

**SEMINAR REPORT ON**  
**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON CHINA: FOCUS ON**  
**TIBET**

**15 October 2015**



Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
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**CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES (CLAWS),  
NEW DELHI**

**NATIONAL SEMINAR ON CHINA: FOCUS ON TIBET**

**15 October 2015**

**KEY POINTS**

- The consolidation of control in Tibet by the Government, the Party, the PLA and the People's Armed Police Force focuses on one single facet – Tibet needs to be controlled with tight-fisted political and military control.
- From 1911 onwards, Tibet was a *de facto* sovereign entity, and the British, till the independence of India in 1947, recognised Tibet as a *de facto* sovereign entity.
- In June 1949, then Home Minister, Sardar Patel wrote a note to Prime Minister Nehru, even before the Communist Revolution in China, which said, “India must ensure that the Chinese do not interfere in the affairs of Tibet”.
- The fight in the Walong sector where the Chinese suffered a lot of casualties – as a result of which, operations were stopped there.
- India committed a strategic blunder of not assessing that the Chinese Air Force at that time was not capable of taking on targets inside India, especially in any of the cities. Therefore, India lost the crucial advantage that could have had a profound impact on the overall outcome of the war – by opting not to employ the Indian Air Force in an offensive role. India suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962 because of four major reasons:
  - 1) India failed to carry out an independent assessment of the strategic threat posed by China.

- 2) A total mismatch between military and foreign policies of India as both were working in different compartments.
  - 3) Total marginalisation of the defence forces from the decision-making set-up and a weak higher defence organisation.
  - 4) Poor man-management by the Army including posting of officers.
- The blitz of infrastructure been pumped into Tibet is a manifestation of the tight-fisted political and military control, reflecting the larger policy in the name of western development strategy since the time of Hu Jintao.
  - The January 2010 politburo meeting of the China Communist Party outlined that there is a need to enhance security in the western frontiers through the western development strategy. China is focusing on continuing large-scale subsidies to spur economic growth in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.
  - The quantum of PLA's force, their trans-regional mobility and the capacity to mobilise greater forces in a shorter time-frame provides the PLA a tremendous capability to carry out a build-up of forces at a point of decision, thereby adding to PLA's overall capability conversion in and out of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

## SEMINAR REPORT

### Speakers

- 1) **Lt Gen SK Sinha** (Retd) – Former Governor (Assam and Jammu & Kashmir), and Former VCOAS
- 2) **Gen NC Vij** (Retd) – Former COAS, Founder Vice-Chairman NDMA, and Director, Vivekananda International Foundation
- 3) **Mr Claude Arpi** – (Historian and Commentator on Tibet)
- 4) **Dr Monika Chansoria** – (Senior Fellow and Head of China-Study Programme, CLAWS)
- 5) **Brig V Mahalingam** (Retd) – Defence Analyst
- 6) **Col RSN Singh** (Retd) – Defence and Security Analyst

The seminar sought to examine Tibet in greater detail to understand the politico-military developments in this region in the past 50-60 years. Perhaps among the most profound change has been a demographic shift in addition to the great infrastructure development/investment that China has made in the Tibetan region. The implications of these two developments need to be viewed from a strategic and military perspective. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor along with strategic investments made by China in Tibet in terms of airstrips on altitudes over 12,000-14,000 ft, military exercises, massive troop movements, merit greater scrutiny in terms of China's active defence military concept. The India-China border still remains disputed and needs to be seen from the above-mentioned perspective as well. According to October 10, 2015 edition of *The Economist*, the Chinese Ambassador to Malaysia stated that the ethnic Chinese (in Malaysia) 'are a class that needs to be needed by them' (by China) – thus reflecting the assertive policy of China towards its neighbourhood.

Incidentally it is exactly five decades since when in 1965 what originally were the three original provinces of what Tibet was back then, namely

Ü-Tsang, Kham and Amdo. Today, the Tibetan Autonomous Region has included the entire southern and western Tibetan region, the whole of the Qinghai province, western parts of Sichuan, parts of Yunnan and a portion of GYANSU. The consolidation of control in Tibet by the Government, the Party, the PLA and the People's Armed Police Force focuses on one single facet – Tibet needs to be controlled with tight-fisted political and military control.

