

## China's Strategic Vision and the PLA's Rise

*Bhaskar Roy \**

*The aim of this paper is to examine the rising power of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in China's strategic vision. Since the founding of new China in 1949, there have been instances of PLA leaders challenging the Communist Party of China (CPC) leadership. But on each instance the Party prevailed emphatically. The dictum "The Party commands the gun, and the army protects the Party" is still very much in place. In the last two decades, however, the relationship between the Party and the PLA has undergone some significant changes. In the 1980s, the PLA prevented Party general secretaries Hu Yaobang's and Zhao Ziyang's appointment as the Central Military Commission (CMC) Chairman, forcing Deng Xiaoping to continue in that post. After the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, Deng gradually succeeded in installing Party general secretary, Jiang Zemin to the post. Gradually, the Party and the PLA entered into a new relationship of mutual adjustment and mutual accommodation.*

*The PLA's rise in assertive diplomacy in strategic and territorial issues became visible between 2008 and 2010, when it took on the United States, backed China's territorial claims in the East China Sea and the South China Sea with military threats and occasional confrontation. Of course, the Party gave support. This led to China losing influence in its Asia Pacific neighbourhood to Washington. The first half of 2011 showed China trying to mend fences with the US, but relations over territorial issues still remain tense. Politically, the PLA clearly remains under the Party. Having said that, signed articles from serving top level PLA Commanders suggest that within the organization there have been pressures to do away with Party control. Under these conditions the Party will have to give the PLA a greater say in important strategic policy affairs.*

In an interview to a foreign journalist in Beijing on March 16, 2011, Maj. Gen. Luo Yuan said, "It is the Communist Party that commands the gun, never the other way round". But he also added "yet, as increasingly diverse opinions were being heard, it was not right for the PLA to just remain silent... (and) that the most important military opinions were those from the CMC's and the PLA's official spokesmen".

Maj. Gen. Luo, along with Admiral Yang Yi and Maj. Gen. Peng Guangqian, through their hard opinions represent a perception of the new PLA elite who continue to hold official positions. Such expression of views in China would be impermissible

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\* **Bhaskar Roy** is currently a consultant with the South Asia Analysis Group (SAAG), New Delhi. He has been a long time China analyst and also writes on other strategic issues regarding the neighbouring countries.

if they did not reflect the growing political power of the PLA. The PLA projects its powers through the Party, which is supreme, but not through the government. Recently, Defence Minister Li Guanglie clarified that the PLA was under the Party and “not under the government”. It would, therefore, be fair to assume that the PLA’s opinion heavily influences heavily the Chinese government’s position when dealing with security issues including territorial and border issues.

From the very beginning of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has been one of the main pillars of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The top leaders were the Long Marchers who had played important roles during the war of liberation against the KMT and civilian government roles were also discharged by the military leaders.

When Deng Xiaoping, the political commissar of the famous 4<sup>th</sup> Field Army, during the Long March, assumed the top leadership (de-facto) of China in 1978, he tried to reinvent the PLA into a more professional. He also ensured that the Party must remain in command. Therefore, the Party chief, the general secretary of the CCP, holds the post of the chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the top PLA today.

Responding to some questions abroad that the PLA may be overruling or dictating the country’s strategic and security policy, president and Party general secretary Hu Jintao, who is also the chairman of CMC told PLA delegates at the fourth session of the 11<sup>th</sup> NPC in Beijing that the “armed forces should unswervingly obey the Party’s command”.<sup>1</sup> Deng Xiaoping had a hard time convincing the PLA to accept the new generation of political leadership like Hu Yaobang or Zhao Ziang as CMC heads. It was only after the June 1989 Tiananmen Square incident that Deng did a total overhaul of the Party and military, eased out veteran leaders, and installed Party general secretary Jiang Zemin as the chairman of the CMC. Even then, he had to protect Jiang almost till his last days. The CCP has come a long way from its revolutionary years and early period of governance. While not stated openly, the actions of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao clearly demonstrate that the PLA has emerged as a significant influencer of strategic policies.

To work towards the ultimate goal of “Central Kingdom”, as envisioned by Mao Zedong the PLA will have to be given the position it demands in policy making by today’s leaders of China. Given this huge ambition and weaker leaders like Hu Jintao and his putative successor Xi Jinping, it is the PLA that may assume a commanding position in the coming years, publicly endorsed by the Party. It is well recorded Jiang Zemin appeased the PLA, especially the army with large numbers

of promotions, though the size of the PLA was being reduced. Jiang managed to hold on to the post of chairman of the CMC for more than one year with the PLA's support. Hu Jintao has followed suit.

