

# **The Current Chinese Defence Reforms and Impact on India**

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Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
New Delhi



KNOWLEDGE WORLD  
KW Publishers Pvt Ltd  
New Delhi

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ISSN 23939729

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CLAWS Army No. 33098

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Published in India by

Kalpana Shukla

KW Publishers Pvt Ltd

4676/21, First Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002

Phone: +91 11 23263498 / 43528107 email: [kw@kwpub.com](mailto:kw@kwpub.com) • [www.kwpub.com](http://www.kwpub.com)

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# Abbreviations

ASEC	Army Standing Establishment Committee
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defence
CDS	Chief of Defence Staff
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNO	Computer Network Operations
CNP	Comprehensive National Power
COSC	Chief of Staff Committee
COSTIND	Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
DPG	Defence Planning Guidance
DPP	Defence Procurement Procedure
DPSU	Defence Public Sector Undertaking
GA	Group Army
GAGAN	GPS Aided Geo Augmented Navigation
IAF	Indian Air Force
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IDDM	Indigenously, Designed, Developed and Manufactured
IDS	Integrated Defence Staff
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IRBM	Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile
IRNSS	Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System
ISRO	Indian Space Research Organisation
KMT	Kuomintang
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LCA	Light Combat Aircraft
MAC	Military Area Command
MMCRA	Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft
MRBM	Medium Range Ballistic Missile
MR	Military Region
MSC	Mountain Strike Corps

NMS	National Military Strategy
NRA	National Revolutionary Army
NSAB	National Security Advisory Board
NSS	National Security Strategy
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OF	Ordnance Factories
PBSC	Politburo Standing Committee
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	PLA Air Force
PLAN	PLA Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSU	Public Sector Undertaking
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SAR	Synthetic Aperture Radar
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
SRBM	Short Range Ballistic Missile
SSF	Strategic Support Force
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
TMC	Tibet Military Command
WTC	Western Theatre Command

# Abstract

This research report provides an overview of the recently announced Chinese defence reforms. The research has been done from the information available in open sources and commentaries by various experts. The timelines of the ongoing defence restructuring and modernisation are in consonance with the stated national goal as articulated in the 2015 White Paper. The research paper has comprehensively covered all aspects of the issue, starting with the historical perspective and evolution of doctrines, which have always influenced and shaped the modernisation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The key drivers have been briefly covered, including the role of the strong leadership of President Xi in ordering implementation of these transformational reforms. The prime focus of the research has been to understand the nature of these reforms and their likely impact on India.

The purpose of these reforms is two-fold. The first, and of paramount importance, is to strengthen the Party and President Xi's grip on the armed forces, and, secondly, to make the PLA a more effective and potent force, capable of fighting future wars. The reforms designed to transform the land-centric PLA into a futuristic force on the lines of the United States military, and doing away with the outdated Russian concepts, would be completed by 2020. There is a need to study these reforms in the requisite detail with a view to draw valuable lessons.



# Executive Summary

- China formally announced many far-reaching changes in its defence organisational structures in 2015, to be implemented by 2020. This would be a step closer to achieving complete informationisation by 2050 as part of the roadmap of 'three steps' of defence modernisation stated in the Defence White Paper of 2006.
- Besides factors like doctrinal dimension, political control, etc, the strong leadership of President Xi emerges as the main driver of these transformational reforms.
- Structurally, the aim of the reforms is to establish a three-tier system where the Central Military Commission (CMC) would be the first tier, the Theatre Commands system the second functional tier and the administrative system that runs from CMC through the various Services, the third.
- The replacement of the four erstwhile powerful departments with 15 'Functional Departments' as part of the restructured CMC has diluted the dominance of the Army over the other Services and would enable closer scrutiny and control by the Chairman of the CMC.
- The creation of the Western Theatre Command by merging two former Military Regions (MRs) would lead to more synchronised operations against India, with the associated challenge of orchestrating forces by a single commander over such a large frontage.
- The South and East Theatre Commands remain almost identical, highlighting Vietnam and Taiwan as the main areas of concern to China. The heaviest Central Theatre Command, with five Group Armies, depicts concern for social unrest as an important consideration.
- Enhancement of the status of the Tibet Military Command in May 2016 was necessitated due to the overall changes in the organisation structure and is in line with the earlier practice. It may not be viewed as a major concern for India, unlike as predicted by many analysts.
- The Ground Forces Command (the leading organ for the PLA Army or the Army Headquarters) and the PLA Rocket Force have been evolved after some adjustments to the already existing structure and upgradation

respectively. The third Service i.e. the Strategic Support Force (SSF) is purely a new creation and the most significant development which would further widen the military capability gap with India.

- The planned reduction of 300,000 troops, to be completed by 2017, would be more from the Army vis-a-vis the other Services and there will be an end to “all paid Services,” thereby reducing corruption and improving the economy. There is likely to be a minimum cut from the ‘teeth’ i.e. the combat element and Theatre Commands opposite India, the South and East China Seas and Taiwan.
- In consonance with China’s articulated Military Strategy 2015 and decreased dominance of the Army post the reforms, the PLA Navy (PLAN) especially [also the other Services, including the PLA Air Force (PLAAF)] would get due priority in the modernisation. As a consequence, there would be increased Chinese influence in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean in the times to come, and would impact India.

# Preamble

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is presently the world largest military force in sheer numbers of approximately 2.25 million members. China has undergone many reforms and experimentation in all spheres of activities since the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The modernisation of the PLA commenced as early as during the Korean War in 1951, when it received large scale Soviet aid in the form of military equipment, advisers and technicians. Its modernisation programme commenced in the true sense with the famous "Four Modernisations" announced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, in which national defence was one of the four modernisations. As per the widely accepted viewpoint by China theorists, the PLA defence modernisation can be divided into three broad stages, which are being briefly covered in Chapter I.

The modernisation bid over these years has focussed on doctrinal changes, structural reforms as well as reduction of forces. Incidentally, the PLA has undergone downsizing 11 times, including the recent reduction of 300,000 troops announced by President Xi on September 03, 2015. Other reforms announced by the President during this 70th anniversary of the military parade included mundane aspects of training, rules, regulations, and discipline, along with major organisational restructuring by the establishment of the joint theatre commands. The reforms are to be completed by the year 2020. The above reforms, if implemented in their complete spirit, will be a major transformational change and result in much leaner and efficient defence structures. This would, indeed, have an impact on the threat perceptions of China's regional and global competitors. The reorganisation of the present Military Regions (MRs) of Lanzhou and Chengdu into the joint Services Western Zone would impact on the Chinese military response along the unresolved land border with India. In addition, China has given a fresh impetus to its strategic assets by upgrading its Second Artillery Corps and creating the new Strategic Support Force (SSF) with integrated capabilities in space and cyber space. These proposed reforms are well designed to transform the land-centric PLA into a futuristic force on the lines of the United States military, and doing away with the outdated Russian concepts.

India and China, with the unresolved border dispute, fought a bloody war in 1962 and have also witnessed many faceoffs at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), since then. The enhanced capability and improved response mechanism created as a result of the implementation of the measures announced by President Xi in September 2015, would have a direct impact on the defence preparedness of India. There is also a need to consider the manifestation of the emerging Pakistan-China nexus. India, as of now, is ill prepared to meet these challenges. Thus, there is a pressing need to evolve its defence structures, besides upgrading the already lagging capability development along the northern borders, in the most cost-efficient and time-bound manner.

# Chapter I

## The PLA Reorganisation: The Historical Perceptive

Historically, the PLA has its origin in the Armies which were created after the Boxer Uprising in 1900 AD (like the Beiyang Army), which overthrew the Confucian government. These Armies were mostly fighting each other till they were united by the Kuomintang (KMT) in 1925 under the umbrella of the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) with the aim to unite China in the northern expedition. The PLA was established on August 01, 1927, as the Red Army under the leadership of Mao, for revolutionary wars. The force eventually undertook the famous Long March (1934-35) to evade the KMT forces and at the end of World War II, the Communist Eighth Route Army (later formed into the PLA) drove out the KMT forces from mainland China to Formosa (Taiwan).