### **Session I – Historical and Political Narrative of Tibet**

The British as then colonisers of India entered into a number of agreements/conventions/treaties with or on the issue of its ties with Tibet. The first agreement such agreement was with China – Chefoo Convention of 1876, signed in Chefoo. The second agreement signed again with China entered into force 1890, followed by another trilateral “Agreement between Great Britain, China on Tibet amending Trade Regulations in Tibet” in 1893. Significantly, the 1904 “Convention between Great Britain and Tibet” was the first agreement on Tibet signed with the Government in Lhasa directly. India had a considerable presence in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet in form of trade and diplomatic ties. In 1908, a Tibetan delegation was invited to Calcutta to participate in the “Agreement between Great Britain, China on Tibet amending Trade Regulations in Tibet of 1893”. The second agreement was the 1914 Simla Agreement which China refused to accept. In fact, it was only in 1914 that Britain directly engaged with Tibet on issues where Tibet was a direct and sole party. The 1914 Simla Agreement focused on border demarcation and on trade – and remains the only document that demarcates the border between India and China (Tibet) – with no other document delineating this border. Prior to the Simla Conference, British agents surveyed the region in and around Tawang and drafted the border, which is the McMahon Line today. But, the border dispute and intrusions by China into Indian Territory (particularly in Arunachal Pradesh) can be traced to as early as 1910, wherein a Chinese patrol came all the way and marked the border (by laying some stones) in Walong. India subsequently rectified this and marked the border north of Kibithu (by shifting these stones). From 1911 onwards, Tibet was a *de facto* sovereign entity, and the British, till the independence of India in 1947, recognised Tibet as a *de facto* sovereign entity. The British' Tibet policy between 1911 till 1947 was largely

based on the following:

- To maintain Tibet as a buffer between India and China – both for India's defence and internal administration
- Reorganise Tibet's autonomy whilst as a ceremonial suzerainty of China
- Support Tibetan autonomy

In July 1947, India requested Tibet to continue and honour British India agreements until a new agreement could be drafted between Tibet and independent India. This was because India had considerable presence in Tibet in form of trade and diplomatic missions. It is also to be noted that independent India's policy was largely in line with British India. For instance in June 1949, then Home Minister, Sardar Patel wrote a note to Prime Minister Nehru, even before the Communist Revolution in China, which said, "India must ensure that the Chinese do not interfere in the affairs of Tibet". Sardar Patel followed this note, with another note dated November 17, 1950 in which he wanted to discuss India's 'China policy' in the backdrop of the Chinese threat. Unfortunately, he passed away before he could discuss this issue with Prime Minister Nehru, who remained firm in his belief regarding the *Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai* slogan.

Even after the Chinese revolution and its annexation of Tibet, New Delhi maintained a full-fledged diplomatic mission in Lhasa till 1952, following which, it was downsized to a Consulate. Till 1954, India was not just supplying food and other vital supplies to Tibet, but also to the Chinese army till Beijing was able to establish land routes to supply for its own troops. Prior to China claiming Indian Territory, the two sides agreed upon trading ties through trade outposts and pass. China claims that the agreements mentioning geographic features/locations do not amount to delineation of the border – and was the justification for the first incursion by China into India in 1954-56. The 'so-called' Agreement of Liberation of Tibet by China was signed under duress as China forced this agreement upon the Tibetan representative with the Dalai Lama learning about this via BBC radio service. Post the Chinese takeover of Tibet, Indian presence

was slowly and steadily limited by the Chinese and the last Indian Consul General to Tibet in 1962 was virtually not allowed to move out of his official residence. Although, Tibet had religious and cultural ties with India for many centuries, the 1962 war waged by China severed ties between India and Tibet. Most of the agreements between India (both British India and independent India) and Tibet were not between India and Government in Lhasa but with Beijing (China).

The 1962 India-China war was undoubtedly a defeat for India. The three main sectors where the battle was fought being Ladakh, western Kameng, and east Kameng of Arunachal Pradesh. The key people in devising strategy and policy were Lt Gen Kaul, VK Krishna Menon (Defence Minister) and BM Malik (Director General, IB). However, one needs to remember the valour and sacrifice of the Indian Army. The nation is proud of Maj Shaitan Singh, PVC, who lived to the highest traditions of soldiering and sacrificed his life and fought to the last man and last round. In fact, wherever the Chinese forces faced considerable opposition by the Indian Army, the PLA did not advance any further, not because of the Indian defensive positions, but by the casualty that the Indian Army was able to inflict upon the advancing Chinese PLA. A case in point was the fight in the Walong sector where the Chinese suffered a lot of casualties – as a result of which, operations were stopped there. In Ladakh during the Battle of Rezang la (13 Kumaon), the Chinese did not move beyond Chushul. Except for the area of the western Kameng, where India withdrew, all the areas where the Indian Army put in a pitched battle and fought, the Chinese did not move further beyond.

