

**PLA Reforms of XI JINGPING in
an Era of Assertive Diplomacy:
Implications For India**

PLA Reforms of XI JINGPING in an Era of Assertive Diplomacy: Implications For India

Maj Gen Rajiv Narayanan, AVSM, VSM (Retd)



(Established 1870)

United Service Institution of India
New Delhi (India)



Vij Books India Pvt Ltd
New Delhi (India)

Published by

Vij Books India Pvt Ltd

(Publishers, Distributors & Importers)

2/19, Ansari Road

Delhi – 110 002

Phones: 91-11-43596460, 91-11-47340674

e-mail: vijbooks@rediffmail.com

web : www.vijbooks.com

First Published in India in 2018

Copyright © 2018, United Service Institution of India, New Delhi

ISBN: 978-93-88161-20-6 (HB)

Price : ₹ 250/-

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Application for such permission should be addressed to the publisher.

The views expressed in this book are of the author/authors in his/their personal capacity and do not represent the views of the USI.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Part I The Strategic Continuum of Chinese Grand Strategy	5
The Strategic Continuum of Chinese Behaviour	5
The China Dream and Its Grand Strategy to Achieve it	12
Part II Role of PLA and Assessment of ongoing PLA Reforms	22
The Role and Tasks of PLA.	22
The Ongoing PLA Reforms.	27
The Strategic Continuum of PLA Reforms	39
PLA's Military Objectives & Strategy	40
Part III Implications for India and The Way Ahead	47
Implications	47
Integrated Front HQ: Towards a Focussed Single Strategic Direction	49
Restructured Ministry of Defence (MOD): A Recommended HDO	55
Overall Armed Forces Structure	57

Indian Army	57
Indian Navy	58
Indian Air Force	59
Strategic Forces	59
Special Forces	61
Persistent Situational Awareness (PSA)	62
Reallocation of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)	63
Centralised Reserves	63
Part IV Conclusion	64
 <i>Appendix</i>	
The 84 Corps Level Units of PLA	70

PLA REFORMS OF XI JINGPING IN AN ERA OF ASSERTIVE DIPLOMACY: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

“Fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy, which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, diplomatic pressure, commercial pressure and, not the least, ethical pressure, to weaken the opponents’ will”

.....B.H Liddel Hart, Strategy, 1954

The international backlash following the Tiananmen Square massacres and the subsequent unravelling of the Communist World in Europe led to Deng Xiao Ping’s famous 24 character foreign policy dictum of ‘*Tao Guang Yang Hui (TGYH)*’ that the Communist Party of China (CCP) diligently followed for over two and a half decades. TGYH – ‘*hide your ambitions and disguise your claws*’¹, or *Keeping a Low Profile*, implied that China should develop its economic, commercial and financial strength, and not concern itself much with International affairs till it has developed fully. The CCP succeeded in this strategy by gaining access to the global trade and commerce with the opening up of China to the MNCs for establishing their manufacturing plants, thereby becoming the global manufacturing hub.

1 Hays, Jeffrey. “Foreign Policy Under Deng Xiaoping.” Facts and Details. Accessed August 16, 2018. <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat2/sub7/entry-5540.html>.

Till early 2000s, China had assiduously followed Deng's dictum thereby leading to an unprecedented economic growth and relative internal stability. It enabled it to improve its *Comprehensive National Power (CNP)*, especially its geo-economic strength, leading to an assumption amongst its decision makers that the rising CNP would afford it a greater geo-political heft and leverage if backed by a robust modern military. With the USA in a strategic retrenchment since Obama², and the Europe in economic decline, the Chinese hard line decision makers now feel that the '*shi, or the Strategic Configuration of Power*', has shifted towards it.