Worrying for China's neighbours and the world at large is what exactly is its ambit of domination and the means to be used to achieve it, though there is no doubt that currently it is in a hurry to become Asia's leader.

Having established that the views of top Chinese strategic scholars including that of the military cannot be voiced in the official media unless a serious factional power struggle is on, some points demand close attention.

In 2006, Dr. Chen Yang, deputy director of the Strategic Research Centre of CICIR, a think tank of the ministry of foreign affairs and the ministry of state security, published a thesis on China's "Greater Peripheral" Strategy.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Chen identified four regions, namely North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia and West Asia as the extended region in which China's security strategy should primarily operate.

Dr. Chen further elaborated a "Western Line" and an "Eastern Line" which China should dominate to secure its energy life line. The "Line" theory defines the contours from West Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian Ocean, to South East Asia and North East Asia and the second chain of Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Dr. Chen was, of course, cognizant of the fact that his "Line" strategy would bring China into conflict with countries like the USA, Japan, India and probably Russia. He mentioned Japan's concept of a "Greater Asia" Russia's "eastern thrust" and India's Indian Ocean domination and "Look East" policy. But he argued that his strategy was imperative for China to attain "big power status" and be "independent" and act as a "responsible big power".

A review of China's policies and actions since then appears to reflect Dr. Chen Yang's thesis. It would, therefore, be fair to assume that the thesis was not a brainwave of a single academic working from a cubicle in his research institution, but a strategy paper vetted at the highest level to warn about China's rising power.

The disassociation from Deng Xiaoping's policy of "hide your strength, bide your time" became broadly visible from 2004. The eminent American China expert Michael Pillsbury explains Deng's advice to "not to stick your neck out" [till you are really prepared]. He interprets Deng's advice to his successors: "do not enter into

serious conflicts; build your economic and military strength and eventually you will become a great power and win without fighting". Despite his belief that the 1989 students' uprising was engineered by the USA, as he related to a visiting African head of state later that year Deng's understanding was that challenging the US might be counterproductive for China in the foreseeable future.<sup>3</sup>

### **CCP-PLA Equation**

When examining the CCP-PLA power equation, it must always be remembered that the PLA is a political army, an integral part of the Party and not the government. The Chinese ministry of defence is the smallest of the Chinese government ministries, without even a vice-minister. It is basically an "address" mainly to conduct protocol duties and relations with foreign defence ministries. The CMC finds mention in both the Party and government lists, but the government part only deals with protocol.

In the post liberation history of the CCP and PLA, it would not be correct to assume that the top PLA leadership has been unquestioningly subservient to the Party. At the 1959 CCP plenary session in Lushan, Mao was politically challenged by some top leaders led by Marshal Peng Dehuai. Peng held Mao responsible for the disastrous "Great Leap Forward". Unfortunately, Marshal Peng lost, was purged, never to be heard of again. In 1971, Marshal Lin Biao, the last of China's ten Marshals, planned a coup against Mao Zedong. He also lost, and died in an aeroplane crash while trying to escape.

In 1991-92, Gen. Yang Shangkun, first vice chairman of the CMC under the chairmanship of Deng Xiaoping, and his half brother, Gen. Yang Baibing, member of the CMC and chief of the General Political Department (GPD) of the PLA were quietly removed by Deng. The two brothers were planning a coup. They got away lightly as they were long time friends of Deng and his family. The tussle between the PLA and the Party had always existed. The question whether the PLA may attempt another coup is a clear 'no'. They are getting what they wanted, and emerging as a king maker.

What has happened in recent years, however, is that China's economy has soared, and the military has modernised in tandem under the policy that economy and security are interdependent, and the two together make for power. The PLA is the executor and co-planner of the power projection in support of national goals. A major aspect is energy security – import of oil, gas and much required minerals and raw materials to maintain a sustainable growth. Referring to Deng Xiaoping's theory, Song Yiming, Senior Research Fellow at the China Institute of International

Studies (CIIS) explained in 2004 “The principle does not mean that China will stay behind in front of every matter, but will act in accordance with its ability, doing or not doing depending on the circumstances.”<sup>4</sup> Strategic analyst Wang Yusheng was in step with Song Yimin, disagreeing with other strategists who felt China should continue to abide by Deng Xiaoping’s advice.

