from its domestic politics, including pressures on the central government to craft a strong Chinese national identity.<sup>5</sup> Beijing is determined to revise its foreign policy with the objective of realising its dream of becoming the centre of the world.

The Bhutanese government, in an official statement issued on June 29, 2017, left no room for any other interpretation of the incident, and clearly represented the dragon as the aggressor. The Bhutanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated:

On 16th June 2017, the Chinese Army started constructing a motorable road from Dokola in Doklam area towards the Bhutan Army camp at Zompelri.<sup>6</sup> Boundary talks are ongoing between Bhutan and China and we have written agreements of 1988 and 1998 stating that the two sides agree to maintain peace and tranquillity in their border areas pending a final settlement on the boundary question and to maintain status quo on the boundary as

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5. Tony Cheung and Kimmy Chung, "Xi Jinping Vows to Strengthen National Identity and Patriotism in Hong Kong and Macau", published on March 20, 2018. Accessed on June 7, 2018.

6. Staff Reporter, Thimphu, "Breaking: Bhutan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Asks for Status Quo to be Maintained in Doklam Area", June 29, 2017.

before March 1959. The agreements also state that the two sides will refrain from taking unilateral action or use of force, to change the status quo of the boundary. Bhutan has conveyed to the Chinese side, both on the ground and through the diplomatic channel that the construction of the road inside Bhutanese territory is in direct violation of the agreements and affects the process of demarcating the boundary between our two countries. Bhutan hopes that status quo in Doklam area will be maintained as before 16th June 2017.<sup>7</sup>

Bhutan called for India's help after the People's Liberation Army (PLA) moved in, under the purview of the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, signed in New Delhi in February 2007. The aim of the treaty was to reaffirm mutual respect for Bhutanese and Indian independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. China's unprovoked and unilateral attempt to change the status quo left India with no option but to rise to the occasion and rush to the aid of Bhutan.

#### **HEGEMONIC AMBITIONS OF CHINA**

The Doklam incident is a pronouncement of a rising China which is becoming ambitious, belligerent and combative. In April 2012, there was a standoff between China and the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal. China justified its aggression by stating that Chinese vessels were operating in the Chinese traditional fishing grounds around the islands. Following a short standoff, the Philippine frigate sent to patrol the area was withdrawn, leaving Chinese naval law enforcement ships in control of what Beijing calls "Hunag Yan Island." Although China keeps on using the sobriquet 'peaceful rise' to camouflage its belligerence,<sup>8</sup> its endless involvement in the territorial disputes, from the East China Sea to the South China Sea to the Himalayan borderlands, suggests that Beijing will continue to reshape the Asian political geography aided by its selective historical amnesia. It goes to the credit of India which stood its ground and refused to withdraw its troops unilaterally from the Doklam border area, and China was exhorted to agree to peacefully retreat and revert to status quo.

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7. Ibid.

8. "Peaceful Rise: Even When China is Trying Hard to be Conciliatory, It Scares Its Neighbours", *The Economist*, June 24, 2004.

China seems to be following a pattern of asserting unjustified claims and thereafter engaging in bullying to get its way. It attempted to construct a road near the critical tri-junction border area between China, India and Bhutan. India could ill-afford to ignore this development as this area is vital to its security. A 2012 agreement between Bhutan and China clearly warrants China to discuss with Bhutan all issues involving the tri-junction border area.<sup>9</sup> Despite this agreement, China appears hell-bent upon encroaching into Bhutanese territory. China's aim and effort to redraw frontiers are becoming too blatant and conspicuous.

China did not expect India's staunch military resistance, political fortitude and befitting response to the PLA's attempted Doklam misadventure.<sup>10</sup> Contrary to the Scarborough Shoal case, where the Filipino forces quit without challenging them, the Indian Army and its Eastern Command stood firm and precluded the Chinese troops from making any movement forward, and without indulging in any violence or allowing escalation. Indian diplomacy negotiated from a position of strength to maintain peace and stability.<sup>11</sup>

The abrupt hostilities that flared up in the summer of 2017 at the tri-border region of India, China and Bhutan were finally settled peacefully. The Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Summit has acted as a catalyst in reaching an agreement. It would have been awkward for Indian Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi to justify his presence at the summit, with the Indian and Chinese forces facing off each other. The same applied to the Chinese president who is keen on projecting himself as a global statesman. Had India decided to abstain from the summit, it would have amounted to the beginning of the end of BRICS, tarnishing Xi's reputation in the run-up to the crucial Communist Party Congress in October 2017.

The standoff had its share of dramatic moments. China demanded that India withdraw unconditionally from Doklam before any meaningful bilateral talks could be held and the state owned media launched a sinister campaign, at times threatening war and reminding about the 1962 conflict between the two countries and

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9. Mukul Kesavan, "Controlling China: Out on a Limb", *The Telegraph*, July 23, 2017

10. Ananth Krishnan, "Doklam Standoff: The Real Reason Behind Why China Has Turned the Heat on India", *Beijing Diary*, July 19, 2017.

