

Guest Associate Editorial Note

The extent to which classical public institutions like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have contributed to China's rise is constantly debated in the discourse on China's impressive rise as a global power. While the CCP has remained the longest surviving successful communist regime in the world, the PLA has stood alongside the CCP to legitimise its standing and achieve broader national and international security objectives. Recently, the CCP mounted a proud display to mark its 90th anniversary, and outlined its future ambitions to push China ahead on the global stage.

The PLA, while celebrating the 90th anniversary event, reiterated the slogan: "Without the Communist Party of China, there would be no new China". This PLA perspective conveys its continued "political loyalty" to the CCP. The CCP in its turn has facilitated the PLA to build its own identity and enjoy its "relative autonomy". For instance, the Chinese National Defence Law (NDL) of 1997 provides a framework for "administering the military according to law". This does not necessarily mean that the military is out of the CPC's control. On the other hand, it permits the PLA to take its national and global responsibility ever more seriously.

The consensus remains that the CCP and the PLA are the most celebrated institutions in China today. The PRC currently makes headline news on many fronts: as the world's second-largest economy; a power that seems to be ready to share the G-2 desk with the USA; a vital power in many global pressing concerns and an important player in the politics of energy, climate change and human rights discourse. For China, the impact of this exciting discourse is minimal in nature: what matters most to it is; keeping up the momentum and achieving various security objectives both at the national and international level. In this outlook, the PLA's role, potential and capability remains the most important concern for China. Current trends indicate that the PLA is being rapidly transformed from a mass army designed to win protracted wars of attrition on its periphery to a force that can match and win 21st century high-tech wars. For the Chinese, a strong and professional military is key for challenging US pre-eminence, deterring Taiwan from its independence stance, and having an edge over neighbouring regions. The target is to modernise the PLA and build it up as a most powerful military force that can help achieve China's security objectives on various fronts. The PLA's prowess and growing capability as a part of China's rise has been striking. The conventional strategic outlook in Asia confirms that a modernised PLA will extensively influence the regional security environment.

Theoretical paradigms in international relations suggest two different postures for the PLA. The liberals are sure that the PLA may not pose a threat to the neighbouring countries because of the integration of the Chinese economy with the region and the world. The contrary perspective of the realists is alarming: it suggests that the impressive Chinese economy drives the PLA's rapid modernisation process which will eventually help it to achieve a range of strategic objectives in Asia: hence, the PLA modernisation remains a security concern. In fact in the context of regional security, it is safe to argue that not only has the PLA's standing as a powerful military been enhanced ; but also that the Chinese military thinking has moved beyond the traditional "people's war" (*renmin zhanzheng*) strategy which earlier stressed *quantity over quality*. Acting upon its own evaluation of the fast changing nature of information warfare (IW) in the light of the regional strategic landscape – and evolving perceptions about China's security situation – the military leadership in China agrees that the PLA needs new and updated planning to meet the emerging strategic challenges. The Chinese *Defence White Paper of 2010* states that the PLA is "now beginning to make progress towards informationisation". At the core of the PLA's drive towards informationisation process is the increasing implementation of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA); and the emphasis on the qualitative improvement of the PLA.

This special issue of the *Journal of Defence Studies* focuses on the role, progress and posture of the PLA, and seeks to explain its regional and global implications. Although the individual contributions in this volume are fairly distinct and focus on the two distinct issues of China and its military, collectively they contribute towards a broader understanding of the PLA and its various facets. The objective is an increased understanding and higher levels of awareness about the PLA's rising profile especially both among the Indian military personnel in the field and among policy makers. Among the important factors currently shaping Indian security interests, the PLA's posture looms very large. In recent times, this has largely informed India's reforms and strategic planning.

The discussion begins with the psychology of the military personnel deployed in the border areas and about the psychological dimension of the military posture. **Ravi Bhoothalingam** in *Chess and Go: Strategic Rivalry or Harmonious Balance?* highlights the soft contours and the morale of military personnel in the border areas. He applies a "chess and go" formula to explain brain functions and psychology, and goes on to explain the strategic underpinning of Chinese and Indian military and political traditions. The particular significance of this contribution is that it uses a non-conventional formulation to explain the PLA's military posture and the rise of China as an economic power.

Srikanth Kondapalli in his *Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics* confirms that the Chinese military is currently implementing an RMA which highlights its progressive modernisation strategy to acquire the capability to gain an edge over other military powers in time. The RMA implementation is based on information warfare, electronic warfare, asymmetric methods, C4ISR modernisation, rapid mobility, long-range precision strikes, space warfare, missileery and joint operations. The author concludes that the RMA-driven Chinese military will impact Asian security in times to come. While one is in broad agreement with this interpretation there are other contours that may need to be explored within China's discourse of the RMA. For example, the Chinese concept of RMA extends beyond the classical military connotation and revolves around China's overall socio-political and national objectives.