### The Modernisation Stages

- **First Modernisation Stage (1949-1980s):** This period marked the end of the revolutionary era and, thus, emphasis was laid on developing a large conventional force, with the help of the Soviet Union. During this period, the Cultural Revolution (1966-69) failed miserably, creating huge economic loss and chaos. The PLA, however, supported Mao and prevented major unrest in the country. In 1970, the failed coup by the then Defence Minister Lin Bao against Mao, led to the curtailment of the political powers of the PLA and, instead, greater emphasis was laid on the development of professionalism and training. The need to modernise was further reinforced in 1979, after a much smaller but more motivated Vietnamese Army defeated an outdated PLA.
- **Second Modernisation Stage (mid-1980s to mid-1990s):** In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping implemented various measures to strengthen the Party and his personal control over the military. The reduced threat perception, due to improved relations with the Soviet Union, enabled the

strategic shift of the PLA to military modernisation. Post-disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, major conflicts were not anticipated in the future by Deng. Thus, Deng adopted a strategy of “local, limited war”, and implemented further reforms in the PLA. Also, during this stage, economic development took precedence over military modernisation. Post 1995, the military received a greater allocation in the defence budget for upgrading, which was now feasible due to the improved Chinese economy. The PLA improved the quality of equipment and formed the combined- arms Group Army (GA). This was accompanied by a reduction of the strength of the PLA twice.

- **Third Stage Modernisation (mid-1990s till date):** The changed world scenario due to the end of the Cold War and display of high end technology by the US in the Gulf War in particular were the triggers for China to undertake the present stage of modernisation. The process of modernisation got a real impetus when President Jiang Zemin formally made the “Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) with Chinese characteristics” part of China’s National Defence White Paper 2004. The foremost objective of the RMA with Chinese characteristics was to downsize the PLA and improve its quality. Because of the downsizing in 1997 and later, between 2003 and 2005, the total strength of the PLA reduced from 2.5 to 2.3 million.

### **‘Three Steps’ of Modernisation**

According to China’s White Paper on National Defence 2006, PLA modernisation is to be implemented in three steps. As part of the first step, China has developed the requisite defence industrial base and has created an especially well equipped modern force (around 15 percent of the total force) to conduct lightning and preemptive strikes. In step two, China plans to further streamline the organisational structures by 2020 as announced in 2015. The third step is to complete informationisation, including national defence modernisation, by 2050.

**The Doctrinal Approaches:** Major doctrinal shifts/milestones, which have influenced and shaped the modernisation of the PLA, are summarised as under in Table 1:<sup>1</sup>

Table I

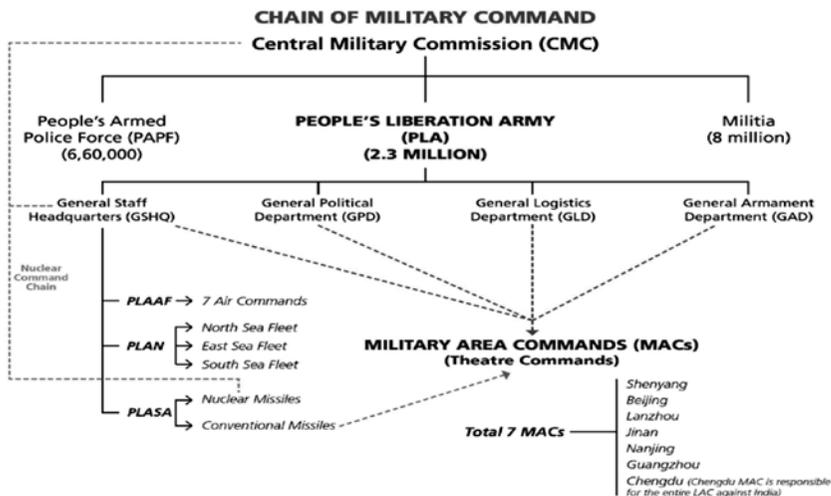
Period	Doctrine	Main Characteristics	Remarks
1949-mid 1970s	People's war doctrine	Mass oriented and infantry heavy	During Mao's period
Late 1970s till 1990	People's war under modern conditions	Active defence (against the Soviets). Adapted to technological advancements and nuclear weapons	Evolution of combined arms concept of war-fighting
Post 1991 (Post break-up of the Soviet Union)	Local limited war in China's proximity	'Total wars' ruled out after the US emerged as the lone superpower	Initiated by Deng Xiaoping
1995	Local wars under high tech conditions	Mechanisation and indigenisation, with major reduction in overall strength  Evolution of the War Zone campaign	Initiated by Jiang Zemin as part of the 'two transformations' and lessons learnt from the Gulf War
2004	RMA with Chinese characteristics	More emphasis on active defence to open avenues for power projection beyond coastlines and borders	Initiated by Jiang Zemin and part of the 2004 Defence White Paper
2004	Local war under conditions of informationalisation	More emphasis on digitisation along with mechanisation (leapfrog strategy)	By Hu Jintao and part of the Defence White Paper.

## The Defence Structure: Prior to Reforms

In order to understand the implications of the ongoing transformational reforms, it is imperative to know the defence structure just prior to these reforms. The succeeding paragraphs briefly cover these defence structures, some of which would not exist after the reforms have been completed.

- **Central Military Commission (CMC):** In China, since 1982, the CMC has been the seniormost decision-making organisation for the military affairs and armed forces of China.<sup>2</sup> The CMC is elected by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) thereby putting the Chinese armed forces under the Party's control. It is subordinate to the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). The Chairman of the CMC is the President of China. The PLA reports to the CMC rather than to the State Council, thereby placing the CPC in a paramount position. From 1987 onwards, the operational control of the PLA flowed from the CMC to the PLA's three General Departments, i.e. General Staff Department, General Political Department and General Logistics Department. The other department responsible for implementing the policies of the CMC is the General Armament Department.
- **Military Area Commands (MACs):** Prior to the reform, the PLA had seven Military Area Commands (MACs) / Military Regions (MRs). The White Paper of 2000 on National Defence mentions "MACs" or "Theatres of War" instead of MRs, which was basically intended to give a fillip to joint operations, including training and logistics. The Army, Air Force and Navy had separate seven Military Regions, seven Air Commands and three fleets respectively. These were geographically contiguous to the MACs and came under their command during war. Thus, the stage had already been set for being accustomed to the 'Joint Service Campaign' under the Joint HQ (Headquarters) before the latest reforms were announced. The flow chart (Fig 1) below shows the basic structure of the PLA before the reforms of 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Fig 1: Chain of Military Command



- **Group Armies (GAs):** The PLA Army (PLAA) is organised into 18 GAs. These GAs command a mix of divisions and brigades and, lately, the PLAA has been shifting to a modular brigade structure and already deploys GAs made exclusively of brigades.<sup>4</sup> A GA, which is purely made up of brigades is of much smaller strength. The precise order of battle varies between different GAs and MRs/MACs.

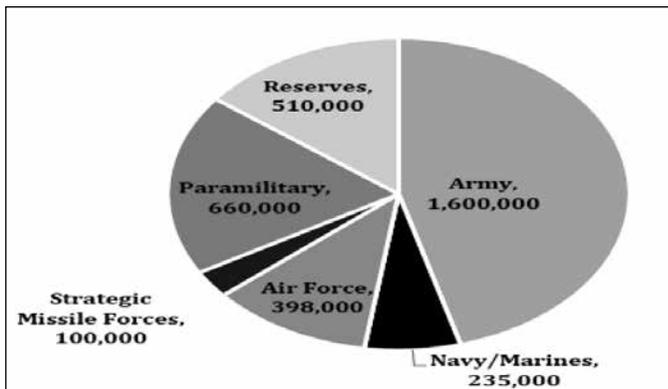
### Other Organisations of the Chinese Security Apparatus

The Chinese armed forces, as discussed above, are only one constituent of the complete Chinese security structure. Besides the PLA (to include the PLAN and PLAAF), the Chinese security establishment has a large paramilitary force and reserves. The overall Chinese security responsibilities are divided among the PLA and other organisations as under:

- **Ministry of State Security (MSS):** The MSS, which is directly under the State Council, conducts all intelligence operations. MSS agents perform covert activities, both inside, and outside, China.<sup>5</sup>
- **Ministry of Public Security (MPS):** It is also under the State Council and administers the Chinese internal law enforcement forces (approximately 1.9 million police personnel). These police forces have many functions including domestic patrol, traffic control, detective, anti-crime, anti-riot, and anti-terrorism.<sup>6</sup>

- **People's Armed Police Force (PAPF):** The PAPF also called the People's Armed Police (PAP) is as an internal security force under the CMC, but technically, it is not part of the PLA.<sup>7</sup> The PAPF with a strength of 660,000+, in addition, is tasked to act as a reserve to the PLA as a light infantry force in the event of a war. It is also deployed as the Border Defence Force (including the Coast Guard), guarding critical infrastructure, firefighting, territorial air defence of the PLA and other such duties.
- **PLA Reserve Forces:** China's reserve forces consist of roughly 510,000 servicemen and servicewomen. Most reserve forces today are staffed by civilians, many of whom are demobilised from the ground force.<sup>8</sup> China's White Paper suggests that the PLA's reserve forces are now more of specialised units and logistics units, and some are qualified in information warfare.
- **PLA Militia Forces:** These comprise young people structured in standard military units, which are under the jurisdiction of the local military district and assist the PLA when required. There are both primary (with a strength of 8 million) and ordinary militias.