China had assessed that these initial decades of the 21st Century are a period of 'strategic opportunity' that needed to be grasped resolutely to achieve greater influence and geo-economic and diplomatic leverages. The forays into Africa, Australia, ASEAN, East China Sea, South China Sea and South America, and the modernization drive of the PLA under Jiang Zhemín and Hu Jintao were all part of this well planned strategy. Under Xi Jinping China is adopting a much more aggressive foreign policy to defend China's expanded 'core interests'. He signalled a shift from Deng's policy of '*Keeping a Low Profile – TGYH*', to '*Striving for Achievement – Fen Fa You Wei (FFYW)*', in his speech at the foreign affairs conference of CCP on 24 Oct 2013³, thereby indicating the acceptance of

-
- 2 Dueck, Colin. "The Strategy of Retrenchment and Its Consequences." Foreign Policy Research Institute. April 13, 2015. Accessed August 16, 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2015/04/the-strategy-of-retrenchment-and-its-consequences/>.
 - 3 Jinping, Xi. "Let the Sense of Community of Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighbouring Countries." Speech, Diplomatic Work with Neighbouring Countries, Stressing the Necessity of Striving for a Sound Neighbouring Environment for China's Development and Making Neighbouring Countries Benefit More from China's Development. October 25, 2013. Accessed August 16, 2018. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjlb_663304/wjzb_663308/activities_663312/t1093870.shtml.

the Chinese hard-liners' assessments.

The PLA has a major role in ensuring that the growing assertiveness is backed by hard power to coerce smaller neighbours and to enable Xi Jinping to establish '*Great Power Diplomacy*' with Chinese characteristics⁴, with USA. While the modernisation of the PLA had made impressive strides over the past decades, its major weaknesses centred on archaic structures lacking jointness inhibited the development of a professional force. The PLA operational doctrine and strategy also evolved from the pre-1979 'People's War', to 'People's War under Modern Conditions', to the 1980 'Local Wars under Modern Conditions', thence to 'Local Wars under High Tech Conditions' of 1993, to the post 2004 'Winning Local Wars under Informatised Conditions', which has now been upgraded by Xi Jinping to 'Winning Informationised Local Wars in the 2015 Defence White Paper'⁵.

The Strategy has stayed course with the 1996 concept of 'War Zone Campaign', with the Maritime Strategy now evolving to 'Offshore Defence' from 'Coastal Defence' with the modernisation of PLA Navy, as enunciated by Admiral Liu Huaqing in 1986⁶. The above coupled with the expansion of military domain by the Chinese into Space, Cyber and Information Warfare domains entailed a restructuring of the

4 'Jinping, Xi. Addressed, "The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing," China, Beijing. November 29, 2014. Accessed August 16, 2018. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

5 Fravel, M. Taylor. "China's New Military Strategy: "Winning Informationized Local Wars"." China Brief 15, no. 13 (July 2, 2015): 1-19. Accessed August 16, 2018. https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/China_Brief_Vol_15_Issue13.pdf?x87069.

6 Hartnett, Daniel. "The Father of the Modern Chinese Navy-Liu Huaqing." Center for International Maritime Security. February 17, 2015. Accessed August 16, 2018. <http://cimsec.org/father-modern-chinese-navy-liu-huaqing/13291>.

PLA with far reaching reforms to strengthen its ‘shi’, thereby ensuring that China can grasp the strategic opportunity resolutely.

This has a direct bearing on India, as China views it as its main competitor for space in the region. As it becomes more strong, both militarily and economically, China will not countenance India’s strategic autonomy and be more aggressive to contain India. In this it already has a willing ally in Pakistan that it would prefer to utilise covertly in the near to medium term – the period it needs to strengthen its ‘shi’. The current flux caused due to the restructuring and reorganisation of the PLA at all levels provides India with some elbow room for the modernisation and restructuring of its own Armed Forces to successfully prosecute the future wars.

Aim

This monograph analyses the PLA reforms under Xi Jinping, in the light of growing geo-economic and geo-political assertiveness by China in the Indo-Pacific Region and its implications for India.

Scope

The monograph is laid out in the under mentioned parts: -

- (a) Part I – The Strategic Continuum of Chinese Grand Strategy;
- (b) Part II – The Role of PLA and Assessment of PLA Reforms;
- (c) Part III – Implications for India.
- (d) Part IV - Conclusion.