11. Rong Ying, "The Modi Doctrine and the Future of China-India Relationship", Report of the China Institute of International Studies, January 25, 2018.

India's humiliating defeat. Tensions continued to rise till August 26, 2017, when disengagement was announced after reaching an understanding, with the withdrawal of Indian troops and cessation of Chinese road construction in the area.

### **FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

In the Xiamen BRICS Summit, India expressed its dissatisfaction with how BRICS members had dealt with the issue of terrorism that had been discussed during the previous summit in Goa.<sup>12</sup> Despite India making terrorism a priority, China blocked India's attempt to include the names of Pakistan-based terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) in the 2016 BRICS declaration. China openly defended Pakistan after the summit, saying it opposed linking any country or religion with terror and asked the world community to acknowledge Pakistan's sacrifices. It was quite surprising, hence, when, in the BRICS declaration of 2017, the LeT and JeM were named, along with East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, as terror groups. The agreement was a manifestation of not only the fact that BRICS member states face common threats in the form of terrorism, but also an acknowledgement of India's consistently strong stand on this issue. China did communicate to PM Modi not to raise bilateral terrorism related issues at the BRICS Summit but India made sure that these were on the agenda list.<sup>13</sup> The Xiamen Declaration underlined, for the first time, the changing regional realities for Pakistan, which hitherto was accustomed to using China as a shield against global pressure on terror.

The combined efforts of Modi and Xi depicted that both countries are willing to move away from the bitterness aggravated by the brief Doklam standoff, and were successful in presenting a united front at the BRICS Summit. They agreed that a Doklam-like situation should not recur. New mechanisms needed to be put in place to strengthen border defence agreements and a requirement

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12. Apurva Shubhajit Roy, "BRICS Summit 2017: First Time China Signs Statement that Names Lashkar and Jaish in Terror List", *The Indian Express*, September 4, 2017.

13. "Brics Compelled China and India to End Doklam Standoff but the Ground between Them is Still Shaky", <https://scroll.in/article/850756/brics-compelled-china-and-india-to-end-doklam-standoff-but-the-ground-between-them-is-still-shaky>. Accessed on June 23, 2018.

for closer communication between defence and security personnel to be identified. Both nations also saw convergence at the global level by stressing on their positions, resisting economic protectionism of the kind that the Trump Administration has been espousing. They were also able to get the BRICS countries to commit to an open and inclusive multilateral trading system. Although after the resolution of the Doklam standoff and show of unity at the BRICS Summit 2017, a sense of normalcy returned to India-China relations, the underlying forces shaping this relationship continue to remain grim.<sup>14</sup> India and China are Asian giants and emerging world powers that have begun to exercise immense influence in international political and economic affairs. China has discarded Deng Xiaoping's dictum. It has dropped the phrase "peaceful rise" while referring to its economic growth and military assertiveness.<sup>15</sup> India and China both are governed by nationalistic leaders who want to shape global politics to achieve their national aspirations. China by diplomatically mishandling India remains isolated in Southeast Asia. Its actions reinforce the perception that its intention is to scuttle India's rise.

There were serious differences among the BRICS member states on a range of economic issues.<sup>16</sup> At a time when the global economy is passing through a difficult phase, the importance of all member nations to work in tandem cannot be overemphasised. The Chinese president called for an expansion of BRICS, as he asserted in his keynote speech at the summit's opening ceremony: "We should promote the 'BRICS plus' cooperation approach and build an open and diversified network of development partnerships to get more emerging markets and developing countries involved in our concerted endeavours for cooperation and mutual benefits."<sup>17</sup> India deftly leveraged the BRICS 2017 Summit held in Xiamen in resolving the Doklam crisis as well as ensuring that its concerns are not marginalised. BRICS 2017 provided

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14. Harsh V Pant, "India and China May Have Pulled Back on the Himalayan Frontier but the Bilateral Chill is Real", *Quartz India*, September 18, 2017.

15. Gen Ashok K Mehta, "The Ferment in China's 'Peaceful Rise'", *Economic Times*, April 22, 2011.

16. Harsh V Pant, "China and India Pull Back on Doklam: Choosing to Fight Another Day", *YaleGlobal Online*, September 14, 2017.

17. Melanie Peters, "Xi Calls for Promotion of 'Brics Plus' Approach", *News World*, September 3, 2017.

India with a platform to keep China engaged multilaterally while enabling it to work with the other members on matters of shared concern.

In an unexpected development, the leaders of the two countries decided to have an informal meeting in April 2018.<sup>18</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi drew parallels between India and China during a one-to-one meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan on April 27, 2018 afternoon. "The culture of both India and China is based along the river banks. If we talk about Mohenjo Daro and Harappa civilizations in India, all the development happened along river banks,"<sup>19</sup> he told Xi during their exchange of thoughts.