Fig 2



## Chapter 2

# Key Drivers for Present Chinese Military Modernisation

*To build strong national defence and powerful armed forces that are commensurate with China's international standing and meet the need of its security and development interests is a strategic task of China's modernisation drive.<sup>9</sup>*

— President Hu Jintao, in an address to the CPC in March 2013.

A unique feature of China's modernisation objective has been the national pursuit of "Comprehensive National Power (CNP)", which possibly is learning from past observations that real global powers enjoy multi-dimensional strengths. The main intention of the latest PLA reforms seems to be to enhance its important constituent of CNP, beside other factors, as discussed below.

### **China's Stated Roadmap of Development**

The national strategic goal of China, as stated in the White Paper "China's Military Strategy of 2015", is "*to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021 when the CPC celebrates its centenary; and the building of a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious by 2049, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) marks its centenary*". These timelines of the stated national goal are in consonance with the military modernisation programme given in the 2006 Defence White Paper.<sup>10</sup> By 2020, the PLA is expected to reach its goal of the RMA with Chinese characteristics and by the year 2049, the PLA expects to be a fully informationised armed force capable of winning information age warfare. These twin objectives would, as per the Chinese thought process, contribute to the achievement of the 'Chinese dream' and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

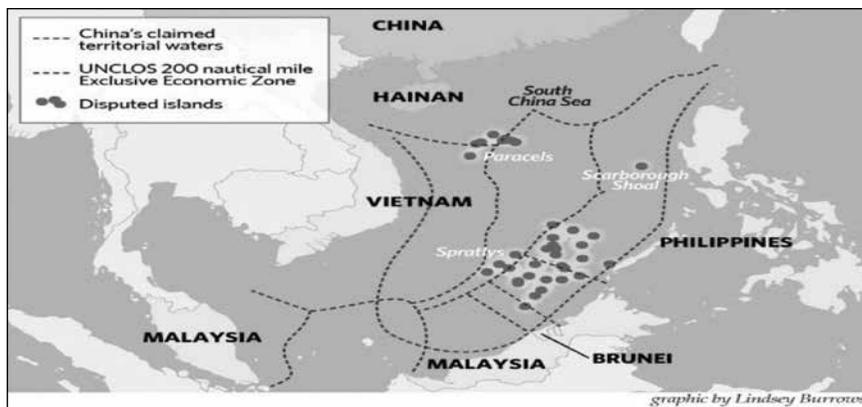
## Political Control

In China, unlike any other major country, the PLA comprises the armed forces of the Party and not of the state. Even any discussion/ thought process to change this status is unacceptable to the establishment. The Party is totally opposed to what it calls the Western construct of nationalising its armed forces.<sup>11</sup> The PLA has been losing its status, and since 1993, its representation in the Politburo has reduced to just two. On the other hand, in recent times the PLA's influence on China's foreign policy have been very conspicuous. The Chumar intrusion in India's northern borders in 2014, when Chinese President Xi was being hosted in India, was possibly the handiwork of the PLA, in isolation. Even the growing tension in the South China Sea is being attributed to the PLA's assertiveness.<sup>12</sup> When Hu Jintao handed over power to President Xi Jinping, there had been apprehensions within China's political establishment over the growing influence of the PLA. Thus, the need was felt to rein in the military to ensure its absolute loyalty to the Party. Consequently, the present incumbent undertook a major unprecedented anti-corruption drive targeting the military, besides others.<sup>13</sup> As a result of these actions, Gen Guo Boxiong, a close confidant of Jiang Zemin and former CMC Vice Chairman and Politburo member, was dismissed from the CPC.

## Protection of the 'Core National Interests'

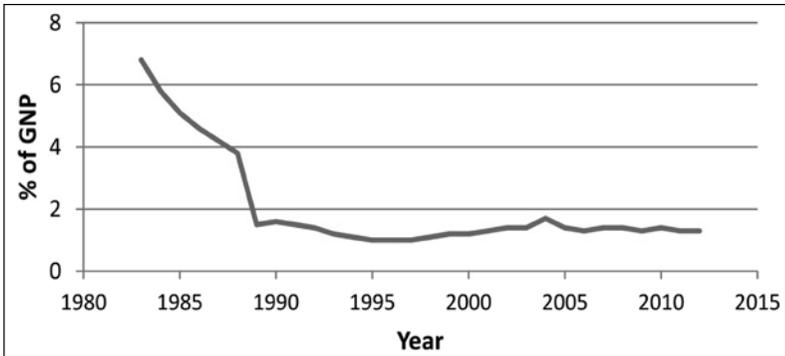
China's six core interests have been highlighted in the White Paper "China's Peaceful Development 2011" viz. "*state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability and, lastly, basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development*". China shares land borders with fourteen countries, including Russia and India. Meanwhile, China has maritime disputes with Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the East China Sea as well as many Southeast Asian countries over territorial claims on islands in the South China Sea. China's refusal to accept the decision of the International Court of Arbitration in favour of the Philippines in July 2016 has further aggravated the situation in the region. In order to safeguard the abovementioned core interests, China has to develop its armed forces, to enable them to be projected outside China's boundaries in an integrated manner.

Fig 3



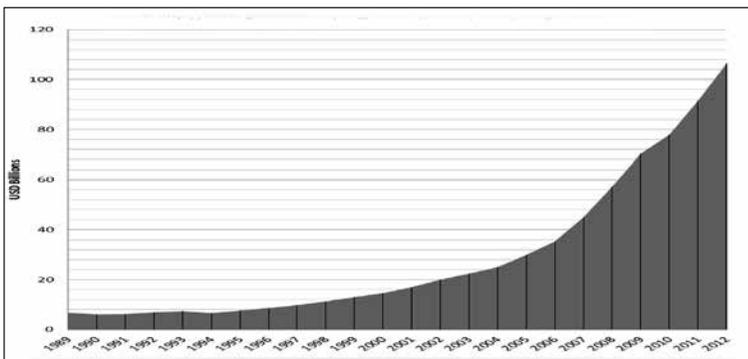
## Economy

The Chinese experience highlights how an expanded economic base can satisfy defence needs successfully. Between 1949 and 1957, with Soviet expertise and technology, China was able to establish a Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) in the country. Post-split with the Soviet Union in 1960, there was limited military modernisation during the time of Mao (1960-78), who believed more in the supremacy of “men over material”. In fact, in 1975, Deng had declared how the “Chinese armed forces were bloated, arrogant, ill-equipped, and too poorly trained to conduct modern warfare”.<sup>14</sup> Due to the “Four Modernisations” programme announced by Deng in 1979, there was a substantial reduction in China’s officially announced defence expenditure during 1979-89, whereas the economy grew at an average of 9 per cent. Deng made it clear that the PLA’s budgetary hike would not be forthcoming until the economic goals had been achieved.<sup>15</sup> However, post 1979, the PLA was allowed to raise resources through business enterprises. In addition, through effective diplomacy, China resolved its border disputes with some of its neighbours. Post 1989, China had a very high economic growth, which translated into higher defence expenditure.