Developments since 2004 indicate that the “East-West” Line theory of Dr. Chen has not been discarded. In May, 2009, the Chief of US Pacific Command (PACOM), Admiral Timothy Keating briefed his Indian counterpart that a senior Chinese admiral had informally suggested to him that the US keep the Pacific Ocean and allow China to keep the Indian Ocean. It is very well known that Chinese officials do not make idle comments with foreign interlocutors howsoever “unofficially”.

At the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) meeting in June, 2010 in Hanoi, a senior Chinese foreign ministry official suggested to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that the USA agree the South China Sea was China’s “core interest”. Clinton, however, reacted by declaring that freedom of navigation in South China Sea was in USA’s national interest. Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi reacted sharply, accusing the US of threatening China. China’s strident approach to fully secure its maritime claims from the South China Sea to the Sea of Japan, may not be comparable to its “East-West” Lines theory, but the significance lies in China’s determined move to unquestionably dominate the Asia-Pacific region up to the first chain of islands and, then, surge forward to impose itself on the second chain of islands.

### **PLA’s Year of 2010**

The year 2010 was remarkable for the PLA as it demonstrated its high profile, if not domination, in sensitive areas of China’s foreign policy concerning security, territorial integrity, territorial claims and national independence.

Reacting to the sale of arms worth \$ 6.4 billion to Taiwan in 2009, the PLA suspended all military-to-military contacts with the US. The Chinese defense ministry declared it would suspend scheduled military exchange visits with the US, closely monitor the situation and take further actions as required.<sup>5</sup> The relationship was reinstated at the instance of the PLA after a year, after reassessing the environment in South East Asia and the Far East.

China’s top strategic leadership that includes the Central Military Commission may have been encouraged by signals from Washington when Barack Obama took over the presidency in January, 2009. President George W. Bush, in contrast

had taken a tough position when he became President, calling China a strategic competitor, and Bush administration advisors floated the idea to “engage China economically, counter China politically”. After Bush got involved in Afghanistan after “9/11” 2001, and in the misconstrued Iraq war, China was free to project its power in its neighbourhood.

Barack Obama started his term on a cautious note. He faced the global economic meltdown, pressure to bring troops back from Iraq, and prosecute the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. In his campaign speeches Obama made counter terrorism his first priority. The US Defense White Paper, January 2009, however pointed out that China's military surge was unstoppable.

Clashes with Japan on the Diaoyu (Senkaku in Japan) Islands in which a Chinese trawler crashed into two Japanese patrol boats, show of gun-boat diplomacy in the South China Sea over the Spratley Islands against other claimants on more than one occasion, and planting of a Chinese flag in the sea bed of the South China Sea (all in 2010) were evidence of PLA jingoism. In July 2010, the PLA conducted a series of war games in South China Sea supervised by PLA Chief army staff vice-chairman of the CMC, Gen. Chen Bingde. Gen. Chen observed the PLA should make solid preparations for military struggle.<sup>6</sup>

The PLA's demonstration of power was supplemented by statements and articles by senior PLA officials who are now involved in research in PLA institutions. Maj. Gen. Luo Yuan, deputy secretary general of China Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) wrote in December 2010 that just being rich was not enough to make China a strong nation, a powerful army was also needed. He added that the neighbouring area was not peaceful, and pacifism would not solve all issues. There were several other similar or more aggressive statements and articles by former top military officials like Vice Admiral (Rtd) Yang Yin and carried by the official media, including the Party mouthpiece the People's Daily, its English subsidiary the Global Times, and the PLA mouthpiece the Liberation Army Daily (LAD). These are not lone voices.

That the PLA's is having its way in important external relations was demonstrated by its financial assistance to Pakistan to fight the devastating floods in 2010, apart from deploying four military helicopters, and the CMC's decision to despatch 64 rescue personnel to Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the decisions would have been cleared from the very top. But the CMC's financial initiative suggests that the PLA dictated the terms.