PM Modi also praised the Chinese efficiency in constructing structural landmarks across the country, citing the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze river as an example. "When I was the chief minister of Gujarat, I had the opportunity to visit this province. I had heard a lot about the Three Gorges Dam. The speed and scale at which you constructed it, inspired me. So I came on a study tour, and spent a day at the dam," he said.<sup>20</sup> The summit appeared to be an effort by India and China to rebuild trust and improve ties that were hit by the 73-day-long Doklam standoff in 2017.<sup>21</sup> The two leaders reviewed the developments in the bilateral relations from the strategic and long-term perspectives. Modi and Xi met for nearly 10 hours in less than two days in April during the informal summit in Wuhan, leading to, according to diplomats, "strategic communication" and consensus between the two leaders.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping again met on June 9, 2018, soon after their arrival in the port city of

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18. Vinay Kaura, "Narendra Modi, Xi Jinping 'Informal Summit' Equally Important for Both the Leaders Given US' Unpredictability", *First Post*, April 24, 2018 available at <https://www.firstpost.com/india/narendra-modi-xi-jinping-informal-summit-equally-important-for-both-leaders-given-us-unpredictability-4443433.html> accessed on June 30, 2018.

19. Sutirtho Patronabis, "History as PM Modi, Xi Jinping Meet in China's Wuhan to Review Bilateral Ties", *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2018.

20. "PM Narendra Modi Meets Xi Jinping at Mao's Favourite Holiday Spot in Wuhan", *The Times of India*, April 27, 2018 .

21. BS Web Team, "Modi in China: Xi's New Era, My New India Dream to Benefit the World", *Business Standard*, April 27, 2018, available at [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/narendra-modi-xi-jinping-summit-in-wuhan-from-today-to-reset-india-china-bilateral-relations-top-10-developments-118042700137\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/narendra-modi-xi-jinping-summit-in-wuhan-from-today-to-reset-india-china-bilateral-relations-top-10-developments-118042700137_1.html). Accessed on July 11, 2018.

Qingdao, in China, where the two leaders took stock of the progress in implementing the decisions they had taken at their informal summit in Wuhan.<sup>22</sup> The meeting took place on the sidelines of the annual Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, which explored concrete ways to bolster cooperation in the fight against terrorism, extremism, and radicalisation, besides deliberating on pressing global issues. India and China also signed agreements in the presence of the two leaders. Modi and Xi explored ways to deepen ties in the areas of trade and investment, besides reviewing the overall India-China bilateral cooperation. The meeting took place weeks after the two leaders held an informal summit in the central Chinese city of Wuhan during which they exchanged views on solidifying the relationship between the two Asian powers.

In a significant move, China agreed to provide India hydrological data of the Brahmaputra river in the flood season, months after Beijing stopped the practice, crucial to predict floods. The two countries also signed an agreement under which China has agreed to import non-basmati rice from India which is likely to bridge the ballooning trade deficit to a certain extent.<sup>23</sup> The agreement came after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had detailed discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping on bilateral and global issues which added further vigour to the India-China friendship after their informal summit in Wuhan. Two Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) were signed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Xi Jinping again on July 26, 2018 in Johannesburg, South Africa, on the sidelines of the 10th BRICS Summit. It was a very productive meeting with during which Modi emphasised on the need to maintain the “momentum” generated by their recent meetings and provide “proper instructions” to their militaries to maintain peace at the border.<sup>24</sup> Recalling his recent meetings with Mr. Xi, Prime Minister Modi said they have given a new strength to India-China ties and also provided new opportunities for bilateral cooperation. He stressed upon the need to

22. Express Web Desk, “Narendra Modi in China: President Xi Accepts India’s Invite for Informal Meet Next Year”, *The Indian Express*, June 9, 2018, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/narendra-modi-in-china-sco-qingdao-summit-xi-jinping-5210875/>. Accessed on July 22, 2018.

23. MEA Media, “Modi-Xi Agree on Rice Export and Renew Pact on Brahmaputra”, *The Telegraph*, June 9, 2018.

24. India.com News Desk, “Modi, Xi Meet on Sidelines of BRICS 2018, Reiterate Commitment to Maintain Peace Along Border”, India, July 27, 2018.

keep up the momentum and suggested that at their level, they should regularly review the relationship between the two countries and give proper instructions whenever required.

### EPILOGUE

The two leaders had a “very productive meeting” in Johannesburg on July 26, 2018, during which they reaffirmed their readiness to give the necessary direction to their militaries to enhance communication between them and to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. India’s Foreign Secretary Mr. Gokhale said Prime Minister Modi had expressed his willingness to send National Security Adviser Ajit Doval to China this year for the special representative-level boundary talks. “Both the leaders made a reference to their informal summit meeting in Wuhan in April as well as the subsequent follow up meeting in Qingdao in June. They were particularly satisfied with the efforts being made by the officials of the two sides to strengthen bilateral engagements and to implement some of the understandings and decisions that the two leaders had reached at Wuhan,”

One of the important issues which Prime Minister Modi raised with President Xi at his previous meetings was of how the two sides could enhance Indian exports to China, particularly agricultural exports. Prime Minister Modi also mentioned the pharma sector and cited a Chinese movie titled *Dying to Survive*, which is based loosely on the role that the Indian cancer drugs play in saving the life of the main character of the movie.<sup>25</sup> The two leaders will meet again at the margins of the G20 summit in Argentina at the end of this year. Both leaders agreed on the necessity of ensuring that their decisions are implemented on the ground in order to ensure progress. Increased exchange of views and the dynamic leadership of the two Asian giants raise the hope that the two great civilisations would develop greater understanding, and the spirit of ‘Chindia’<sup>26</sup> will be able to address global issues from a common platform.