**Fig 4: China's Published Military Budget**

Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/budget-table.htm>

As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), China's defence spending for the year 2015 has been approximately \$215 billion, which is just 1.9 percent of the Chinese Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The figures as reflected by 'Global Security' above, reflect how more funds have been progressively made available for China's military modernisation, despite a lower allocation as a percentage of GDP. The annual average growth of China's defence budget over the last decade has been 11.8 percent, after adjusting for inflation.<sup>16</sup> As per SIPRI, China imported arms worth \$26.7 billion in the last decade (2000-11), 85 percent of which were from Russia. However, due to significant improvement in indigenisation, imports have plunged significantly to less than \$1 billion (2007-12).

**Fig 5: China's Published Military Budget**

Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/budget-table.htm>

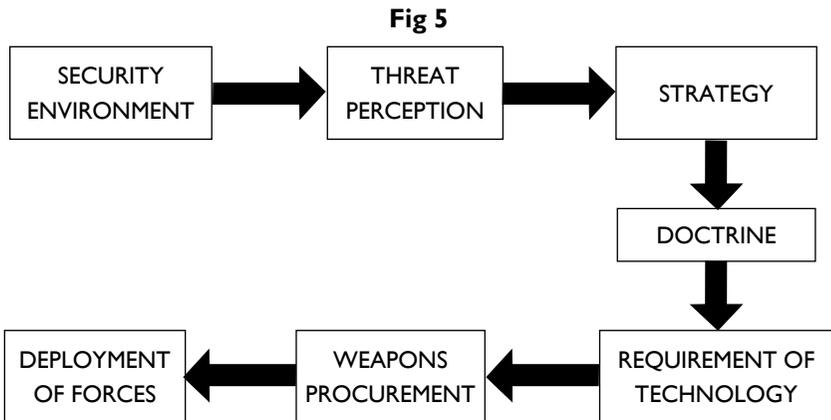
## Strong Leadership

Some political commentators have called Xi Jinping “the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping”.<sup>17</sup> The marked difference between Xi and his predecessor Hu Jintao are his dealings with the military and his close monitoring of the military reform. In a distinctive term of succession, President Xi is in the unique position of commanding the Party, government and military at the same time. As Chairman of the CMC, and the leader of the newly created organisation “Central Leading Group for Military Reform” in 2014, Xi has made some bold and far-reaching announcements to clean up some existing ills in the military and build a more effective fighting force.

- **Anti-Corruption Drive:** During the first two years of his term, Xi initiated cases against former Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman Xu Caihou, former Politburo Standing Committee member and security chief Zhou Yongkang, and Hu Jintao’s former chief aide, Ling Jihua.<sup>18</sup>
- Mao had held the famous “**Gutian Conference**” in 1929. In the resolution that followed, the absolute leadership position of the CPC over the Red Army was entrenched.<sup>19</sup> Nearly eight and half decades later, President Xi also held the “**New Gutian Conference**” in Gutian on October 30, 2014. While addressing the ‘Military Political Work Conference’ of the PLA, he reemphasised the principle that “the Party has absolute control over the Army”. Later, Xi was named the ‘Commander-in-Chief’ of the country’s new Joint Operations Command Centre on April 21, 2016. He has called for tighter discipline of the secretarial staff and an end to factions and cliques while, paradoxically, he himself is a *mishu* and a princeling.<sup>20</sup>
- **Xun Ci:** On December 31, 2015, in an event to commemorate the newly created organs of the PLA, Xi issued strict directions to the PLA for further reforms in a time-bound manner, in a formal address known as *Xun Ci* (meaning ‘admonishing words’ in English). Xi Jinping is the second Chinese Communist leader to give a *Xun Ci* after Mao Zedong, who did the same in 1952 and 1953. These assertions of Xi Jinping in matters concerning the military, unlike any of his recent predecessors, **have given a fillip to the PLA modernisation in the given period.**

## Strategic and Doctrinal Dimensions

David Shambaugh in his paper, “PLA Strategy and Doctrine,”<sup>21</sup> has observed that military doctrine is the principle driver of all aspects of China’s military modernisation. The traditional model of evolution of the doctrine which guides defence modernisation evolves out of strategy, which, in turn, is dependent not only on the strategic culture but also the threat perception, as given below:



Source: Lt Gen J S Bajwa, *Modernisation of the Chinese PLA* (New Delhi: Lancer’s Publication, CLAWS, 2013), p.92.

Some of the major events, which have influenced the Chinese strategy and doctrine in the recent past are as under:

- **Tiananmen Square Incident (1989):** This famous crisis/incident was blamed by many CPC analysts on Deng’s policy of opening up of China to foreign, especially Western influence, which ‘polluted the minds of the students’. The unrest was viewed as instigated by the West to bring down the Communist Party. As a result, post crisis, a new definition of nationalism was coined which was closely linked to loyalty to the Party.
- **The Break-up of the USSR:** The Chinese establishment drew two lessons from the break-up of the Soviet Union. First, they attributed the free debate allowed by Mikhail Gorbachev and his willingness to dilute the Communist Party as the prime reason for the fall of the empire. The Chinese felt that to be soft was to lose power.<sup>22</sup> Second, the erstwhile Soviet military might was based on a non- sustaining and weak economic base.

- **The Gulf War:** The technical and military power displayed by the US in the Gulf War gave a new focus to the Chinese military modernisation in terms of improved missile accuracy and increased priority to the Air Force and the Navy.
- **NATO Operations in Kosovo:** The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) operations in Kosovo demonstrated even more sophisticated technology than the Gulf War and the Chinese realised that Information Warfare (IW) was the wave of the future.<sup>23</sup> Also the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during the conflict, was considered deliberate and exposed China's vulnerability.
- **Other Events:** The imposition of the No-fly Zone by the US and intervention in East Timor by the Australian-led international force cautioned Chinese thinkers about replication of such actions by the Western powers against China.

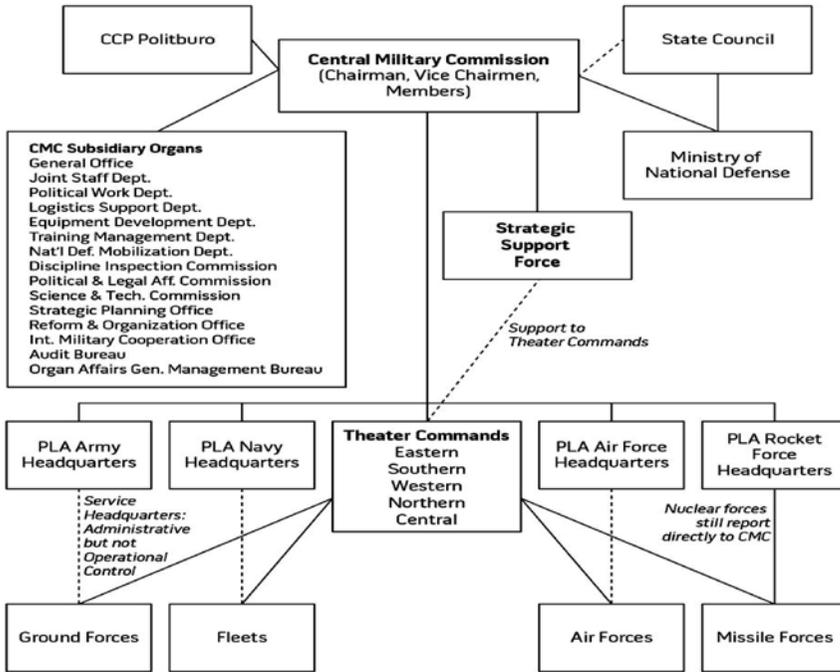
## Chapter 3

# The Proposed Restructuring and Analysis

The broad framework of the present reforms in the PLA was announced in the third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in 2013. The details of the broad array of these reforms emerged in the announcements in 2015, after detailed deliberations at all levels. It was the second time in the history of China post 1949, that the PLA was being radically reformed.<sup>24</sup> A blend of compromise, coercion and consultation preceded implementation of the reforms, clear contours of which are now visible.<sup>25</sup> After the draft plans were finalised in 2011, it took substantial time and effort by Xi Jinping and his predecessor, Hu Jintao, to build the required consensus in the PLA to begin the process of these transformational structural reforms and downsizing of the troops.<sup>26</sup> A separate 'Leading Group for Deepening Reform of National Defence and the Military' was set up in March 2014. The US-based China analyst Peter Mattis has brought out that almost 860 seminars and 900 officer surveys were undertaken, to arrive at the details and convey the intended reforms. All these were considered essential to dilute the growing apparent resistance amongst the PLA, including at senior levels, where 1,000 serving PLA General Staff officers would be deprived of their present status and functional appointment.