## **PLA's Propaganda and Diplomacy Warfare**

Propaganda warfare has been part of communist strategy whether in internal indoctrination or external projection. From the 1960s, China's military diplomacy focused on providing free or "friendship price" armaments to small and pariah dictatorships to establish political influence, denials notwithstanding. It is known that in the mid-1990s China started executing a policy of promoting military relations with Indian Ocean Rim countries to encircle India. Actions became very visible between 1999-2001 with a slew of top level visits, including military, to the Maldives.

In an article titled "Military diplomacy serves the nation's development" Maj. Gen. Zhu Chenghu, Dean of China's National Defense University (NDU) explained the need for expansion of military exchanges to eliminate "contradictions and conflicts between countries, nationalities and cultures to bring about an anti-war, anti-splitist and pro-unity military concept that opposes use of force or threat of using force, gun boat diplomacy and law of the jungles and promote open, just and peaceful military exchange".<sup>8</sup> Zhu Chenghu also indicated that the PLA was prepared to prosecute legal warfare, described as "combat capability" of military diplomacy in resolving conflicts of interest in territorial, maritime, deep seas, airspace and space matters by closely integrating strategies with legal battles. Maj. Gen. Zhu actually conveyed the Central Committee's and the CMC's decision to cool down the situation, especially with the US.

Since January, 2011 there has been a remarkable change in China's political and military diplomacy. The challenging tone from the PLA was withdrawn. The attempt at placating the US became so pronounced that it surprised most. President Hu Jintao's visit to the USA in January 2011 was described by the Chinese official media in superlative terms though there was some hard talking from the American side. Similar treatment was given to the visit of the Chinese delegation to the US in May 2011 for Security and Economic Dialogue (SED), when President Barack Obama downwards lectured the Chinese delegation on human rights abuses. The PLA Chief of General Staff Gen. Chen Bingde's visit to the US (May 15-22, 2011) is a very important link in the chain of events. Gen. Chen maintained Beijing's position against US arms sales to Taiwan, but everything else was put in a positive perspective.<sup>9</sup> The visit, of course, was in the mutual interest of the two countries, and Washington regained the initiative.

The Chinese media was at pains to explain, quoting foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu, that China's support to Pakistan in the aftermath of the Osama bin Laden killing in Abbottabad (May 02) by US navy seals was not an attempt to dissuade

Pakistan from supporting the US in its war against terrorism (China Daily, May 20, 2011). Although this is not part of military diplomacy, it may be seen in the context of the PLA agreeing to transfer 50 F-17JF (Thunder) advanced aircraft to Pakistan on an emergency basis during Pak Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani's visit to Beijing (May 14-18, 2011).

In tandem, the PLA has launched a series of diplomatic initiatives in South East Asia to assuage anti-China apprehensions created by China's own aggressive postures. This is, however, unlikely to mitigate the growing distrust easily, but could calm down the situation. The bottom line, however, is that China will not withdraw from its stated position of sovereignty claims in the region.

### **Three Warfares**

The "Three Warfares", Media Warfare, Psychological Warfare and Legal Warfare is perhaps the greatest invention yet of the PLA's asymmetric warfare strategy or non-traditional warfare strategy. Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula, USAF (Rtd) classified the strategy into 3 heads – psychological operations, influence operations and legal warfare. These operations were a way to "describe and quantify military efforts to undermine a superior enemy's military abilities as well as influencing the enemy civilian leadership's will to fight". The article, "China's Active Defence Strategy and its Regional Impact", published in the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission of 27 January 2011 describes the 'Three Warfares' strategy. Initiatives such as this have always been in the domain of the Party's Propaganda department and the United Front Works Department. This suggests that the PLA took up this initiative on its own, and had the Party endorse it.

Before proceeding further, it would be important to recall a strategy enunciated by two Chinese military officers, Col. Qiao Liang and Col. Wang Xiangsui in the book "Unrestricted Warfare" in 1998.<sup>10</sup> The basic thesis of the book is "the struggle for victory will take place on a battlefield beyond the battle field". It propounds that since all traditional warfare methods including cyber warfare have been employed and counter-actions have been devised, there is a need to go beyond.

American strategic expert Al Santoli, in his introduction to the book published in the US, referred to a report in the Washington Times of June 2002 that US intelligence had confirmed that before the "9/11" terrorist attacks on the USA, China provided training to the Afghan Taliban and its Al Qaeda supporters. While it is known that China had all along maintained a quiet relationship with the Taliban starting from the Afghan war against the Soviet Union, there is no available evidence to suggest that the Chinese had any hand in training the Taliban or the Al Qaeda for terrorist



activities against Beijing's perceived enemies. It would be hazardous to stretch speculations that far. But on the other hand, the theory of unrestricted warfare cannot be ignored. The thesis of unrestricted warfare can in a manner fit into the "Three Warfares" concept in which each of the three meshes to make a whole.