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25. “Chinese Film on Cancer Patient’s Plight Highlights Urgent Need for Import of Indian Drugs”, PTI, July 6, 2018.

26. Raj Mongia, “China Keen to Tap India’s Expertise: Revival of the ‘Chindia’ Syndrome”, *In Focus* (Centre of Air Power Studies, Web Journal), May 25, 2014, available at [http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS\\_Infocus\\_RM\\_15.pdf](http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_Infocus_RM_15.pdf). Accessed on September 4, 2018.

# SRI LANKA-CHINA RELATIONS IN RECENT YEARS: POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

**SAMATHA MALLEMPATI**

After years of internal ethnic conflict, Sri Lanka under the National Unity Government, set its priorities pertaining to economic development, national reconciliation and a foreign policy that can help the country emerge as a hub in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and Indo-Pacific. Sri Lanka's relations with other countries, including China, can be seen in this context. Whether the foreign policy choices will help Sri Lanka, particularly in its relations with China, to address the needs of the economy and to emerge as an important player in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific, as it desires, while securing Indian Ocean safety and security and protection of Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) is the concern.

## **SRI LANKA-CHINA RELATIONS: EVOLUTION**

Before looking at Sri Lanka-China relations in the present scenario, it is important to understand how the relationship between the two countries evolved after Sri Lanka's independence. Sri Lanka-China relations were based on centuries old trade, cultural and religious exchanges and as a small island nation, its defence and economic

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development became its priority after independence. The the United National Party (UNP) government which was in power from 1948 to 1956 concluded a defence agreement with the UK, much to the disappointment of the then major power, the Soviet Union. The decision taken by Sri Lanka during the Cold War period was considered to be a pro-West foreign policy. However, recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950 by Sri Lanka and the 1952 rubber and rice trade pact signed between the two countries cemented the relationship—despite the change in government led by the two major Sinhala political parties, the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—over the years. The rice and rubber pact provided much relief to Sri Lanka's rice crisis during the Cold War and established trade relations with China, as it agreed to buy 50,000 metric tonnes of rubber, much to the benefit of the rubber industry of Sri Lanka. The formation of the first SLFP government in 1956 under the leadership of S.W.R.D Bandaranaike emphasised on the foreign policy that could help Sri Lanka's economic and security interests. Therefore, on February 7, 1957, diplomatic relations were established between the two countries, which led to the visit of the former Premier of China Zhou En-Lai to Sri Lanka in 1957, after which Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike visited China in 1962 and in 1972.

Since then, China has consolidated its interests in the island nation which is evident from its support to the resolution declaring the Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace along with Sri Lanka at the UN. During the Sino-Indian border war and also during the Indo-Pak hostilities of 1971, Sri Lanka supported China and Pakistan. Sri Lanka's stand during the time of the regional crisis was attributed by many to be a balancing act due to fear of India's dominance in the region. At the same time, Sri Lanka tried to ensure that its relations with other countries were not inimical to India's interest, which was evident from the generally balanced diplomatic relations maintained between India and Sri Lanka after independence.<sup>1</sup> China's trade, technical and economic cooperation continued under both the UNP and SLFP governments. China also supplied arms and ammunition to Sri Lanka in considerable quantities.

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1. Chandrakant Yatanoor, *Sri Lanka's Foreign Policy under the Presidency of J.R. Jayawardane* (Delhi: Kalunga Publications, 1997), p.99.

The 1983 anti-Tamil riots had an impact on internal ethnic relations in Sri Lanka as well as on Sri Lanka's relations with other countries, particularly with India. The riots against the Tamils had an impact on Indo-Sri Lanka relations and the 1987 Agreement, during Jayawardane's tenure, was seen as an imposition by India. Since then, the internal conflict and the four Eelam Wars, that took place between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka, led to civilian casualties, massive destruction in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, and large scale refugee flow to other countries. The internal conflict was a setback to Sri Lanka's ambition of emerging as an important player in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) after independence. Many international actors, including India, tried to find a solution to the conflict through intervention, mediation, and also facilitation by Norway, but none yielded any result. The military defeat of the LTTE under the leadership of President Rajapaksa in 2009 amidst accusations of human rights violations only led to a pause in the violent conflict. The country is still to arrive at a solution to the conflict at the domestic level and is trying to recover the economy shattered by long years of war.