The main thrust areas of the long-anticipated military reforms are on revamping of structures and systems at the **political, strategic and operational levels**. The aim of the reforms is to establish a **three-tier system** where the CMC would be the first tier, the Battle Zone Commands/Theatre Commands system the second functional tier and the administrative system that runs from the CMC through the various Services, the third.<sup>27</sup> The new structure of the PLA post reform is as under:<sup>28</sup>

Fig 7

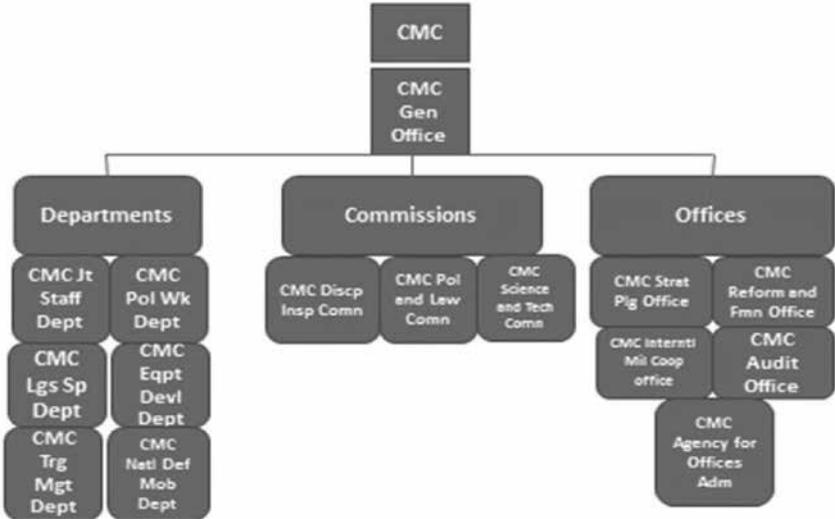


## Restructuring the First Tier (CMC)

Prior to the restructuring, the responsibility of actual execution of the policies laid down by the CMC, was with its four departments. Out of these, the GSD and the GPD were considered the most influential. Post reforms, the four huge and powerful departments were replaced by 15 'Functional Departments' as part of the restructured CMC. In the earlier system, the PLA's Army Headquarters was an inherent part of the GSD and, thus, had acquired considerable power and authority over the other Services, as it closely influenced the decision-making process of the CMC. In addition, it was felt that the Army's influence had to be reduced to enable the CPC to ensure complete control over the armed forces.

The **restructured CMC organisation** has the CMC General Office at the apex controlling four of the diluted erstwhile departments of the CMC, along with two new departments (Training Management and National Defence Mobilisation Department), three commissions and five offices. The organisation tree below shows the broad organisation of the restructured CMC.<sup>29</sup>

Fig 8



The main aim of the restructuring appears to be to establish the supremacy of Xi Jinping as the indisputable leader in all matters, including the military. A more detailed explanation, with analysis, is as under:

- **CMC General Office:** The Chairman of the CMC would control the organisation through the CMC General Office, which would likely be headed by a person who had the complete trust of President Xi Jinping.
- **Enhanced Civil Control Over Military:** As a part of Xi's anti-corruption drive, the task of checking corruption by the erstwhile GPD has been taken away and, instead, the CMC Discipline and Inspection Commission has been created. In addition, the newly created independent CMC Audit Office would send out audit teams to all armed forces units of the PLA for accounting checks and ensuring probity. These departments are likely to be used as tools by the political establishment to rein in the military whenever required.

- **Dilution of Influence of PLA Army:** The headquarters of the PLA Army has been separated from the erstwhile GSD and instead a CMC 'Joint Staff Department', with broad-based representation from each Service, has been created. This would effectively reduce the domination of the PLA Army in the decision-making process at the CMC.
- **Strategic Planning:** 'Strategic Planning' has been removed from the ambit of the CMC Joint Staff Department, the diluted successor of the erstwhile GSD. The CMC Joint Staff Department would now only formulate the combat planning for the overall military operations of the PLA. A separate 'Strategic Planning Office' has been created as one of the five offices of the CMC.
- **Logistics:** The Logistics Support Department in the restructured CMC would undertake overall logistics support planning for the complete PLA. The requirement of 'Integrated Joint Operations' has been factored in the new organisation. It caters for decentralisation of logistics support units and elements to meet specific operational requirements.
- **Science and Technology:** The CMC 'Science and Technology Commission' has been culled out of the earlier 'Commission of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence (COSTIND)', which was a sub-part of GAD.

### Re-zoning Military Commands

The basic objectives of Xi's reform, as it appears, are two-fold: to centralise the PLA's decision-making in the hands of the CMC and Xi, and transform what has historically been a land-dominated military into a nimble, integrated force.<sup>30</sup> As the second part of this broader agenda, the PLA finally reorganised its seven MRs (*jun qu*) to five new "Theatre Commands" called "*zhan qu*" in Chinese. A Transitional Work Office has been established to ensure a smooth changeover from the old MRs to the new Theatre Commands.<sup>31</sup>

Fig 9



The map above depicts the focus areas of these newly created five theatres viz. Northern, Central, Eastern, Southern and Western. The orientation of these five new theatres is to align China's strategic directions with the command of the troops. A more detailed explanation, with analysis, is given below:

- **Enhancing Responsiveness:** The erstwhile MRs had proved to be ineffective in the past on many occasions, more so during the Vietnam War of 1979. The reactions of the MRs were found to be slow and uncoordinated in many crisis situations. These include the devastating earthquake of Sichuan province in 2008 and the rampage by Muslim extremists in Urumqi in 2009. It was also felt that the requirements of future wars demanded greater integration between the various Services.
- **Transformational Change for Joint Operations:** The number of MRs has varied in the past and it stabilised at seven in 1985-88. However, the present reform of transition from the Military Region to the Battle Zone focusses on the development of joint operations capability. The PLA has been underscoring the concept of "integrated joint operations" since the Iraq War of 2003.<sup>32</sup> The PLA can implement its Anti-Access/Area Denial (AA/AD) operations in the South China

Sea to check the US military engagement in the Asia-Pacific, rebalancing only by having Joint Theatre Commands. Now the Services other than the Army are ordained to play increasingly significant roles for the PLA, as it seeks to enlarge its areas of influence. Still, all the five new theatre commanders are from the Army, suggesting a further balancing act, which may follow subsequently. With the leadership interests at stake, experts are still expecting resistance within the PLA during its transition towards establishing a joint operational command structure by 2020.<sup>33</sup>

- **Enhancing Party Control and Loyalty:** As part of the reorganisation, the erstwhile commanders of China's seven MRs, have been given command of theatres far from their original base of power, ensuring that no one commander can maintain a network of personal loyalty that supersedes Party authority.<sup>34</sup> For example, to implement this, the former commanders of the MRs of Lanzhou, northern Shenyang, and eastern Jinan now command the Eastern Theatre, Southern Theatre and Western Theatre, respectively. On the other hand, three erstwhile commanders have been totally left out.
- **More Assertive China:** The integrated Military Theatre Zone designed for the enhanced capabilities of the PLA to exert influence beyond the immediate boundaries/ shores has given a more assertive image of China to its neighbours as well as the US.
- There is hardly any change in the composition and boundaries of the earlier Guangzhou and Nanjing MRs and these have been merely renamed the South and East Zone respectively. This implies that Vietnam and Taiwan would linger as areas of concern to China. Also, the high density of commands in Eastern China shows the preoccupation with the East and South China Seas as well as Taiwan.
- There has been redistribution of Group Armies, with changes in the geographic boundaries of the Theatre Commands as given in Table 2.<sup>35</sup>

Table 2

Theatre Command	Group Armies	Focus Areas	Redistribution of GAs from Former MRs
Eastern	1st, 12th and 31 <sup>st</sup>	Taiwan	Identical to former Nanjing Military Region (MR)
Southern	41st, 42nd and 14 <sup>th</sup>	Focus South China Sea	First two from Guangzhou MR and 14 GA from Chengdu MR.
Western	13th, 47th and 21 plus 10 div/brigades of the Tibet and Xinjiang Military Districts	India, Tibet and Xinjiang	Latter two from Lanzhou MR and 13 GA from Chengdu MR.
Northern	16th, 39th, 40th and 26th	Russia, Mongolia and the Korean Peninsula	First three from Shenyang MR and 26 GA added from Jinan MR
Central	38th, 54th, 27th, 65th and 20th	Strategic Reserve	20 & 54 GAs- Jinan MR Others- Beijing MR

### Creating New Services

On December 31, 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the formation of three new Services for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). While two of these, that is, the Ground Forces Command and the PLA Rocket Force have been evolved after some adjustments to the already existing structure and upgradation respectively, the third Service (Strategic Support Force) is purely a new creation. These newly formed Services will be of the same status as the PLA Navy (PLAN) and PLA Air Force (PLAAF).