PART I – THE STRATEGIC CONTINUUM OF CHINESE GRAND STRATEGY

The Strategic Continuum of Chinese Behaviour

There exists hype, built up in the West and USA, on the assertiveness of Xi Jinping ever since his elevation as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in 2012. They seem to be fixated by him and appear to look upon him as the sole leader responsible for China's unprecedented rise. Post the 19th Congress in Oct 2017 and the 13th National Peoples' Congress in March 2018, Xi has emerged as the single most powerful leader since Mao era with some Sinologists placing him above Mao. With his 'Thought' and his plan for China's rejuvenation, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), enshrined in the Constitution, and his anointment prior to it as the 'core leader', it is no small surprise that he is seen as the 'all-powerful' leader.

They fail to grasp the *strategic continuum* since Deng Xiao Ping that created the structures for Xi Jinping to be able to take such an aggressive, revisionist and a revanchist stance. Unless this aspect is grasped and understood the responses to the gauntlet thrown by Xi Jinping would largely fail to achieve their purpose. Without targeting the foundations of this structure and the strategy thereof, China's influence through geo-economic squeeze, especially amongst the smaller nations in South Asia, SE Asia and East Asia would rise, despite some

delays and hiccups.

All Chinese leaders, since Dr Sun Yat Sen (the most revered leader both in PRC and Taiwan), are steeped in ancient history of China and often refer to ancient texts like *ZizhiTongxian* (Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Governance)⁷, 36 Ancient Stratagems, Sun Tzu's Art of War, Seven Military Classics, etc. to resolve extant problems and achieve the rejuvenation of China. As early as 1923-24, Dr Sun Yat Sen had laid out the vision for China by giving the Three Principles of Nationalism, Democracy and Socialist Economy to be followed to eventually surpass USA⁸. His advice was to learn from the USA and the West to achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation.

Mao Zedong failed in his attempt achieve the same through his programs of 'The Great Leap Froward', and 'The Cultural Revolution'. That was when the outreach to USA began in the late 60s, not just as a counter to the Soviet Union, with whom the relations had worsened, but also to obtain economic and technical assistance for the desired rejuvenation, in line with Dr Sun Yat Sen's vision. It was finally achieved in the 70s under Deng Xiaoping and gained traction thereafter.

The Tiananmen Incident of 1989 and the subsequent unravelling of the Communist Countries of East Europe and the Soviet Union led Deng Xiaoping to enunciate his 24 character foreign policy of '*TGYH*' (hide your strengths and bide your time) – an extension of Dr Sun Yat Sen's vision. It was aimed at securing China from a similar fate. He wanted

7 *Zizhitongjian: Warring States and Qin* by Sima Guang Volume 1 to 8 - 403-207 BCE. Translated by Joseph P. Yap. With annotations and translation of Yang Kuan's textual research on the Warring States. CreateSpace. North Charleston, S. C. ISBN 978-1533086938, Yap, Joseph P. (2016).

8 *Fundamentals of National Reconstruction*, Sun Yat-Sen, 1923, <http://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/three-principles-sun-yat-sen-1923/>

China to gain technically and economically from the USA and the West for its rejuvenation, and then compete with it for strategic space to create a new global order with Chinese characteristics. While the West and the US concentrated on translating it as '*Keep a Low Profile*', they missed the '*bide your time*' caution that Deng Xiaoping had enunciated.

To enable innovation and technological excellence in the future, Deng Xiaoping ensured that USA and the West opened the doors of their Universities to thousands of Chinese students. Jiang Zhemín and Hu Jintao continued the deception by their lexicon of '*Peaceful Rise of China*' and '*Harmonious Rise*', even as they proceeded with the rejuvenation of China. Jiang Zhemín ensured that the concerned Chinese State owned Enterprises (SOEs) reached out to secure the raw materials and resources needed for the economic growth of China. Hu Jintao pushed further by ensuring that the shipping and port SOEs invested to own/have controlling stakes across nearly two-thirds of the International Maritime ports and transportation hubs for shipping containers⁹, established shadow institutions / parallel structures¹⁰ to a wide range of US led international institutions that are designed to increase China's autonomy vis-à-vis US dominated institutions and started the infrastructure projects in SE Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and Africa.

To Hu Jintao goes the crown for being the first Chinese leader to quietly bury the Deng's dictum of never assuming leadership. In November 2006 he invited the African Heads of

9 Kynge, James, Chris Campbell, Amy Kazmin, and Farhan Bokhari. "How China Rules the Waves." - FT.com. January 12, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://ig.ft.com/sites/china-ports/>.