China's role in assisting the Government of Sri Lanka to defeat the LTTE is well reported as it provided considerable military aid to the government, including F7 fighter jets to the Sri Lankan Air Force.<sup>2</sup> China provided assistance to Sri Lanka at a time when the Western countries and traditional donors such as the US and European Union (EU) were critical of the Sri Lankan government's human rights record. Due to the internal conflict, the US stopped its military aid to Sri Lanka in 2007. China's support to Sri Lanka at the UN during the internal war also helped in consolidating China's interest in Sri Lanka.

In both pre and post conflict scenarios, Sri Lanka-China relations became a contested issue due to the massive Chinese investments in the country in various sectors as well as Sri Lanka's growing debt towards China. Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Sri Lanka in 2014 gave a much needed impetus to bilateral relations and both countries agreed on a Strategic Cooperative Partnership. During the

2. "How Beijing Won Sri Lanka's Civil War", May 23, 2010, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/how-beijing-won-sri-lankas-civil-war-1980492.html>. Accessed on August 25, 2018.

rule of Rajapaksa from 2010 to 2014, the government enacted various laws to facilitate foreign investment and also borrowed heavily for the government's pet projects. Some of the projects included the Mattala Hambantota International Airport Project worth US \$ 51.7 million, Northern Road Rehabilitation Project worth US \$ 68.1million, Bunkering Facility and Tank Farm Project at Hambantota worth US \$ 28.2 million.<sup>3</sup> The US \$ 1.4 billion Colombo Port City Project, the largest project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), was initiated during Rajapaksa's time. Despite the initial reservations expressed by the Maithripala Sirisena government due to environmental concerns the project was given the green signal by the government in 2016. Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe visited China in 2015 and 2016 respectively after assuming office.

#### **TRADE AND INVESTMENTS BY CHINA UNDER THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT**

The National Unity Government led by President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe underscored the need for using the country's strategic location in the Indian Ocean to its advantage. Sri Lanka "is situated on the world's busiest shipping lanes, carrying two-thirds of global petroleum supplies and half of all containerized cargo".<sup>4</sup> It has expressed its willingness to work with the maritime powers in the Indian Ocean and beyond for maritime security and unimpeded commerce. Sri Lanka's emphasis on the export-led economy through ports by increasing trade and commerce is also driving its engagement with China to some extent. This can be achieved, according to the Government of Sri Lanka, through developing service hubs with appropriate infrastructure, and a stable and peaceful space.<sup>5</sup> Sri Lanka is looking at developing its ports in line with other successful and well developed ports in the region such as

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3. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report 2011, p.115, [https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb\\_documents/publications/annual\\_report/2011/en/9\\_Chapter\\_05.pdf](https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/publications/annual_report/2011/en/9_Chapter_05.pdf). Accessed on August 24, 2018.
  4. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka, "Sri Lanka –A Growing Hub in the Indo-Pacific", Speech by Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam, March 8, 2017, [www.slembassyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/speech-at-the-hudson-Institute-on-March-8-2017.pdf](http://www.slembassyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/speech-at-the-hudson-Institute-on-March-8-2017.pdf). Accessed on August 25, 2018.
  5. Ibid.

in Singapore, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The Colombo Port is the busiest trans-shipment port in South Asia and 70 percent of cargo trans-shipped in the port is for India.

Sri Lanka is an important partner in China's Belt and Road and Maritime Silk Route Initiatives and it believes that support extended to China's initiatives will consolidate Sri Lanka's position as a hub in the Indian Ocean, and integrate Sri Lankan markets with Asian markets. Sri Lanka's firm belief in Asian economic growth and China as a major player in that growth, along with India and Japan, has been influencing its relations with these countries in recent years.

China remained as an important trade partner for Sri Lanka, along with the US and India, in 2017. The Sri Lankan government's "emphasis on promoting external trade and greater integration with global markets is driving the country's policy towards more trade facilitation agreements".<sup>6</sup> Sri Lanka has signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India and Pakistan. Presently, it is negotiating a China-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA), an FTA with Singapore, and trying to expand the FTA with India into an Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) covering goods and services, along with investments. The CSFTA is supposed to cover trade in services, goods, investments and a preferential access to Chinese market. Chinese investments, according to the prime minister of Sri Lanka "will be primarily directed to industrialisation and further development of Hambantota Air Sea Hub in Southern Sri Lanka and the creation of a Financial City to fill the vacuum for offshore financial service between Singapore and Dubai".<sup>7</sup>

In 2017, India remained Sri Lanka's major trading partner, followed by China and the USA. Together, these countries contribute to around 40 percent of Sri Lanka's total trade. In 2017, trade with China exceeded US \$ 4 billion. China is the second largest source of imports after India and accounted for 18.9 percent of imports in 2017. Imports from China mainly constituted textiles, textile articles,

6. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report 2017, p. 144, [https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb\\_documents/publications/annual\\_report/2017/en/9\\_Chapter\\_05.pdf](https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/publications/annual_report/2017/en/9_Chapter_05.pdf). Accessed on August 20, 2018.

7. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka, "Sri Lanka and its Place in the World", Address by Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe, October 3, 2016, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://www.mfa.gov.lk/pm-addressnz/>. Accessed on August 23, 2018.

telecommunication devices, and vehicle and machinery parts.<sup>8</sup> China (13 percent of total arrivals) was also the second largest source of tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka after India (18 percent of total arrivals) in 2017. Information provided by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka indicates that China is keen to emerge, along with India, as an important trade partner with Sri Lanka.

One of the important aspects in China-Sri Lanka relations is the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that China is providing to Sri Lanka. The FDI provided by China is looked at with caution by India and the West, particularly the USA. Over the years, in the post conflict scenario, the FDI flow to Sri Lanka has increased considerably and in 2017 alone, Sri Lanka's total FDI inflows, including foreign loans received by companies registered with the Board of Investment (BOI), amounted to US \$ 1,913 million, in comparison to US \$ 1,078 million in 2016.<sup>9</sup> China, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia and Singapore were the top five investors in 2017 and ports, housing, telecommunications are some of the sectors where major investments are made by foreign parties. The Hambantota Port Project as well as Colombo Port City Project received major FDI inflows. In July 2017, Sri Lanka and a Chinese owned enterprise signed a 99-year lease for Hambantota port.

Over the years, Sri Lanka has borrowed heavily from China to finance its major projects. Of the total borrowing of US \$ 1,535 million in 2017, lending by China's Export-Import Bank alone amounted to US \$ 491 million. Construction of the extension of the Southern Expressway Sections 1, 2 and 4, Outer Circular Highway Project Phase III, Hambantota Hub Development Project (US \$ 59 million) and Greater Kurunegala Water Supply and Sewerage Project are some of the projects implemented with Chinese loans. The Government of India provided about US \$ 62 million in loans for projects such as restoration of the Northern Railway Services and procurement of two advanced offshore patrol vessels.<sup>10</sup> The Colombo port was expanded to become a deep water hub port and the government wants the Hambantota port to be a commercial hub with export industries. In January 2018, China announced a US \$ 1 billion project to construct a 60-storey building in the proposed Colombo Financial City.

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8. n.6, p.160.

9. Ibid., p.169.

10. Ibid., p.171.

Borrowing from external sources for implementing various projects led to an increase in the external debt in 2017. The total external debt of Sri Lanka has increased by US \$ 5.4 billion to US \$ 51,824 million in 2017.<sup>11</sup> According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the repayment of US \$ 1,320 million for long-term foreign loans obtained for financing projects is the main reason for the increase in external debt. Sri Lanka has borrowed heavily from China and owes about 70 percent of its debt to China. The Government of Sri Lanka is trying to turn the debt with China into equity after much domestic criticism of its policies. For example, in June 2018, the China Merchants Port Holdings (0144.HK) made a \$584 million payment as part of a \$1.12 billion deal to operate Sri Lanka's deep sea Hambantota port.<sup>12</sup>

China's investments under the present government seem to be expanding. In March 2018, the Bank of China opened its first branch. In July 2018, China offered a US \$ 295 million grant to Sri Lanka to utilise in any sector development. A Chinese-funded kidney hospital is under construction in the president's home constituency of Polonnaruwa. Recently, China has also showed interest in investing in the conflict affected north and east of Sri Lanka, where India has been providing development assistance to build basic infrastructure such as roads, railways, schools and hospitals.

### **CHINA- SRI LANKA RELATIONS: INDIA'S CONCERNS**

China's investments in Sri Lanka in sectors such as ports and telecommunications, have been a cause for concern for India, due to the strategic geographical position of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean. Though India has been an important development, trade and investment partner for Sri Lanka for long, concerns remain due to the growing external debt of Sri Lanka to China and the latter's investments in sensitive sectors in Sri Lanka. In the past, India had voiced concern over the docking of two Chinese submarines in 2014 in Colombo port. The Sri Lankan government has made various statements about the non-military nature of the investments to

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11. *Ibid.*, p.176.

12. "Chinese Firm Pays \$584 Million in Sri Lanka Port Debt-to-Equity Deal", June 21, 2018, <https://in.reuters.com/article/us-sri-lanka-china-ports/chinese-firm-pays-584-million-in-sri-lanka-port-debt-to-equity-deal-idINKBN1JG2Z6>. Accessed on August 25, 2018,

assuage India's fears. However, given the country's dependence on China, the security concerns will remain. For India, peace and stability in its neighbourhood are of utmost priority and given the Chinese investments across the region, including in Maldives, through the BRI, India's strategic concerns will only grow with time. The US Department of Defence 2018 Report to Congress on *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, has also mentioned that "China uses the Belt and Road Initiative to develop strong ties with other countries to shape their interests to align with China's and deter confrontation of China's approach to sensitive issues".

