

# Chinese and Pakistani Armed Forces: Striking Similarities With Common Foe

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DINESH MATHUR

## **Pakistani Legacy and Brand of Democracy**

Pakistan, from the time Jinnah to that of Nawaz Sharif, has grown progressively weaker, more authoritarian, and increasingly theocratic. The Pakistan Army, is a force in itself, usurping political power, vast commercial and industrial interests and massive rural and urban properties. The veracity of the age-old saying, “All countries have Armies, but here, an Army has a country,” is undoubtedly true in the case of Pakistan. The intelligentsia steadfastly believes that the nexus between politicians and the bureaucracy is corrupt, incompetent and cannot be trusted to hold authority. There has never been much doubt about who actually calls the shots, especially in the formulation of foreign, nuclear and defence policies.

Guided democracy or oligarchy in Pakistan, is a loose term for the informal political system that binds together the senior ranks of the military, the civil service, key members of the judiciary, and other social elite. Political institutions have ceased to exist and crudely favour the elite in pursuing quick financial gains while the poor continue to languish. Civilian governments, like birds of passage, are nominal heads and serve at the pleasure of the Army Chief. In its tumultuous 67 years’ history, only one civilian government completed its term recently, a good pointer to the state of democracy.

## **Pakistan's Core Principles**

Conceding that conventional / nuclear war is not the best option against India, the Pakistan Army has enunciated five core principles for Pakistan's survival:

- Growing Indian power disturbs the equilibrium of South Asia and it must be countered in all fields. Support to militants in Kashmir and to Islamic nationalism in India through various conduits to bleed India white, must continue.
- Pakistan's greatest ally, China, is also the enemy of Pakistan's enemy. The advantage lies in having China as a third party in the Kashmir dispute.
- Minimum credible deterrence and an assured second-strike capability form the bulwark of Pakistani nuclear deterrence, so vital for status quo in South Asia.
- The US is to be despised publicly but full advantage of grants / aid is to be taken for the refurbishment of weapon systems / superior military technology and logistical support for the Army.
- Socio-economic reforms for the amelioration of the poor and illiterate masses can be relegated in importance, as long as the elite is looked after.

**Since Independence, Pakistan has become weaker, authoritarian and theocratic.**

## **Chinese Communist Legacy**

The People's Republic of China (PRC) founded in 1949, ushered in a new era for China's authoritative system wherein China's political and economic systems, the citizen's rights and freedoms, were clearly curtailed by the Communist Party. The ultimate goal was to make the system and laws totally authoritative, incapable of being flouted by anyone except the Communist Party. The situation is similar in Pakistan where the military rules by means other than Communism. Cases of corruption in the higher ranks are common to both Armies.

During the last three decades, authoritative capitalism has brought in massive investments from the US and European nations and has successfully propelled the Chinese economy to the second largest position in the world. Pakistan has utilised the US aid / grants in the guise of national development for more than five decades, but its economy has stagnated.

Control of the armed forces in China lies with the Central Military Commission (CMC), with the President as the Chairman. Political Commissars for indoctrination in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and *jihadi* leaders and

Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for the Islamic indoctrination in Pakistan perform similar jobs. It appears that the PLA is still hostage to the Pakistan Army's Indo-phobia which perceives India as a future regional threat

## **Geo-Strategic Compulsions and Behavioural Pattern**

The geo-strategic location of China dictates that it cannot aspire to expand towards the north or east without full scale joint maritime operations. However, land movement southwards to finish the unfinished territorial agenda is possible. Pakistan too, is obsessed about strategic depth after the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) troops depart from Afghanistan in 2015. Fresh geo-strategic alignments preclude both China and Pakistan from benefiting from this move.

The recent intrusions by PLA soldiers into Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) airstrip and Chumar-Demchok areas in Ladakh during the visits to India by the Chinese Prime Minister and by the President on April 14 and September 14 respectively, were well orchestrated moves. The Pakistan Army Chief's utterances, the transgression along the Line of Control (LoC) and the spurt in terrorist activities (whenever there is a VIP visit to the Valley) indicate similar motives.