India committed a strategic blunder of not assessing that the Chinese Air Force at that time was not capable of taking on targets inside India, especially in any of the cities. Therefore, India lost the crucial advantage that could have had a profound impact on the overall outcome of the war – by opting not to employ the Indian Air Force in an offensive role. In a critical analysis, it would only be apposite to assess that India suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962 because of four major reasons:

- 1) India failed to carry out an independent assessment of the strategic threat posed by China

- 2) A total mismatch between military and foreign policies of India as both were working in different compartments
- 3) Total marginalisation of the defence forces from the decision-making set-up and a weak higher defence organisation
- 4) Poor man-management by the Army including posting of officers

Flipping through the pages of history, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not too kind on Tibet for as many as five Dalai Lamas died young. Notably, it takes almost two decades for a young Dalai Lama to be mature enough to take over the reins of the government. It is for this very reason that China wants to appoint the next Dalai Lama so that it will have a couple of decades to act as an agent, and dictate the affairs of Tibet without any interference from anyone. China has rejected the *middle path approach* proposed by the Dalai Lama, wants to hand pick and appoint the next Dalai Lama – which will automatically give China at least 20 years to consolidate its position in Tibet. The *Middle Path Approach* is one in which the Dalai Lama is willing to concede military and foreign affairs to China in exchange for autonomy. As long as China enjoys massive military presence in Tibet, the middle path approach would not work. By creating a Tibetan civilian government-in-exile in India, the present Dalai Lama is ensuring that China would be compelled to address the Tibetan issue even in the event of a post-Dalai Lama situation.

Over the years the situation both inside Tibet and the world opinion on the Tibet question has undergone some change. In 1971, Henry Kissinger stated in a memorandum, “CIA Tibetan activities, utilizing followers of the Dalai Lama, have included in addition to guerrilla support, a program of political, propaganda, and intelligence operations. These activities are designed to impair the international influence of Communist China by support to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exiles in maintaining the concept of an autonomous Tibet”. Regarding the Dalai Lama’s presence in India, Deng Xiaoping had told former US President Gerald Ford, “We do not pay much attention to that because it is of no use. And to put it more explicit terms, the Dalai Lama is now a burden on India ... No matter what the Dalai Lama boasts, he cannot affect the prospects of Tibet.” The assertions

of Deng Xiaoping reflected China consolidating its position and interests in Tibet and also brushing aside the impact of what Henry Kissinger had expressed in 1971.

India's position was best brought out in 1974 when Swaran Singh, then Foreign Minister of India, summarised the Indian position in the Rajya Sabha debate by stating, "I would like to say very categorically that our border with China is mostly Tibet and for Tibet we have to deal with China, whether we like it or not ... It is the Government of China and the Chinese soldiers, whom our soldiers face all along the border... We have given asylum to Dalai Lama. We have never recognized his political position vis-à-vis Tibet." In the past three decades, owing to its economic growth, China has been able to integrate Tibet with the rest of the Mainland. If Tibet is perceived as a palm, then the five fingers of this palm are Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh.

## **Session II – Ramifications of Infrastructure Build-up and PLA's Military Capabilities in Tibet**

By the sheer scale of infrastructure stack up, Tibet has become China's gateway to the world and does not merely remain a buffer for India. The blitz of infrastructure been pumped into Tibet is a manifestation of the tight-fisted political and military control, reflecting the larger policy in the name of western development strategy since the time of Hu Jintao. Today, there are over 17 million tourists who visit Tibet with majority of them being Han Chinese. The base of China's infrastructure development is the logistics build-up and the reform process in the region. Chinese White Papers have focused on logistics reform and support to enhance operational logistic capacity.

The January 2010 politburo meeting of the China Communist Party outlined that there is a need to enhance security in the western frontiers through the western development strategy. China is focusing on continuing large-scale subsidies to spur economic growth in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The Han migration is one of the biggest issues that is being discussed, debated and questioned, primarily because they are offering attractive

bonuses and even benefits for the Han Chinese. All companies that are dominating the major industries in the region are owned and run by the Han Chinese. The security covers which envelopes Tibet projects the power of the CCP with the People's Armed Police Force in right gear – all ethnic Han.