Shailendra Arya in *Infrastructure Development and Chinese War Waging Capabilities in Tibet* discusses whether the PLA's infrastructure construction in the China-India border areas is a calculated strategic initiative or a manifestation of China's rise. The author's view is that the Chinese are developing infrastructure and encouraging the Han population to migrate into the Tibet to gain greater control over the region. **Arun Sahgal** in *Chinese Anti-Access Strategy: Conceptualizing and Contextualising an Indian Version* examines the principles of the Chinese 'anti-access strategy' and uses that as a model to develop the contours of an Indian "grand strategy framework" that will entail developing military capabilities for inflicting damage and raising the cost of intervention. The author builds up a case that Indian doctrinal philosophy must focus on developing a joint operational doctrine and high-tech weapon systems for fighting limited, high-intensity conflicts. Without really disagreeing with this, the more plausible argument that arises here is that the Chinese keenness to maximise asymmetric capabilities and information superiority through RMA needs to be factored into the Indian perspective. A mixture of doubtful intentions and untested capabilities in air, naval and second artillery arenas increases the threat posed by PLA modernisation and a new level of insecurity for India.

While issues like the PLA modernisation and 'RMA with Chinese characteristics' have attracted the attention of strategic experts in India, the PLA's ever-increasing role in Chinese politics and the decision-making process needs closer debate. **Bhaskar Roy** in *China's Strategic Vision and the PLA's Rise* discusses the PLA's growing influence in the party-military dynamic in Chinese politics. He argues that the PLA's profile has increased in the Chinese politics substantially, that the PLA's assertive role in territorial and strategic issues became more pronounced

“between 2008 and 2010, when it took on the United States, backed territorial claims in the East China Sea and the South China Sea with military threats and occasional confrontation”. The author argues that the CCP will in due course have to make greater concessions to the PLA in terms of granting it greater autonomy and freedom to tackle the emerging security challenges for China. The most notable aspect here, however, is the Chinese military’s acquiescence to civilian desires, which permits the military to have a greater say in the decision-making process.

Despite its thrust on “professionalism”, the PLA’s vigour in influencing and crafting foreign policy objectives has not been reduced. Writing about the PLA’s status in China’s foreign affairs and decision-making process, **D.S. Rajan** in *PLA’s Influence in Foreign Policy Making in China and Implications for India* notes that while there is a “downturn trend in the PLA’s political status which is clearly debatable, the military is making headlines in areas like gathering professionalism through robust modernisation process where the highlight has been the military budget and systemic improvement.” He argues that though the PLA is still working in accordance with the principle that the “Party commands the gun”, there are instances where the PLA has taken independent decisions and bypassed the CCP and civilian administration. Despite the induction of new actors in the Chinese foreign policy making process, the PLA still remains the most influential unit when it comes to the national security foreign policy issues. Political trends in China suggest that the PLA’s role in foreign affairs and strategic decision-making process is growing over time, a testimony to the diversification of China’s structural process.

While these papers discuss the internal contours of the PLA and its level of influence, the PLA’s rising regional and global profile also merits attention. Understanding the PLA’s posture through the Indian and the regional perspective is an increasingly important task. A few papers in this volume examine the impact of the emergence of the PLA as a powerful force on regional dynamics. There is a general consensus that the PLA’s current outreach is designed to make it at least a “regional military power” if not a global one. To carry forward this ambition, the current generation of the Chinese leadership perceives economic development as the focus of China’s national strategy and emphasises the need to continue the coordinated progress of national economy and military modernisation. Going by this Chinese drive to push military modernisation along with economic development, two imperatives of the Chinese strategic culture may be singled out: (a) *territorial integrity* and (b) *maintaining supremacy or sovereignty*. Maintaining territorial integrity or insisting on “national unification” has always remained the most significant national strategic calculus in China.

To put it directly, the rise of China has become a “strategic reality” for the US and for many regional powers in Asia. The PLA’s increasing role in the Chinese political discourse and role in regional maritime and territorial disputes in this context merits a closer look for all concerned. PLA modernisation and China’s “military rise” will continue to influence the India and the regional security environment. China’s military posture in this context is likely to lead to a balance-of-power structure in which the US continues to play the stabilising role.

Hsin Chih Chen in *Soft Way to Consolidate Hard Power: China’s New Orientation of ‘Low-Profile’ Strategy* argues that the PRC has taken serious note of the fact that constant strategic tensions with the US are detrimental to broader Chinese interests. There is a change in the Chinese strategy towards the US, and the PRC is adopting a “low profile” in various strategic areas with regard to the USA. It is a strategy that has continued from the days of Deng Xiaoping. **Sanjukta Banerji Bhattacharya** writes about the gravity and implications of the Chinese strategic culture in the context of Sino-US military relations. Military power based on high-tech military modernisation, is crucial to China’s rise and it is likely to increasingly challenge US supremacy. The world, including India, is worried about the non-transparency of Chinese military growth. But the Chinese military is targeting the American supremacy at a different level. A fine example of this aspect is the Sino-American military relations discourse.