The following is a brief summary of David Deptula's statements at the congressional hearing:

- Psychological Operations (Psyops): attempts to undermine military operations aimed at deterring and demoralising military and civilian populations using media, leaflets etc... World War-II and cold war methods-also used domestically to boost morale of the Chinese people.
- Influence (media) Operations: influence domestic and international opinion to support China's actions – release selective information when China launches a war or short military strikes in its neighbourhood as propaganda to support China's case.
- Legal Warfare (arguments): using domestic and international laws to win international support for China's military actions – eg. South China Sea, East China Sea, support to North Korea among other objectives.

The "Three Warfares" strategy was discussed from 2002-04 in China. But the responsibility to execute this strategy was given to the PLA in 2008 by Party general secretary, president and chairman of the CMC, Hu Jintao in 2008.

Since then, the PLA's control and execution of the "Three Warfares" has been reiterated by the Chinese media and Hu Jintao all along. Hu Jintao instructed the PLA's political commissars and instructors to help officers and soldiers better understand the "Three Warfares" and military operations other than war.<sup>11</sup> This makes the ascendancy of the PLA clear in China's domestic and foreign policy in non-military affairs.

### **Military Doctrines**

The PLA doctrine for the modern period is a gamut of aims, strategies and principles under the document "National Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period" prepared in the early 1990s. As the title suggests, the PLA doctrine will continue to grow and new concepts will be included as the PLA grows in strength and political power. The "Three Warfares" is one of them.

In periodic Chinese official defence documents like the White Paper on China's National Defence, the concept of defence policy of "defensive nature" has given way to the concept of "active defence" though the former policy is also mentioned

simultaneously.<sup>12</sup> The concept of “Forward Defence” Mao Zedong’s strategy of a people’s war – draw the enemy deep inside and surround them-has been discarded with the growing power of the PLA. China’s military and economic strength grew in tandem with China’s expanding territorial ambitions.

China has gradually shifted its position from compromise, and setting aside disputes as discussed in this paper earlier. Today it follows the principle of “forward defense” or “active defense” through military means if need be.

According to the PLA National Defence University (NDU) handbook *The Science of Campaigns* the essence of active defence is to take the “initiative and annihilate the enemy”.<sup>13</sup> Another NDU book, the *Science of Military Strategy* says that under high-tech war conditions “the strategy of gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck does not mean waiting for the enemy’s strike passively.<sup>14</sup> Fundamentality, it means if the PLA perceives the enemy is preparing to attack, then they will resort to pre-emptive “defensive” attack.

Deng Xiaoping, as the Chairman of the CMC in the late 1980s, enunciated the strategy of “local wars under modern conditions”. This evolved into “local wars under high-tech conditions”, as China moved to Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and plunged into cyber warfare, electronic warfare, and first strike options. Very recently, China has set up a “Blue Army” to secure its cyber space and accelerate cyber warfare.<sup>15</sup> The threat of local wars continues to be respected and emphasised.

The PLA has come up with a new thought process recently. It says “Traditional Security concerns blend with non-traditional ones and domestic concerns interact with international security ones, making it hard for traditional security approaches and mechanisms to respond effectively to the various security issues and challenges in the world”.<sup>16</sup> The significance of this observation is enormous. External challenges are linked to internal challenges like pro-democracy movements, demand for political reforms, and the PLA takes the responsibility for both. The huge internal security apparatus unveiled by China, known as “Wei Wen” is under PLA control and supervision, and has a budget of over \$ 95 billion which is \$ 3 billion more than the declared PLA budget for 2011-12. The growing power and resources of the PLA is evident.

### **Asian Military Doctrine**

In April 2009, China’s National Peoples Congress (NPC) Standing Committee enacted a new “National Defense Mobilizing Law (NDML)” which envisages emergent actions, if the

country's "state sovereignty, unification, territorial integrity or security were threatened". (17) It is a threat perception and response law which makes all of China's assets and people responsible by law to abide by the PLA's command. Military exercises to test this response has been carried out since. China's concerns mainly involve neighbouring countries contesting China's claim of undisputed sovereignty over maritime territories in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. The US resurgence in the Asia-Pacific region under the Obama administration was spearheaded by US secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton. The issue of Taiwan is critical in this strategy.