Recent reports in the *New York Times*, on China's role in influencing the domestic politics and elections in Sri Lanka during the 2015 elections to support Rajapaksa have only added to India's political and security concerns about the island nation. According to the report, at least US\$7.6 million was dispensed from China Harbour's account at Standard Chartered Bank to affiliates of Mr. Rajapaksa's campaign.<sup>13</sup> Sri Lanka is yet to find a solution to its ethnic issue, which might impact India-Sri Lanka relations, as in the past. Rajapaksa's hard-line approach towards the ethnic question is well known and India hopes that the internal conflict situation in Sri Lanka will be resolved in an amicable manner by the Government of Sri Lanka.

Another concern regarding the security architecture in the IOR is the growing interest shown by countries such as the US and Japan in cooperation with, and building, Sri Lanka's maritime capacity. Sri Lanka's engagement with the US has increased in recent years and the two countries held the Second Partnership Dialogue in 2017. The dialogue covers "cooperation in law enforcement, counter-terrorism and establishment of US Departments of Treasury and Justice Programmes".<sup>14</sup> The US Pacific Fleet and its transport vessel

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13. "Chinese Funds Financed MR's Election Campaign: *New York Times*, May 26, 2018, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/151905/Chinese-funds-financed-MR-s-election-campaign-NY-Times>. Accessed on August 27, 2018.

14. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka, "Joint Statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka and the US Department of State on the Sri Lanka-United States Partnership Dialogue", November 6, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/11/275329.htm>. Accessed on August 23, 2018.

the USNS *Fall Rover* made a goodwill visit to Hambantota port on its first ever Pacific partnership goodwill mission to Sri Lanka from March 6-18, 2017. The US and Sri Lanka co-sponsored a resolution on Sri Lanka, pertaining to reconciliation and human rights, much to the relief of the Government of Sri Lanka, which had been criticised for human rights violations through the state machinery.

Domestically, investments by foreign actors are considered a threat to the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, depending on the party in power. The joint opposition, led by Rajapaksa, has been active in mobilising public opinion against investments by China and India to develop maritime and other infrastructure such as industrial parks in Hambantota and an oil tank farm in Trincomalee. China's and India's roles in Sri Lanka continue to remain an electoral issue.

## CONCLUSION

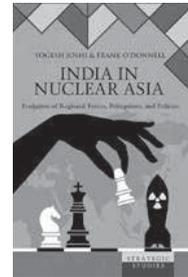
The above developments in Sri Lanka-China relations in recent years point to a growing strategic, economic and political relationship. Sri Lanka's support to the BRI has consolidated China's interests in the island nation. It is clear that China will continue to manoeuvre its interests through various means to be an important partner to Sri Lanka. Growing competition for influence in the region by China and the USA for strategic space, by increasing their engagement with Sri Lanka at the bilateral and multilateral levels might impact the security of the region. Amidst the growing competition for space in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific among the major players, how India will secure its regional interests through cooperation with Indian Ocean states, particularly with Sri Lanka, remains to be seen. For India, Sri Lanka is an important neighbour having ethnic and cultural links. India is conscious of the fact that the growing influence of China can be contained by regular engagement and cooperation at various levels. And India's development assistance to the country has been instrumental in the post conflict phase to normalise the situation on the ground, in the conflict affected north and east of the country. In this scenario, how Sri Lanka will balance its relations with the emerging powers in Asia and beyond, will determine the peace and security of the Indian Ocean Region.

# BOOK REVIEW

## **India in Nuclear Asia: Evolution of Regional Forces, Perceptions and Policies**

Author: Yogesh Joshi and Frank O'Donnell

Publisher: Orient Blackswan Pvt Ltd, 2018,  
Rs. 850



## **MANPREET SETHI**

It was only to be expected that there would be a flood of writings to mark 20 years of India's nuclear tests in 2018. Such occasions present an opportunity to examine the complex nuclear deterrence issues that India is grappling with. Indeed, India's nuclear challenges are unique, coming as they do from two nuclear armed adversaries right at its borders, with both of whom India has unresolved territorial issues, and both of whom are themselves in collusion with one another. No other nuclear armed country has a similar threat scenario. These challenges are only going to get more complicated in the coming times due to certain emerging technologies such as SSBN (Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear) and the rising prominence of dual use platforms. These will have particular bearing on increasing the chances of inadvertent or accidental escalation. These risks form the focus of a recent book by two young scholars.

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The book is well written and neatly put together. However, it does lean towards an alarmist perspective with respect to the course the authors suspect India's nuclear capability could take. In fact, the blurb of the book itself is a bit suggestive when it describes India as having initially "portrayed an image of a restrained and responsible nuclear power", but that "the contemporary picture is beginning to differ from these initial expectations". Such a statement stands on little ground. One of the reasons for the authors reaching this conclusion may be their exclusive focus on a capability-based assessment without adequate anchoring of thought in more conceptual or cultural dimensions of strategic issues.