10 Sebastian Heilmann, Moritz Rudolf, Mikko Huotari and Johannes Buckow, 'China's Shadow Foreign Policy: Parallel Structures Challenge the Established International Order', MERICS China Monitor Number 18, 28th October 2014. Accessed 16 August 2017

State for the **Forum on China Africa Cooperation** in Beijing and offered Chinese economic help as a counter to growing discontent with the Bretton Woods Institutions led by the US and the West. The Heads of State or Heads of Government from 41 African countries attended this Summit where President Hu rolled out \$5 billion worth of concessionary loans to Africa. As one of the “Eight Measures” for Sino-African relations, President Hu announced the creation of the China Africa Development Fund to further Chinese investment in Africa with US\$1 billion of initial funding with its fund expected to grow to US\$5 billion in the future.¹¹ The loans however are touching US \$ 94.4 billion, as of 2015¹². Even at that stage, he attempted to soothe the nerves of USA and the West by stressing on ‘Harmonious Rise’; *but the die was cast*.

Considering Xi’s trajectory during his first tenure, a clear continuum of Chinese strategy can be established (refer Figure 1 below), starting from Mao Tse Tung to Xi Jinping. While Mao failed in his efforts, Deng’s grand strategy, of co-operating and learning from the West and USA for China’s economic growth and biding time till the ‘*shi*’ flows in its favour, succeeded. It can be stated that the foundation was laid by Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zhemin and Hu Jintao with Xi Jinping now joining the dots and attempting to create the edifice for the Chinese domination in Asia and later the World, the ‘*Dream*’ as enunciated by the leader revered by both China and Taiwan – Dr Sun Yat Sen way back in 1923-24.

11 Yan, Zhou. “CAD Fund to Boost Footprint in Africa.” China Aims to Boost Industries along Yangtze River. May 28, 2010. Accessed August 17, 2018. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2010-05/28/content_9903203.htm.

12 Chinese Loans to Africa, China-Africa Research Initiative, John Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies, Jan 2018, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-chinese-loans-and-aid-to-africa>

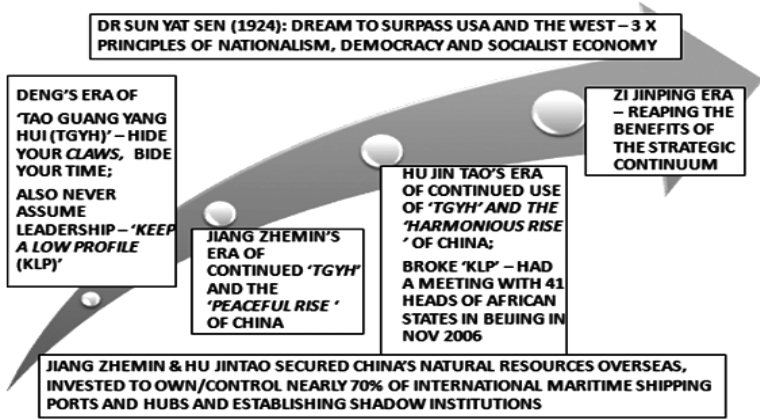


Figure 1: The Strategic Continuum of China's Dream (Self Made)

China's view of the World is steeped in antiquity and based on ancient classics, like Shujin's Classics of History. It considers that the ruling power – the *Middle Kingdom*, has a 'mandate from heaven', which it loses when the heavens unleash a *natural calamity - loss of shi*. The other contenders of power can then make a push to claim suzerainty. The economic crash of 2008 that resulted in the weakened economies of USA and the West is seen by China as that *natural calamity - loss of shi*, and now it seeks for itself a major role at the World Stage displacing the extant ruling power – USA, initially to control Asia and to subsequently replace USA at the world stage.

It feels that the *shi* is now flowing in its favour. However it also opines that this strategic window is small as other emerging powers, like India, Indonesia, Japan etc., would inhibit its unfettered control over the Asian / World order it seeks to now establish. Hence, this aggressiveness by Xi Jinping in China's posturing.

These classics define the Middle Kingdom (China) in five major geographical zones emanating outwards from the seat of

power¹³ –

- The Capital,
- The Royal Domains,
- A Pacification Zone,
- The Zone of Allied Tributaries and,
- The Zone of Barbarians.