Renowned Chinese strategy expert, Zhang Yangmin, suggested in April 2009, that Asia was China's "great backyard" and China must first rise in the continent by "acquiring the capability to resolve various issues in the continent" to become a pre-eminent power diplomatically and through power projection".<sup>17</sup> It may be interesting to note that in China various theses have been propounded from the 1970s of multipolar world, tripolar world and even bipolar world (this, immediately after the breakup of the Soviet Union), but it has never enunciated the concept of a multipolar Asia. Chinese diplomats usually avoid this question when asked.

### **A New Nuclear Doctrine**

A study by the China Institute of International and Strategic Studies (CIISS), a PLA think tank, proposed a radical change in China's nuclear doctrine. Discussing the reunification of Taiwan with China by force if necessary, it argued that China's nuclear doctrine of "no first use" had become obsolete as China's conventional force would be no match for a combined Taiwanese, Japanese and US force.<sup>18</sup> The paper also advocated nuclearization of space as the US had made great advances in space warfare.

China's Defence White Paper of 2006 assured the world that China's fundamental goal was to deter other countries from using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against China, and China remains firmly committed to the policy of no first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances. It went on to say that China upholds the principle of counter attack in self-defence with a limited (but modernised) arsenal. It also declared China's nuclear force (the Second Artillery) was under the command of the CMC.

But in reality, there is an ambiguity in the NFU doctrine. This was revealed in an interview given by Gen. Zhu Chenghu to the Wall Street Journal in 2005 in which he said if the US interfered (in a China-Taiwan conflict) with advanced weapons China could respond with nuclear weapons. In 2008, Chai Yuqiu, a vice principal with the Nanjing Army Command College, told the Pro-China Hong Kong news

paper Ta kung Pao that China's NFU policy was not unlimited and China could use nuclear weapons if big powers with nuclear weapons interfered in Taiwan. In 1996, China's ambassador for arms control Sha Zukang remarked that NFU did not apply to Taiwan.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the Taiwan case which is unique, one tends to ask how and when China will use its nuclear weapons against a country which possesses nuclear weapons. China will certainly not wait to be struck with nuclear weapons to retaliate. Therefore, it depends upon a calculated perception. For example in the case of India, if a conventional war breaks out with China at what point would China perceive India would launch a nuclear attack? China's NFU is dangerously misleading, undependable, and a part of its "denial and deception" warfare strategy. Hence, China's NFU principle is hardly reliable for countries like India which now have nuclear weapons, and countries and legal entities like Japan, South Korea, Australia which enjoy the US nuclear umbrella.

It is necessary to note that the CMC is in charge of the nuclear command, and the only civilian member of the CMC is the chairman, but significantly weaker than his predecessors like Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. No published Chinese official position says that the chairman of the CMC has veto power.

### **INDIA and the PLA**

In the case of India, and with some other countries, a powerful opinion of the PLA is quite evident along with that of the CCP, in the making of China's policy. The Chinese government only implements it.

India-China relations started with a great deal of euphoria including the *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* (India and China are brothers) slogan. India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave up India's opportunity to become one of the five permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council, in favour of China. It was again Prime Minister Nehru who bailed out China on the Tibet issue in the UN in the early 1950s. As recently as 1989, when the most important countries in the world ostracised China, and even sanctioned China because of its inhuman crack-down on Tiananmen Square student protesters, India stood by China.

But China on its part, shocked Indians as a whole when it attacked Arunachal Pradesh (then North East Frontier Agency) in 1962, a largely undefended border. The perception in India changed. There was a sense of "Great Betrayal". That led to freezing of ambassador level relationship, which thawed somewhat in 1976, and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's China visit in 1988 took the relationship to a new level.

Even the initiative from India was almost derailed by hard-line Chinese Premier Li Peng, till paramount leader Deng Xiaoping intervened. Today, India-China relations have greatly improved, with annual bilateral trade rising to \$ 60 billion and looking towards \$ 100 billion, though still heavily in China's favour.