### Ground Forces Command

The Ground Forces now are no longer diffused within the four erstwhile General Departments that actually ran the entire PLA. For fielding its Ground Force component, the PLA has established a dedicated staff called the "Army Leading Organ". The term "leading organ" is used in the PLA for all its Services because it does not have official terminology for "headquarters." This organ's task

is to build an efficient Ground Force and Gen Li Zuocheng, earlier commander of the Chengdu Military Region, has been nominated as its commander.

The creation of a separate Ground Forces Command would certainly remove the domination of the Army in the policy-making and, thereby, result in faster development of the PLAN and PLAAF. It also marks at least a nominal downgrading of the power of the Ground Forces, since all the departments under the CMC are bureaucratically superior to the Services. The Army and other staff are not responsible for commanding the forces, but rather for organising, training, and equipping the forces for employment within the five new joint commands.

### **PLA Rocket Force**

Prior to this reorganisation, the “First Artillery” was the conventional, tube/rocket artillery of the Ground Forces and the “Second Artillery”, although not a Service, had a very special status. This reorganisation has, however, elevated the Second Artillery to full-blown Service status with the nomenclature of the “PLA Rocket Force” and placed it at par with the Ground Forces, PLAN, PLAAF, etc. The new PLA Rocket Force controls all intercontinental, medium and short-range ballistic missiles, suggestive of the important role it would continue to play in disputes with China’s neighbouring countries. President Xi has asked that the new Rocket Force develop “nuclear deterrence and counter-strike capability which is credible, reliable, with medium and long-range precision strike ability, as well as strategic check and balance capacity to build a strong modern Rocket Force”.<sup>36</sup>

The upgradation would give a boost to the modernisation effort of the missile and nuclear arsenals of China. It is also indicative of the importance being given by the CPC to develop credible deterrence. The Rocket Force is likely to have two separate wings for its nuclear and conventional missiles. While the nuclear missiles would be maintained purely for strategic deterrence, the conventional missiles would be employed for preemptive strikes and degradation. Subsequently, the short-range conventional ballistic missiles (less than 1,000 km range) may be transferred to the Army to extend its area of influence in the battlefield. It is yet unclear whether the new Theatre/Zone commanders, who are, incidentally, senior in status to the former MR commanders, would have operational authority over PLA Rocket Force elements deployed within their zone.

The new Service, as it evolves, is expected to deploy its nuclear assets on land, sea and air. By integrating the strategic nuclear submarines and strategic bombers, the Rocket Force would become more integrated than the nuclear forces in the US, Russia, Britain and France. China has an edge over the US and Russian missile forces as they are reducing their arsenals as per the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Since China is not a signatory to such a treaty, it has established the world's most complete 360-degree ballistic missile strike system (nuclear and conventional). In addition, unlike China, France and England do not have land-based nuclear vectors.

### Strategic Support Force

Consolidating and reorganisation of China's information forces is a part of the evolving military strategy reflected in the various White Papers issued from time to time. In this regard, the formation of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) has been, by far, the most significant development. The decision to launch this service is a culmination of years of technical advancement and structural changes. This Service, once fully operationalised, would control the key forces for "local wars under informationized conditions," including the space and cyber forces. President Xi has described the SSF as a "new-type combat force to maintain national security and an important growth point of the PLA's combat capabilities."<sup>37</sup>

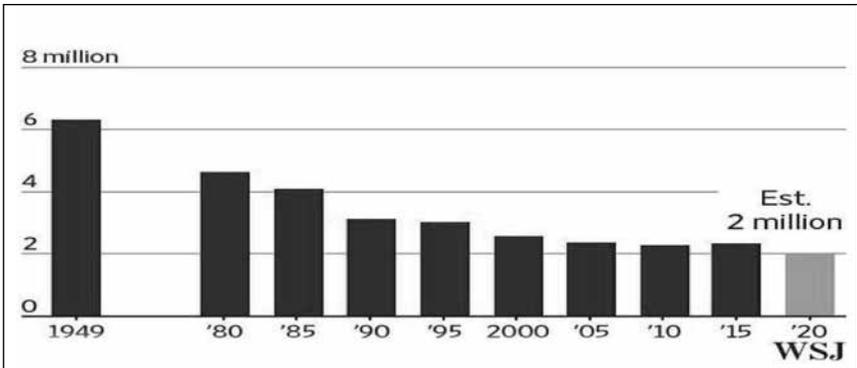
The SSF has been culled out from forces formerly under the subsidiary branches of the General Staff Department (GSD). As per many analysts, the SSF will be composed of three separate forces, i.e. Space Force, Cyber Force and Electronic Warfare Force. The **Space Force** would "focus on reconnaissance and navigation satellites," the **Cyber Force** would be composed of "hackers focussing on attack and defence," and the **Electronic Warfare Force** would focus on "jamming and disrupting enemy radars and communications." The SSF will absorb new inventions like the unmanned 'Shenlong', which is a space weapons launch platform in its last stage of development. It is also anticipated that this new Service will incorporate the support forces of different Services to improve the economy and efficacy.

Some more PLA implications and analyses regarding the creation of this new organisation are as under:

- **Likely Mission:** The SSF would be an important force multiplier to the PLA during operations. The SSF's missions may include routine satellite navigation operations, handling Beidou satellites, controlling reconnaissance assets based in space, and undertaking offensive and defensive IW operations.
- The SSF would serve as the core of the Information Warfare Force, which is vital to China's stratagem of preemptive attack and asymmetric warfare. In addition to military application, the SSF is likely to play a bigger role in protecting civilian infrastructure from hackers and criminals.
- Creating the SSF from former GSD organs and subsidiary units is indeed practical and would reduce the power and influence of the Army by removing one of its most important strategic capabilities.
- **Integrating Intelligence:** Earlier, 'foreign intelligence' was the responsibility of the erstwhile GSD, in which two separate departments handled human intelligence and electronic-cum-internet intelligence. Now this role has been divided amongst specialised Army units, the Rocket Force and the SSF. In addition, earlier, the Liaison Department of the GPD and GAD had their own intelligence-gathering units. Now these have most likely been merged into the SSF, leading to streamlining and integration of intelligence.
- Prior to the restructuring, the Technical Reconnaissance Bureaus (TRB) in each MR were supporting their mission areas for cyber exploitation. These assets would now be concentrated under the SSF for synchronised efforts at the strategic levels.

## Deep Cut in Military Force

President Xi Jinping made an announcement of a reduction of 300,000 troops in September 2015. The PLA in 1949 was 8-million strong and has, since then, been reduced progressively as per the evolving doctrine and the need to modernise the military. The PLA's size has been cut four times since the 1980s: by one million in 1985, by 500,000 in 1997, by 200,000 in 2003, and now by 300,000.<sup>38</sup> The original proposal to reduce 800,000 troops in the present reform was finally reduced to 300,000 after discussions. Even after these troop cuts, which would be completed by 2017, China's armed forces will remain the largest in the world. However, there are reports suggesting reservations about absorption of these demobilised troops in other government owned enterprises.

**Fig 10: China's People's Liberation Army Personnel Since 1949**

Source: Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

The prime reason for the cut is to save on the ever rising revenue budget for Service payrolls and thereby increase the much required finances to modernise the military. These cuts would mostly focus on administrative personnel without diluting the effectiveness of the “teeth”. China would also put an end to “all paid Services,” which would prove to be economical and discourage the corruption associated with military-run business.