However, China presently appears to view the world in four zones,

- Its peripheral provinces (that it needs to control);
- Its friends / allies (few and far between);
- Neutral nations; and
- Its competitors (India is viewed as its competitor in the region).

All allied and neutral states are considered as supplicants to China and this relationship is maintained only for its own benefit, the concept of *Tianxia*. China appears to be assiduously following this concept of ‘Tianxia’, as articulated by the philosopher Zhao Tingyang in 2005¹⁴. Although Zhao does not clearly or logically lay out its elements here but his views in his book, *‘Investigations of the Bad World: Political Philosophy as the First Philosophy’*, published in 2009 by China Renmin University Press, throws disconcerting light on the Chinese view of securing such a system, which transcends the nation-

13 Jacques, Martin. ‘When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order’. Penguin, 2009.

14 Zhao Tingyang赵汀阳, *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution* (TianxiaTixi: Shijiezhiduzhexuedaolun 天下体系：世界制度哲学导论), Nanjing: Jiangsu JiaoyuChubanshe, 2005, translated in English and republished by China Renmin University Press in Oct 2011.

state. It builds on the ancient system of the vassal / tributary states 'kowtowing' to the 'Celestial Emperor' of China ' and paying tribute to be able to trade with it implying a '*Unified Global System with China's superior characteristics on top*'.¹⁵

The Chinese scholars had long spoken of overcoming 100 years of humiliation and the great renewal of the nation, alluding to the 19th Century 'Opium Wars' with the West that greatly debilitated the nation and the subsequent subjugation during the Japanese War in the 20th Century. The cycle of rejuvenation is best ascribed by the Figure 2 below,

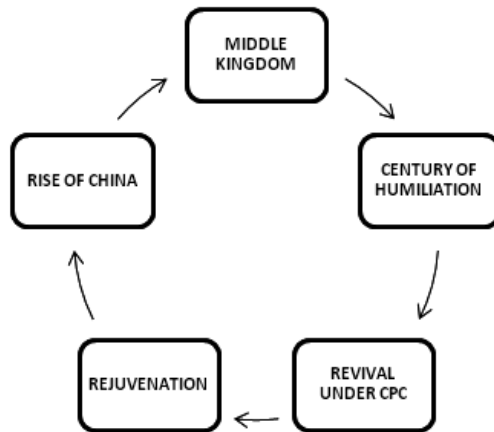


Figure 2: Cycle of Rejuvenation (Self Made)

The crux of the Chinese Strategy appears to be to re-establish the *Middle Kingdom* – a world order based on Chinese characteristics for China's sustained prosperity. Towards that end the current push seems to be for establishing a *Unipolar Asia* under China, dealing with the West and USA – its version of Great Power / Great Country relations. Michael Pillsbury,

15 Pillsbury, Michael. *The Hundred Year Marathon: China's Strategy to replace America as the Global Super Power*, St. Martin's Griffin; Reprint edition (15 March 2016), pp. 17 - 30

in his book ‘The Hundred Years Marathon’, has also similarly opined that the marathon strategy that China’s leaders are pursuing today, and have been pursuing for decades, is largely a product of lessons derived from the Warring States period. These have never been translated in English and are very popular and extensively studied in China.¹⁶

The China Dream and Its Grand Strategy to Achieve it

The China Dream was enunciated in a book by Col Liu Ming Fu *China Dream: The Great Power Thinking and Strategic Positioning of China in the Post-American Era*, where he argues that China should displace the United States as world leader¹⁷ and has listed nine steps to achieve the same¹⁸, as given below,

- (a) *Induce Complacency to avoid alerting your enemy* – as was done since Deng Xiaoping by following the dictum of, ‘hide your claws, bide your time and never take leadership’;
- (b) *Manipulate your opponent’s advisors* – its manipulation of the advisors to the US government till the early 2000s is a case in point;
- (c) *Be patient for decades, or longer, to achieve victory* – effectively done since the 1970s;
- (d) *Steal your opponents’ ideas and technology for strategic purposes* – does so very effectively from the US, the West and Russia even now.
- (e) *Military might is not the critical factor for winning a long term competition* – the use of Unrestricted Warfare