Difficult problems, however, remain. One is the demarcation of the border and China's claim on Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh. India and China do not even agree on the length of the border. Beijing does not include the entire Jammu and Kashmir border including the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) border on the grounds this is a disputed area between India and Pakistan.<sup>20</sup> It has resisted exchange of maps on the respective positions of the two countries in the Western and Eastern sectors. It has reneged on the agreement (2005) between the two countries on the modalities for resolving the border issue, pulling back from Article 4 of the agreement which says there will be no transfer of areas with settled population, because this will nullify their claim on the strategically located Tawang. This is an important military-strategic issue for the PLA, as the ownership of Tawang would give the PLA the advantage of cutting-off greater India's only land connection to its north-east region at the narrow Siliguri corridor. It may be noted that the agreement was signed between civilian leaders of the two countries. That the Chinese later went back on it suggests the PLA's strategic advantage was re-evaluated at the instance of the PLA.<sup>21</sup>

Equally important was China's decision to not only give stapled visas to Indian Kashmiris, but also to Indian military officers serving in Kashmir. This led to the cancellation of the Indian military delegation's visit to China led by Lt. Gen. B.S. Jaswal, GOC Northern Command. Even Premier Wen Jiabao could not deliver on his promise to rectify the situation during his January, 2011 visit. The issue was resolved only in May/June, 2011. As detailed earlier in this paper it can be assumed that given the tense situation the PLA is facing in its Asia-Pacific neighbourhood, it does not want to raise further tensions with India.

At the same time, the strategy of "undeclared war" against India remains active even today. The arrest of separatist leaders of India's north-east by the Indian security agencies revealed Chinese arms trading companies controlled by the CMC have been actively selling arms to insurgents like the ULFA and NSCN (I/M).<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It may be safely concluded that the PLA has no intention of replacing the CCP. But what is significant is how much power and influence it wields on the CCP. The Chinese government is of no consequence to the PLA. As noted earlier, the Chinese defence ministry has a defence minister for protocol purpose. It has no

vice minister. A strong and powerful military dictating the strategic foreign policy of such a formidable rising power is not a comfortable sign.


China has displayed its intentions of taking a quantum jump to equal the United States. The various three-world and two-world, and restricted multipolar theories, and those of dividing the globe between the US and China point to this. This ambition, or perception, has led to the display of arrogance in foreign policy and security issues. Some Chinese strategists have lately begun to understand that their authorities have overplayed their hand. The years 2009-2010 witnessed any opposition, criticism and even reasonable dialogue dismissed with impunity and disdain. Snubbing the visiting American president Barack Obama in 2009, and insulting him again at the Copenhagen climate change summit provoked an US reaction that made President Hu Jintao and army chief of staff Gen. Chen Bingde scurry to Washington in January and May 2011, soliciting good relations, and swallowing tough American lectures.

Finally, the following demand close attention and follow up. In a preface written for a book by left leaning writer Zhang Musheng, Gen. Liu Yuan, Political Commissar to the PLA's General Political Department (GPD) said "Military Culture is the oldest and most important wisdom of humanity" and "without war, where would grand unity come from? Without force, how could fusion of the nation, the race, the culture, the south and north be achieved?" He also writes "Actually, the Party has been repeatedly betrayed by general secretaries, both in and outside the country, recently and in the past".<sup>23</sup>

Coming from a serving General of the PLA this statement is astounding, if not prophetic. Gen. Liu is the son of Liu Shaoqi, Mao's anointed successor until Mao's Red Guards tortured and killed him. He has undergone persecution and was banished to rural re-education camps like other "princelings", i.e. the children of veteran leaders like politburo member Bo Xilai and Hu Jintao's putative successor Xi Jinping. Most of these princelings in politics and the PLA are poised to be part of the 5<sup>th</sup> generation leadership that will take over China in October 2018 at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Castigating the past and present top leadership so openly, while also reverting to certain Maoist theories of ultra-nationalism would be something to worry about, especially when "military culture" is given prominence. Gen. Liu Yuan would not have written this introduction if he did not have strong support from within the PLA.

Ancient Chinese strategic culture advocated the primacy of politics to defeat an enemy. A military option was the last option and that too would be directed by



political strategy. If “military culture” dominates the ideology of China’s 5<sup>th</sup> generation leadership along with Maoist hardline campaigns, the environment in China’s neighbourhood, to say the least, will be uneasy. 

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Notes:

- 1 *Xinhua*, Beijing, March 12, 2011.
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