**Rebalancing Between Services:** China's Military Strategy White Paper of 2015, lays emphasis on an enhanced role for China's Navy. As per an estimate, the recently announced troop cut would be in a ratio of 40 percent of the Army, 30 percent of the Air Force and 10 percent of the Navy. As Beijing now perceives less external threat from the northern sector, analysts assess that three GAs from this area would be demobilised.<sup>39</sup> The overall reduction of strength will be limited in the Western Theatre Zone facing India and the Southeast Zone responsible for Taiwan, the South China Sea and Vietnam.

### Joint Logistics Support Force

China established the Joint Logistics Support Force of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in Beijing on September 13, 2016.<sup>40</sup> The main Joint Logistics Support Force base at Wuhan will have its five joint logistics support centres at Wuxi, Guilin, Xining, Shenyang and Zhengzhou and would cater for the common logistics requirements of all the Services. During the ceremony on September 13, President Xi emphasised on the need for China

to accelerate its military construction according to the requirements of joint operations, joint training and joint support to build a strong and modern joint logistics support force in order to make the Chinese military a world first-class military capable of winning modern regional wars.

In order to synergise the joint operations, a Joint Operations Centre was established in 2014. It was visited by President Xi post the restructuring in April 16, to review its effectiveness.<sup>41</sup> This Joint Operations Centre is likely to integrate the operations of all the Services and Theatre Commands, including the newly formed Strategic Support Service.

# Chapter 4

## Impact on India

The PLA's world turned turtle at the beginning of this year as part of the well-designed roadmap to transform the land-centric PLA into a global force. The intended changes are patterned on the US military and are a clear deviation from the Soviet model being followed till date. There are implications of this for the world at large and would impact more on China's neighbours that have territorial disputes with it, including India. This chapter would specifically discuss the implications for India.

### **The Western Theatre Command (WTC)**

The utmost significant development for India in the Chinese PLA reorganisation is the formation of a single Western Battle Zone, headquartered in Chengdu, and responsible for the full land borders with India. Prior to the re-zoning, this responsibility was divided between the Xinjiang Military Region (headquartered in Lanzhou), and the Chengdu Military Region (headquartered in Chengdu). The Western Theatre Command also has a major focus towards ensuring the success of President Xi's initiative on the upcoming US \$46 billion CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). With the creation of a single Western Theatre Command (WTC), one commander with all the resources of the PLAA and PLAAF as well as the conventional missiles of the Rocket Force, will orchestrate the battle against India.

The **impact on India** as a result of the creation of the WTC is likely to be as under:

- One Theatre Command dealing with India would facilitate joint planning and better synchronisation/synergy in operations. Integration of the Qinghai region which was earlier part of the Lanzhou Military Region (LMR) in the new West Zone will enable more flexibility in the induction of acclimatised and trained troops into Tibet.
- In the event of hostilities with India, China would control operations through the newly created Western Theatre Command (WTC) on the land borders and the Southern Theatre Command with the South

China Fleet component at sea. In contrast, eight operational commands of India would be involved, i.e. three Army Commands, three Air Force Commands, and in case of a naval dimension, the Navy's Eastern Command. In addition, the sole Tri-Service Andaman and Nicobar Theatre Command would also come into play, which incidentally reports to the Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). These Indian operational commands, with their headquarters at different locations, and with overlapping boundaries, would result in a total absence of real time tri-Service coordination as compared to China.

- The newly constituted Western Zone comprises almost half of China's land area, 22 per cent of its population and has approximately one-third of the PLA's land-based military. Its responsibilities include the 4,057-km boundary-cum-Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India. This long stretch, due to terrain peculiarities and lines of communications, is fragmented. The same command is also responsible for the border with Afghanistan, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam as well as the relatively quiet borders with the Central Asian Republics, Russia and Mongolia. The sensitive areas of Xinjiang and Tibet, with active terrorism and potential situations of unrest, are in its area of responsibility. Thus, as per another viewpoint, this vast expanse of land, with peculiar terrain features, would pose a peculiar set of challenges for the smooth orchestrating of forces by a single commander during a war.<sup>42</sup>
- Earlier, the Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs had two Group Armies each (21 and 47 GAs in Lanzhou MR and 13 and 14 GAs in Chengdu MR). After restructuring, the Kunming area of the erstwhile Chengdu MR, with 14 GA, has come under the Southern Theatre Command.<sup>43</sup> Because of this change, the Western Theatre Command now has three GAs instead of four. 14 GA is, however, trained for Jungle terrain as per its area of responsibility on the Myanmar and Vietnam borders.
- The troops from the erstwhile Jinan MR (now divided between the Northern and Central Theatre Commands) and erstwhile Guangzhou MR (now Southern Theatre Command) had been participating in exercises in Tibet. Now, other than the Southern Theatre Command, formations from the strategic reserve and heaviest Central Theatre Command (with five Group Armies) are likely to be made available to the Western Theatre Command for operations. The 27, 38 and 54 GAs in the Central Theatre

Command are Group A category (out of a total seven in Group A in the PLA) which are better equipped and require minimum preparation for mobilisation and, thus, best suited for reinforcement tasks.<sup>44</sup>

### Raising Status of Tibet Military Command

- The newly created Western Theatre Command has the Tibet Military Command (TMC) focussing more towards the land borders with India, and the Xinjiang Military Command responsible for the areas of Xinjiang. As per the latest reforms, provincial military commands like the above two, including, the TMC, were placed under the newly set up National Defence Mobilisation Department under the CMC. However, as per the state run *Global Times*, the Tibet Military Command will now be under the PLA Ground Force Commander, Gen Li Zuocheng, who is also part of the CMC.<sup>45</sup> This move has raised the TMC's authority, including the designation of troops, and implies that it would expand its function and mission in the times to come.<sup>46</sup>
- **Impact:** This remains a grey area as the TMC comes under the WTC for all operational purposes. Xinjiang and Tibet always had a special status compared to the other provincial military districts, partly because they were former Military Regions, and have dedicated troops under their command, unlike other military districts. Thus, raising the status of the TMC has been necessitated due to the change of the overall organisation structure and is not a matter of major concern for India.

### Centralised Power at CMC

- During the pre-reform period, the PLA deployed in the respective MRs, to an extent, was autonomous in taking tactical decisions. It has even displayed isolated cases of assertive behaviour in the past along the land borders with India, without the full knowledge of the central leadership.<sup>47</sup> As per some analysts, President Xi had expressed his discontent with the actions of the local military commanders who initiated the incidents in the Chumar-Demchok area in 2014, just prior to his visit to India as also for the poor response in withdrawing, despite his public assurance to the Indian Prime Minister.
- **Impact:** With centralisation of all decision-making at the CMC, now such incidents at the behest of local commanders may show a decline but, at the same time, the intended actions would be more synchronised.

## Information Warfare

- The establishment of the Strategic Support Force, which comprises three independent forces, i.e. Cyber Force, Space Force and Electronic Warfare Force, as explained in Chapter III, is the most significant development. The PLA realises the need to control space-based information assets for achieving the 'new strategic high ground.' Ultimately, the PLA would aim at a synchronised exploitation of space, cyber space, and the electromagnetic spectrum and information operations of a strategic nature. These would give a force multiplier effect to its operations, deny space capabilities to the adversary and enable Computer Network Operations (CNOs) targeting the enemy's data and network. India is not yet prepared for such contingencies. The space programme by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is not working on any counter-measures to the Chinese acquired capabilities including anti-satellite weapons.
- **Impact:** The coordinated effort by the SSF would further widen the military capability gap with India. The human and technological intelligence is now under one umbrella, unlike earlier, when it was dealt, with separately under the second and third departments of the GSD.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the cyber attacks would be more coordinated. The impact will be more severe in case enhanced cyber security measures are not put in place, especially when India and its armed forces are transforming towards 'Digital India'.