16 Ibid. pg. 34

17 Hughes, Christopher R. “In case you missed it: China dream.” (2010).

18 Pillsbury, Michael. *The Hundred Year Marathon: China’s Strategy to replace America as the Global Super Power*, St. Martin’s Griffin; Reprint edition (15 March 2016), pp. 17 - 30

(URW) to denude the Comprehensive National Power (CNP) of nations is a prime example of this Chinese strategy;

- (f) *Recognise that the Hegemon (US) will take extreme, even reckless action to retain its dominant position* – the Anti-Access and Area-Denial (A2AD) Strategy / Counter Intervention Strategy was evolved by the Chinese to ensure that the US Navy would not have a free run within the ‘first island chain’ and pose a threat to the ‘core Han heartland’;
- (g) *Never lose sight of Shi* – China has carefully crafted its rise based on this principle and it now feels that the *Shi* is flowing in its favour;
- (h) *Establish and employ metrics for measuring your status relative to other potential challengers* – Deng Xiaoping developed the metrics for CNP as per Chinese perceptions and has utilised it to inhibit the rise of potential challengers; Deng had formulated China’s concept of CNP by mid 1980s that had four major indices¹⁹,
 - (i) *hard power index* (such as economic wealth, natural resources, science and technology, military might),
 - (ii) *soft power index* (such as political power, foreign affairs, culture, education),
 - (iii) *coordinated power index* (such as line of command, leadership in policy decision-making), and

19 Chuwattananurak, Wuttikorn. “China’s Comprehensive National Power and Its Implications for the Rise of China: Reassessment and Challenges.” In Paper apresentado na CEEISA. Disponível em: <<http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/CEEISA-ISA-LBJ2016/Archive/01043de7-0872-4ec4-ba80-7727c2758e53.pdf>>. Acesso em, vol. 28. 2016.

- (iv) *environmental index* (such as international environment).
- (j) *Always be vigilant to avoid being encircled or deceived by others* – as China's CNP has risen so has its 'core interests' to ensure that it denies space to other powers / emerging powers in its neighbourhood.

Just after becoming General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in late 2012, Xi announced what would become the hallmark of his first term in office. "*The Chinese Dream*," he said, is "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." Xi's Chinese Dream was described as achieving the "Two 100s"²⁰,

- *the material goal of China becoming a **moderately well-off society by 2021**, the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, and*
- *the modernization goal of China becoming a **fully developed nation by about 2049**, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC)*

After the 19th Congress, in October 2017, and the 13th National Peoples' Congress in March 2018, Xi Jinping emerged as the undisputed autocratic leader, with his thought – 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in a New Era', and his pet project the 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) / One Belt One Road(OBOR)', the broad umbrella under which he has grouped all the ongoing infrastructure projects in SE Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Europe, India Ocean Region and Africa that he inherited, enshrined in the Constitution.

Xi Jinping appears to view the coming decades as a 'strategic opportunity' for China to establish a 'Pax Sinica' in Asia – the fruition of phase one of *The China Dream* and the

20 Xi pledges 'great renewal of Chinese nation', English.news.cn, 29 Nov 2012

great rejuvenation of the nation, though he has given some new timelines during the 19th Congress on the route to his China Dream, which is at some variance to the ‘Two Hundreds’ timeline²¹; to become,

- A “moderately prosperous society” by 2020,
- A “basically modernised socialist nation” by 2035 and
- A “rich and powerful socialist nation” by 2050.

Significantly, BRI’s implementation schedule, also enunciated by Xi Jinping during the 19th Congress, runs almost parallel to the above politico-economic vision spelt out by him,

- Phase I: Mobilisation 2013-16;
- Phase II: Planning 2016-21;
- Phase III: Implementation 2021-49.

To achieve this Dream, the strategy is for gaining geopolitical space in Asia with ‘Neighbourhood Diplomacy’, which appears to be centred on commercial penetration through infrastructure projects and selling a short term ‘economic dream’ to the underprivileged nations on its periphery. Commercial penetration is the precursor to the ‘strategic equity’ squeezed out from these nations due to the debt trap caused by these unviable projects thereby gaining political, diplomatic and geopolitical space needed to achieve the China Dream of becoming a ‘Great Power’ by 2050 – a Unipolar Asia centred around China. Hambantotta in Sri Lanka, the islands in the Maldives, and Gwadar (and Jiwani) in Pakistan seem to be an example of such geo-economic squeeze for geo-strategic gains.