Chintamani Mahapatra in *Complex Cold Warriors: US-China Relations and Implications for India* studies the superpower complexity between China and the US. In his view, “China is conscious of its emerging global profile in view of its unprecedented economic growth and successful military modernisation programme.” This aspect has a number of strategic implications for India as “China does not consider India as a friendly country”. Issues like Tibet, Dalai Lama and Arunachal Pradesh still remain the major irritants between the two countries. There is a need for India to adopt a mature and robust foreign policy approach towards China. What essentially dominates the debate about the PLA’s global profile is the PLA’s rising regional posture through different means. **H. Shivananda** in *Sino-Myanmar Military Cooperation and its Implications for India* highlights China’s political-military approach for solidifying its relationship with important neighbours. The increasing military cooperation between China and Myanmar carries substantial strategic implications for India. “Sino-Myanmar military cooperation which started with the negotiation of purchase of arms including jet fighters, armoured vehicles and naval vessels has gone much deeper”; and that has “brought the Chinese to India’s eastern flank with up-gradation of infrastructure”.

Ming-Shih Shen writes about the *Military Confidence Building Measures across Taiwan*. It is the author's view that "military confidence is not a semantic trick, but rather a strategic way to transcend existing constraints and frameworks". The military confidence between China and Taiwan is currently tilted in favour of mainland China; and the proposed military confidence building measures proposed by Hu Jintao are not the conventional ones. China sees CBMs as a means of facilitating the unification process and the confirmation of the "One China" principle. The author concludes that there is a need for CBMs, and which requires "practical considerations of strategic security to achieve structural breakthroughs in both the domestic and foreign investments".

Rup Narayan Das cautions that given the existing status of relations between India and China, "the need for defence preparedness on the part of India to meet any challenge to secure territories should not be overemphasised". CBMs are indeed important in the China-India context, but India needs to be cautious about the Chinese military posture. The PLA's maritime policy is a new area of discussion all over the world. **Sarabjeet Singh Parmar** and **Saloni Salil** write about how the expanding economy and demand for natural resources are linked and push the maritime vision ahead both in the case of China and India. They argue that "the rediscovery of a maritime vision leading to increased inroads in the maritime domain by China and India indicates their commonalities; however, there are divergences and differences in their strategic approach and thought", which is a matter of regional debate. They raise the point that while "China fears India's growth as a maritime power in the Indian Ocean region ... India equally views China's ingress into the Indian Ocean Region with concern." These differences in perception could prompt maritime competition between the two countries and eventually turn into a conflict. **SN Misra** in his paper *Impact of Defence Offset Policy on India's Military Industry Capability* points out that India's offset policy in 2005 envisaged direct purchase of products and services, joint venture, FDI, etc. So far, 12 Offset contracts have been concluded for \$2 b. He argues that most of it is for low end products and services repair and overhaul facilities, training, and simulators. However, expected inflow in terms of long term investments, FDI have not materialized. He feels that the major reason for this is the low FDI cap of 26 per cent and non-inclusion of technology transfer in its scope. In this paper, the author suggests need for increasing FDI limit up to 50 per cent so that major foreign arms producers find profitable to invest in defence production sector. Besides, critical areas of technology like weapons, sensors, detectors and propulsions and design and development capability should be targeted. He is of the view that strong government support and a single point empowered defence offset agency will facilitate the process of optimizing the offset opportunity of \$25 b during 12th Plan.

The narratives in this volume unanimously confirm that the PLA is a vital establishment in the PRC's current rising profile. In the future course of China's foreign policy strategy the PLA will play a decisive role. The PLA's future goal may not necessarily be limited to military objectives; they could combine both institutional and foreign policy goals that link to China's national objectives. More notably, the PLA's larger goal is linked with China's approach of achieving Comprehensive National Power (CNP), a target that confirms the PRC's ambition for achieving superpower status.

The debate continues outside China whether the PLA is pushing China to be a "military power". It is important to note in this context that the PLA has time and again upgraded its global and regional posture. "Public diplomacy" has been the main thrust in the PLA's posture in order to moderate the perception of the PLA as a threat. The PLA pursues joint military exercises and CBMs with other militaries of the world. At the same time, to substantiate its profile, the PLA is rapidly coping not only with 21st century security issues, but also equipping itself to have an edge over other militaries.

There is much that the Indian strategic circles do not study, investigate or fully understand. It is important for India to take a serious note of the PLA's current posture and its future possibilities. Within the broader discourse of China's rise, where the PLA's role has been the most notable entity, it is imperative that the PLA's modernisation discourse and its regional posture are objectively analysed and assessed at regular intervals in India. There is more research to be done on the PLA as it contributes hugely to China's rise. The contributions in this volume are by no means to be taken as the ultimate explanation of PLA's initiatives and strategic objectives. They are intended more in the way of marking a beginning among the strategic experts in India to think, discuss and prepare to know more about the PLA and China's strategic planning, to disseminate ideas and information and initiate a dialogue about the most important military of the world.

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