## Strategic Deterrence and Space Capabilities

As covered in the previous chapter, the Rocket Force of China is very advanced even when compared to such forces of the developed nuclear states. China has made great strides in various types of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). Now the Rocket Force, at par with other Services, would get a boost to further enhance its capabilities. In 2010, China had successfully tested a Ground-based Mid-course Missile Defence (GMD) system and again tested the advanced version of the same in 2013 after India's first test of the Agni V. China also has two Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missile programmes. The first one i.e., the SC 19 category, is used for destroying sub-orbiting small Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) satellites which was successfully demonstrated in 2007 and is operational. The DN 3 would be used for destroying spy satellites

and navigational satellites in high orbit and is likely to become operational before 2020. China also has developed soft kill capability to make satellites ineffective without hard kill missiles. The details of the Chinese strategic and conventional missiles are as under:

**Table 3**

Name	Range	Type	Launch system	Fuel	Deployed	Remarks
DF-3A	3,000	Intermediate-range	Mobile	Liquid	1971	None
DF-4	5,500+	Intercontinental	Silo	Liquid	1980	None
DF-5/5A	13,000+	Intercontinental	Silo	Liquid	1981	None
DF-5B	13,000	Intercontinental	Silo	Liquid	2015	MIRV-mounted
DF-21/21A	2,150	Intercontinental	Mobile launcher	Solid	1991	None
DF-31	7,000+	Intercontinental	Mobile launcher	Solid	2006	None
DF-31A	11,000+	Intercontinental	Mobile launcher	Solid	2007	None
DF-41	15,000?	Intercontinental	Mobile launcher	Solid	Not yet deployed	MIRV-mounted
DF-26	4,000	Intermediate-range	Mobile launcher	Solid	2015?	Nuclear and conventional

Source: James C O'Halloran, *IHS Jane's Weapons: Strategic 2015-2016* (IHS, 2015).

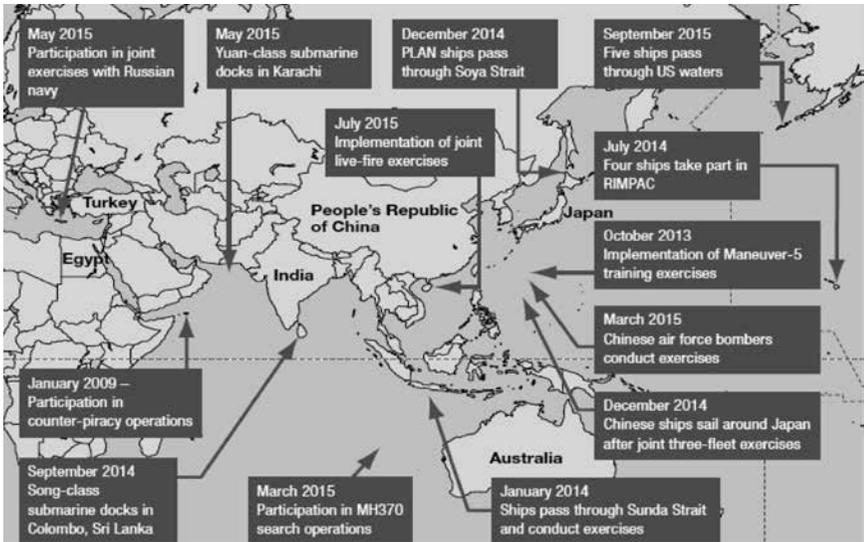
- **Impact:** Besides the longer range nuclear capable missiles, India also needs to be concerned about the PLA's conventional inventory of Short Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs) and Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs)/Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). Almost 1,200 SRBMs (as per the Rand Report of 2015, the figure is 1,400), which are mostly deployed against Taiwan, can easily be switched to the Sino-Indian border. These missiles, with much better accuracy, would now be used effectively in preemptive strikes in future conflicts. Based on this acquired capability of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD), China has discounted any credible Indian missile deterrence. Most of the Indian communication and

observation satellites with leased transponders to the armed forces, and the upcoming Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) can now easily be targeted with the present Chinese ASAT capabilities. India would be even more vulnerable in case it launches dedicated military satellites rather than the present practice of utilising transponders on multiple satellites.<sup>49</sup> India is also concerned with the proliferation of missile and nuclear technology to Pakistan by China.

### Enhanced Operational Capabilities of PLAN

- The Eastern and Southern Naval Fleets, post the defence restructuring, form part of the Eastern and Southern Theatre Commands respectively. With more emphasis being given by China to the development of its naval capabilities, the PLAN has evolved a strategy of “offshore defence and open sea defence” from the earlier strategy of “coastal defence and inshore defence.” It has expanded its area of operation from the East and South China Seas to the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean. It is also developing an indigenous aircraft carrier which is likely to be ready by 2020. By 2022, the PLAN is likely to have four aircraft carriers. Its first aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning* which became operational in November 2016, boasts a marginal size advantage over the Indian carrier *Vikramaditya*.<sup>50</sup> As of 2016, China deploys four Jin class nuclear ballistic missile submarines, each armed with 12 JL-2 ICBMs. China has plans to produce a total of 12 Jin class submarines.<sup>51</sup> These systems have replaced the aging JL-1 (CSS-N-3) missiles aboard the Xia class Type 092 submarine; they have almost double the range and will likely have an accuracy of 150 or 300 m Circular Error Probable (CEP).<sup>52</sup>
- **Impact:** In the recent past, there have been increasing incidents of forays of Chinese submarines in the Indian Ocean. These are a natural outcome of China’s increasing interests in dominance of the Malacca Strait, through which most of China’s energy needs pass. This influence would further increase with the PLAN submarine force likely to grow between 69 and 78 submarines by 2020, with a combination of nuclear-powered (such as the Jin class/Type 094) and conventionally-powered (such as the Yuan class/Type 039A) submarines.<sup>53</sup> China is also investing in new strategic relationships that will help the PLAN realise its blue water ambitions.<sup>54</sup> The map below shows the PLA’s expanding operations.

Fig 11



Source: NIDS China Security Report, 2016, Tokyo, March 2016.

### Enhanced PAAF Capabilities

- The PLA Air Force (PAAF), with over 2,000 combat aircraft is the largest Air Force in Asia and the third largest in the world.<sup>55</sup> As per a study, by 2017, almost 60 percent of the fighter aircraft inventory of the PAAF would be of the fourth generation. China is already developing its fifth generation fighter aircraft, the J-20. China has also recently tested its FC 31 stealth fighter. The allocations of the PAAF dedicated to the respective Theatre Commands are likely to remain the same as per the earlier areas of responsibility and geographic boundaries. It has also been reported that the PAAF has adapted its frontline J-10 fighter aircraft to effectively function in the higher altitudes of Tibet. This has narrowed down the advantage enjoyed by the Indian Air Force operating from the plains. Now five full-fledged airfields are operational in Tibet at Gongar, Pangta, Linchi, Hoping and Gar gansa, besides new airports constructed in the Qinghai plateau. In addition, many Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) have also been developed. The PAAF is in the process of acquiring the S-400 modern anti-aircraft missile systems from Russia, with the first batch arriving by the first quarter of 2017.

- **Impact:** There is now almost complete year-round presence of the J10, J11 and SU-27 aircraft in the Tibet region on deployment or exercises.<sup>56</sup> Further, the PLAAF is modernising at a fast pace and the size of its air fleet is likely to be almost triple that of the Indian Air Force fleet in the near future.<sup>57</sup> The S-400 system would significantly enhance China's air defence against the Indian Air Force, till India also receives the same system as per its recently concluded contract with Russia.

## Conclusion

China's recent military reforms are transformational in nature, which would bring China's hard power to the next level. India needs to study these reforms closely to understand their direct implications on our security and defence preparedness. This study aims to provide us with valuable lessons to revamp our not so efficient defence structures. India's experience of modernising its defence apparatus has been mixed and many of the far-reaching recommendations made by various committees have not seen the light of day. It is not possible at this stage for India to compete with China in defence spending, but it is prudent to fully optimise its limited resources. To achieve the same, integration of our defence forces at all levels is a prerequisite.

China's growing footprint in South Asia and the extended Indian Ocean Region (IOR), along with collusion with Pakistan, has added to India's security concerns. *There are various ways to deal with these existing challenges: while the larger political dialogue emphasises cooperation and restrains competition, there is nonetheless a growing awareness that India needs to develop reliable and effective hard power as a dissuasive strategy against China.*<sup>58</sup> Developments in the South China Sea and an assertive China in general, have brought strategic convergence between India and other world powers. While India has increased its strategic partnership with countries like Japan, there is little unanimity on how to progress on the India-US relationship to further India's strategic interests. India continues to face a strategic dilemma about whether to be a regional balancer, a swing state, or a strategic hedge. India needs to debate these strategic options while taking concrete steps to develop its hard power by transformative reforms in the defence structures at all levels, in a time-bound manner.

## Notes

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