The first chapter of the book on India's Nuclear Force Development 2018 highlights, rather bombastically, that "India's nuclear force in 2018 is scaling new heights of technical achievement at an unprecedented rate." The authors also detect a "wide scope and ambition of nuclear force development" which they find "increasingly difficult to reconcile with India's stated nuclear posture of credible minimum deterrence." Such a view seems at variance with what has really been happening in the country. For sure, there has been technological progression in delivery systems. That's normal in 20 years. But, from what is visible from the nuclear warhead and missile developments that have been taking place, India seems to be choosing its nuclear capability enhancement rather carefully. In fact, many of the capabilities that may be described as "irresponsible" because they promote nuclear war-fighting, such as Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) have been eschewed by India's nuclear doctrine and strategy. Neither has there been any official commitment towards Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicle (MIRVed) missiles. Hence, the book seems premature in suggesting that India is moving towards counter-force technologies. Rather, the current capability focus, rightly so, is on technologies that were mentioned right at the time that India first drafted a nuclear doctrine in 1999. These include building a triad of delivery systems, with an emphasis on the range of missiles, their reliability, and full operationalisation of the nuclear submarines. So basically, unlike what the authors

seem to suggest, India has not shown any change of approach to nuclear weapons, nor an interest in nuclear war-fighting technologies.

India considers nuclear weapons as instruments of deterrence, and that too, for deterrence by punishment. Hence it has not felt the requirement to invest in counter-force capabilities. Despite change in governments, there seems to have been a widespread consensus on the understanding of the nature of the weapon – that it causes large scale damage which cannot be constrained in space and time. Accordingly, the country believes that the requirements of the actual nuclear hardware are pretty limited and there is no need for India to give up credible minimum deterrence – something that the book has an alternative view on.

Similarly, on No First Use (NFU) too, though the book seems to suggest that it is under a cloud and likely to be abandoned, there are no such indications from the officialdom. In fact, there should be no reason for India to give up its no first use. It has nothing to gain from a first use when the other side has a secure second strike capability and a disarming or a decapitating strike is impossible to obviate retaliation. In such circumstances, it makes little sense to use own nuclear weapons to offset a conventional crisis. Rather, by not using nuclear weapons first and leaving the onus of escalation on the adversary, India ends up stabilising the situation and lessening the adversary's use or lose dilemma. Meanwhile, the NFU requires the credibility of assured retaliation, and so India has rightly retained its focus on survivability of its nuclear arsenal—better ranges of missiles, mobility of missiles, better penetrability of missiles, even Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) for the survivability of Command and Control (C2).

In order to deal with the risk of misperceptions about India's capability developments, the authors suggest that India should set upper limits for its missile aspirations. This is a non-starter, and no nation sets limits to its technological advancements. While the world, and India's own neighbourhood is pressing towards hypersonics and induction of artificial intelligence without any upper limits, not even a conversation on a code of conduct, leave alone any arms control, it is difficult to visualise India agreeing to any upper limits. In fact,

Research and Development (R&D) on all kinds of capabilities is a normal activity and even the draft nuclear doctrine of India has categorically stated that “India should step up efforts in R&D to keep up with technological advances in the field”, and that “while India is committed to maintain deployment of a deterrent which is both minimum and credible, it will not accept any restraints on building its R&D capability.”

The book has a section on policy recommendations, two of which are valiantly offered. The first recommendation is to the capitals of India, China and Pakistan to initiate nuclear and naval strategic dialogues. This is a good suggestion since nuclear armed nations must keep communication channels open for the sake of better understanding of each other’s positions and perceptions. The second recommendation of the authors is only to India and they recommend the conduct of an official defence review. Why should the same not be asked of the other two nuclear powers in Asia? Sure, China does bring out a Defence White Paper that has a few lines on the nuclear dimension, but it provides nothing of the kind of assurances that India is being asked to offer by the book. Pakistan, on the other hand, has honed the art of ambiguity and the authors seem to be resigned to that fact.

Of the three nations, in fact, India is the only country to have a public, written nuclear doctrine. Even if it is 15 years old, there may be little reason to change the main attributes of the doctrine. Nevertheless, it may not be a bad idea to bring out some kind of a document to once again reiterate the same principles. If nothing else, it would set to rest some of the fears being expressed in strategic circles on whether India’s capabilities are indicating any change in its doctrinal guidelines. Reaffirming the principles of credible minimum deterrence and no first use may provide the necessary assurance to voices that are expressing misgivings on the country’s intentions. This, in turn, could help in reducing security dilemmas that might be caused by misperceptions. To that extent, the call made by the book is useful but the same could have been asked of the other two nuclear countries too as one way of addressing the challenges of accidental and inadvertent escalation that form the subject of the book.

Overall, the book has its merit in drawing attention to the risks of inadvertent and accidental escalation owing to the changing nuclear capabilities of India, China and Pakistan. However, it tends to presume certain nuclear responses of India based purely on its technological capabilities, divorced from the unique philosophical prism from which India views nuclear weapons. Given this Indian approach, the country may not, and should not, allow technology pulls and pressures to determine its nuclear choices. The book may be read as ringing the cautionary bell for Indian nuclear decision makers.