*Rail communications* – The Qinghai–Tibet railway line from Golmud to Lhasa has become fully operational. The *Xinhua* news agency has stated that the QTR is a main option for transporting soldiers to Lhasa and beyond. The Golmud-Lhasa line has been extended and is operational right till Shigatse making it a total of 1,400 km. The high-speed rail network has the capacity to transfer 1,00,000 army personnel over 300 miles possibly within half a day. The extension of the Lhasa-Shigatse rail to Kathmandu and further down onwards to Lumbini in Nepal is also being discussed. In fact, the survey work for the Sino-Nepal border has been completed and the construction work has been initiated although at a very initial stage right now.

*Road Networks/Highways and Airfields* – There are five major highways and subsidiary roads in the region, and the emphasis is now on inter-provincial highways, linking the interior and the coastal areas. All these roads are constructed to military specifications. Nearly 80 percent of Tibet's township and 20 percent of the villages are accessible by highways. The emphasis is on the construction of an additional 103 highway projects in TAR. The three major highways are the western, central and eastern highways which leverage greater connectivity between western and mainland China. The primary aim has been to improve the lateral mobility between central and eastern parts of the Tibetan region. In the event of large-scale rioting in Tibet (a potential post-Dalai Lama situation), the Sichuan Tibet highway will be a key passage way for the combat troops from the Chengdu Military Region to support the PAPF already stationed in the region.

*Fibre Optic Communications* – There are 58 small aperture terminals satellite stations that are already functional. The fibre optic network spreads over 55 counties in TAR. Interconnecting Chengdu and Lanzhou Military Regions is one of the major aims and further connecting to Beijing through secure communications remains the larger aim. In fact, fibre optic cables have steadily been extended towards military installations all along the border

areas with India. Enhanced communication security is likely to continue tilting the balance in cyber warfare in favour of the PLA.

The significant doctrinal changes in the PLA today includes towards moving towards a quick decisive campaign; from single-service operation to multi-service joint operations; from concentration of units and personnel to concentration of capabilities; emphasising on defence to primacy of offence; need to absorb blows to execute operational level pre-emption; shifting from exclusive land warfare to holistic and simultaneous operations on land, maritime, airspace, electromagnetic and cyber-space dimensions. China's doctrinal formulation called *active defence* seeks to take the initiative and stay on the offensive from the conflict's earliest stages and aims to bring hostilities to a swift and favourable conclusion. The nature of military presence and build-up in Tibet can be gauged from the fact that from 22 Divisions two years ago, China is capable to raise 33 Divisions in a few days time. PLA's responsibility in Tibet has been divided between the Chengdu and Lanzhou Military Regions –something equivalent of a Command Headquarter, with two important changes taking place.

- 1) The PLA Army Headquarter is being taken out perhaps to give PLA the image of a joint army
- 2) Seven Military Regions are being restructured to form five joint commands – which are expected to establish respective theatre joint operational commands

The Lanzhou Military Region is responsible for India's northern as well as central sectors and the Chengdu Military Region is responsible for India's eastern sector. Lanzhou MR has South Xinjiang Military District under two military sub-districts. The Chengdu MR (including Tibet) under which there are three military sub-districts. As regards the Chinese borders, it is the responsibility of Chinese border defence regiments and also a few independent regiments and battalions. These border defence regiments come directly under the respective military sub-districts. These two military regions each have two group armies plus a few other elements.

*Lanzhou MR* – has 21 and 47 Group Armies (GA) and the 21 GA has been designated as an Mobile Offensive Force. The Two Infantry Divisions and a Motorised Division of this group army has been nominated as Rapid Reaction Force with specific reference to India. Motorised Infantry Division of 21 GA conduct fire assault exercises using computer networked command and control platforms down to battalion levels.

*Chengdu MR* – the 13 GA (Chongqing) has been designated as Rapid Reaction Force and the 37 Division is part of 13 GA, and has been classified as an Aviation Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Aviation Brigade is affiliated to this MR. Bordering Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, the 14 GA is trained in Mountain and Jungle Warfare. This particular MR also has elements of information warfare and electronic warfare. Recently, the Chengdu MR carried out *Exercise Joint Action 2015* which involved over 1,40,000 troops, from over 140 PLA Regiments of various types, involved troops from Army, Navy, Air Force, Second Artillery, PAPF as well as Intelligence, Reconnaissance and EW elements, and entailed long-distance delivery, joint reconnaissance, and computer coordinated bombardment. The aim of this exercise was primarily to see that how would units and formations operate under C2 platforms in digitized conditions. As far as the mobility doctrine is concerned, the Chinese are changing from regional defence to trans-regional mobility. To that extent they have carried out two very significant exercises – Stride 2009 and the second is Mission Action 2010. In Exercise Stride 2009, there were 50,000 troops, 60,000 vehicles and heavy equipment drawn from 5 MRs, with troops being moved from 5 MRs to northeast China in 13 days.