As a part of the socialist market economy, extensive infrastructure development in road, rail and air networks, Fuel, Oil and Lubricant (FOL) pipelines, telecommunications and industrial bases has taken place. China chose to go well beyond the requirements of Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), ostensibly to improve the PLA's logistics capability on its southern borders. Work on the Lhasa-Gormo oil pipeline and Lhasa-Golmud rail link is now complete, making Nagqu the region's largest logistics hub for a military build-up against India. Likewise, Chinese help in well developed communications in the north, especially along the Karakoram Highway, is part of a well conceived plan.

## **Sino-Pak Collusive Support**

Better understanding of the common goals, the existing treaty of friendship and cooperation, the Pakistan Army's growing clout with the PLA brass, and sharing of intelligence and common values in peace-time, could result in a synergy of effort against India, by:

- Increased infiltration by terrorists / intrusions along the LoC in Kashmir Valley and through Gilgit-Baltistan-Shaksham Valley along the Indus towards Ladakh to set up sleeper cells. Simultaneously, the use of the Indian Mujahideen/

**Sino-Pak  
collusive support  
is detrimental to  
Indian security.**

Students Islamic Movement of India/ Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (IM / SIMI / HUJI ex Bangladesh) to foment religious dissension / disturbance during periods of national festivals / calamities.

- Both would continue to hold talks to resolve the border issue and adopt an inflexible approach in negotiations. Simultaneously, keep the unresolved border issue alive by physical intrusions / infiltrations in all sectors across the LoC / LAC (Line of Actual Control). Deny or foil the Indian attempts to patrol up to the LoC / LAC. The two would sign a fresh treaty of friendship and cooperation to include mutual assistance in case of a threat to either's territorial integrity.
- Both would carry out physical forward deployment of frontier guards / rangers periodically to remind India of China's claims to Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh (HP) and Uttar Pradesh (UP) borders. Though, the latter three areas do not apply to Pakistan, it helps to tie down the Indian forces.
- Both would raise border disputes, contest India's regional alliances like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and others to malign India in the international fora, especially the UN, repeatedly. Issue warnings to India to keep out of Vietnam and oil drilling in the South China Sea.
- Both would ensure fleet safety against the Indian Navy's superiority in the region from Gwadar base. The Chinese Navy would also deploy its lone aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean with forces to maintain surveillance of the Indian Navy's Eastern and Western Fleets, besides keeping open its option of second strike nuclear capability in the event of an adverse situation developing. Their possible high value targets would be Bombay High, Ahmedabad, Kochi, Vishakhapatnam, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore, Kolkata and Siliguri.
- Both would continue their military and moral support to Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh and attempt to wean away Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar from India's sphere of influence.
- Both would attempt penetration / neutralisation of India's national financial and banking institutions and commercial establishments by cyber intrusions, cracking computer codes, and hackings to render networks ineffective; carry out river diversions in Tibet for excessive silting, to cripple power generation capacity at dams in India.

## **PLA and Pakistan Army Joint Operations**

China's existing logistics infrastructure, terrain and communications available in Tibet give it a capability of launching its six infantry divisions already deployed plus 12 additional infantry divisions from outside the TAR against India. It would take almost one month to induct such a quantum of force from the other military regions into the TAR. Considering the time when the Himalayan passes are closed, it would be prudent for China to build up from March to May and complete operations by November. To achieve China's military aims, the PLA planning, with collusive support from Pakistan, could be in the following terms.

- China builds up this maximum sustainable force level between March to May in three distinct War Zone Campaigns (WZC), from its launch pads in the TAR.
- Simultaneously, Pakistan builds up its three strike corps for operations in the Gilgit-Baltistan, Jhelum-Chenab and Ravi-Beas corridors in the guise of training manoeuvres, limited to the aim to tie down Indian strike corps in the Western and Southwestern Commands.
- The timings of the Chinese offensives through Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh bordering Tibet, would be staggered with another limited Pakistani offensive in Gilgit-Baltistan, towards Kunjerab Pass and towards Leh.
- The PLA would occupy areas beyond Shaksham Valley and DBO and link up with the Pakistani offensive from Kunjerab Pass on the Karakoram Highway and force an Indian pullout from the Siachen Glacier and Base Camp.

Both Armies expect that the well coordinated and prepared Indian defences would be hard sloggng and costly. Therefore, extensive use of Rapid Reaction Forces (RRFs) for envelopment, heliborne / airborne landings and outflanking / infiltration tactics, to assist both Pakistani and Chinese offensives. Reserves of up to two Chinese divisions would be kept centrally to exploit gains either in Ladakh or Arunachal Pradesh. Likewise, Pakistan would maintain adequate reserves for the occupation of the Siachen Glacier, when vacated by India.

## **PLA Operations in Particular**

The PLA campaign strategy is of speedily gaining the initiative by a first strike to capture high value targets well beyond claim lines, especially in Ladakh and the northeast. It needs to be noted that an adequate number of feeder roads with infrastructure is now present in the TAR opposite Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. The operation could unfold along the following lines:

**Ladakh WZC:** China has claimed the entire region in DBO and areas northeast of the Karakoram–Pangong mountain ranges to provide depth to the Western Highway through Aksai Chin. Operations would be preceded by RRF units capturing choke points intact/ securing crossings on the Indus River near Demchok.

Launching three-pronged equally weighted offensives – northern, central and southern – converging towards Leh to capture it and thereafter, attempting to cut off road Upshi-Manali. Likely support bases for operations in this area are located at Hotan, Gartok and Giamuk. Forward bases from north to south are likely to be at Rudok, Spanggur Gap and Tashigong.

**Sikkim WZC:** China does recognise India's suzerainty. Operations would be preceded by RRF units capturing choke points intact on both north-south axes leading to Gangtok. The PLA would then launch a local offensive into Sikkim through Chumbi Valley to drive a wedge into the Siliguri corridor to cut off the northeast region from the rest of India, with the added aim to interdict the Indian mountain strike corps. Nvingchi in East Tibet provides the support base for operations.

**Arunachal Pradesh WZC:** The Chinese have claimed the entire Arunachal Pradesh up to the foothills. Operations would be preceded by RRF units capturing choke points intact / securing crossings on the Brahmaputra River and behind the main defences at Sela-Bomdila. The PLA would launch two-pronged equally weighted local offensives to occupy areas up to its claim line (up to the Lohit and Brahmaputra line to the foothills): one through Dokala Pass on the Indo-Bhutan border to bypass Sela-Bomdila defences and the other south of Walong to bypass the defences at Walong and head for Itanagar, the state capital. Main airfields within the region are Gongar, Hoping, Pangta, Linchi (Nyingiri) and Gar Gunsar. Construction of new airfields / Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) / helipads in and around the TAR has enhanced China's strategic airlift capability, with a shorter warning period now. The air-to-air refuelling capability of the recently acquired IL-78, gives it greater endurance.

The PLA's aggressive posture on the LAC and Pakistan's transgressions across the LoC create the basis for an Asian military alliance which excludes China and Pakistan. Both countries have become negative factors in Asia. China's string of pearls theory is likely to boomerang, if it results in forging greater cooperation

**PLA campaign strategy is to capture high value targets in Ladakh and Northeast.**

between India and its immediate neighbourhood besides foreclosing the opportunity for increased trade. It is time for India and China to come together and exchange new maps which result in an honourable settlement rather than the same old ones of the Sixties, which are intractable.

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Brig **Dinesh Mathur** writes on strategic and national security issues.