The functional airfields include Gongga, Donshoon, Hoping, Bangda, Nagchuka and Shiquanhe. The Gongga and Bangda airfield have been upgraded to cater for nearly 2.1 million transients annually. According to the 12<sup>th</sup> five year plan, China has constructed the world's highest airport in Tibet's Nagqu prefecture at an elevation of nearly 15,000 ft. In combination, the Nagqu airport, and the QTR constitute a three-dimensional transport network that envelops Tibet. All this augments the capability of the PLA Air Force with striking range to engage targets in India on a very broad front and greater depth. Airfields in Lhasa and Hoping has witnessed exemplary rise in the sorties that have taken place in the last six years. PLA aircraft have flown

in more than 1,460 sorties in 2014 alone. The PLA Air Force's role is slowly shifting from a territorial air force to an air force that is capable of carrying out defensive as well as offensive operations. As per an assessment, PLAAF can make available anything up to 1,500 aircraft for operations in the Tibet sector. After the introduction of J-10, J-11 and SU-27 aircraft, the Chinese seem to have overcome the difficulty they had in flying in high altitude areas.

The quantum of PLA's force, their trans-regional mobility and the capacity to mobilise greater forces in a shorter time-frame provides the PLA a tremendous capability to carry out a build-up of forces at a point of decision, thereby adding to PLA's overall capability conversion in and out of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The Second Artillery has ballistic cruise as well as tactical missiles, having seven bases out of which one base takes care of storage and maintenance of missile warheads particularly nuclear ones and the other six bases have a total of 24 missile brigades. The Chinese have recently tested 18 transport helicopters and it is said that these helicopters can climb up to a height of 9,000 m with 27 fully-equipped troops and 2 crew members. Fielding integrated command platforms for multi-service communication for integrated joint operations (IJO), to integrate various types of units i.e., ground, naval, air, missile, logistics and armament support and battlefield systems i.e., intelligence, reconnaissance, communications, EW, cyber space etc. Improved communications are fast emerging as the central component of the Integrated Joint Operations.

### **Comments during Discussion Hour**

China's rise as a major international actor is a major phenomenon in the strategic landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With Tibet's foundation of ten major rivers, sustaining 47 percent of the world's population, Tibet for China, is a national security and ecological security barrier, as well as a land mass from which China seeks to dominate a major part of Asia. The Chinese campaign to build dams is of concern. Apparently China has agreed to share some data and selected survey by India on the river water flow in China (Tibet). However, the real issue is not dam-building but the diversion of river waters

by China. For the time being, diversion of river waters is not feasible or technologically possible.

The PLA's vision will extend beyond its immediate territorial interests, as stated by former President Hu Jintao in 2004. The preparedness is designed to improve the capacity of the PLA to fight and win. In this reference, what China refers to as 'local' is a misnomer because the same can be used for regional high intensity wars of short duration under an information-centric environment. The Chinese are rapidly building up aerospace and cyber capabilities. The PLA is also reinventing its capabilities towards trans-theatre mobility for multi-dimensional sustainable operations, lasting them for a month or longer.

India's strategic situation has to take into account a two-front conflict with Pakistan and China allying together. India needs to restructure its higher defence management, defence services and intelligence apparatus. New Delhi needs to notch up its border management, develop border areas especially by improving operational roads and communications infrastructure. India needs to cater for mobile offensive Mountain Corps, joint operations while simultaneously speeding up modernisation of the Air Force, Navy, Artillery, and Army Aviation. Added emphasis on C4I2SR systems and infrastructure, offensive and defensive capabilities of IW, EW and cyber warfare along with reforming the military logistic structure is the need of the hour. A war of the future would be a different ballgame and military preparedness and capacity-building is the only solution.

Tibet and Xinjiang are two restive regions that China has not been able to assimilate. Xinjiang has been a backdoor that China used to invade Tibet. Presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exiles in India is a leverage that India can use. There is a pressing need to declassify government files and records in India that would enable scholars to have greater access to facts and thereby better understand events of Tibet's past.