21 Singh, K. C. “Will China’s ‘dream’ Be a Nightmare for India?” [Http://www.asianage.com/](http://www.asianage.com/). October 29, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <http://www.asianage.com/amp/opinion/columnists/301017/will-chinas-dream-be-a-nightmare-for-india.html>.

*It appears to be moving towards ‘an integration of the Comprehensive National Power (CNP)’ of the ‘Neighbourhood’ with itself, in a step by step approach – an umbilical connect that would not be easily disrupted, thereby creating a regional economic and security architecture with ‘Chinese Characteristics’. Towards that end it appears to be utilising its doctrine of *Unrestricted Warfare* to denude the CNP of the developing nations of the region, thereby making it easier to coerce and integrate them with China.*

Unrestricted Warfare (URW), a Peoples War in Other Dimensions and Wei Qi - The Ancient Chinese Game of Controlling Space: The Grand Strategy to Achieve its Dream.

Military strategists of China have elaborated a “unified field theory” of war – in which the kinetic dimension is no longer dominant. The most articulate example of such theory to date remains the manifesto published in 1999 by Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui and translated in English under the somewhat misleading title of *Unrestricted Warfare* (URW - Chao Xian Zhan, literally ‘War Beyond Rules’ or ‘Beyond-limits Combined War’) or warfare in all domains be it Military, Trans-military, and Non-military.²²

The implication is that China has moved on to a Peoples War in all domains against all nations that it feels can compete with it in its rise, as also the existing World Powers, to ensure that it has an unhindered rise. Considering the shadow institutions it has setup it is clear that China sees itself as the sole Super Power in the long term and is moving towards that goal in a step-by-step approach. In its march towards a ‘full spectrum’ domination of the world China needs to first secure its heartland from land, sea, space, cyber, economic, commercial, diplomatic, social and air threats.

22 Liang, Qiao, and Wang Xiangsui. *Unrestricted warfare*. PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House Arts, 1999.

It would utilize its URW over the full spectrum of domains to weaken the CNP of all countries in the region it seeks to control, and their strategic allies to ensure it is able to reshape the economic and security architecture based on 'Chinese Characteristics'. It would thus be able to coerce the smaller nations within the region to follow it as part of its Strategy of Common Imitation under the overarching concept of 'Wei Qi'.

This grand strategy of URW has eight principles, as under²³:

- (a) *Omni directionality* – no distinction between what is or is not a battlefield.
- (b) *Synchrony* – key factors in different space and domains brought to bear within the same designated time period (not necessarily at the exact same time).
- (c) *Limited objectives* – creeping forward, within limits based on capabilities at each step.
- (d) *Unlimited measures* – enlarge scope, space and domains to attain the limited objectives: limited must be pursued in unlimited ways.
- (e) *Asymmetry* – identify and exploit weak spots, and calibrate asymmetrical response to develop any situation as per requirement.
- (f) *Minimal consumption* – rational designation of objective(s) to make it a step by step approach, combine varied dimensional response to accomplish objective with minimum consumption.
- (g) *Multidimensional coordination* - ensure proper co-ordination between all space and domains of response to accomplish objective. Exploit intangible strategic

23 Ibid

resources like ethnic identity, International rules / laws / organisations, socio-cultural/ political divides, etc.

- (h) *Adjustment and control of the entire process* – Need feedback and revision at every stage to calibrate resources, space and domains of response based on the enemy's reactions and thereby ensure initiative is maintained.

Based on the above principles, *there are 24 lines of operation* that can be identified in the Military, Trans-military, and Non-military domains as under,

Military	Trans-military	Non-military
Atomic warfare	Diplomatic warfare	Financial warfare
Conventional warfare	Network warfare	Trade warfare
Bio-chemical warfare	Intelligence warfare	Resources warfare
Ecological warfare	Psychological warfare	Economic aid warfare
Space warfare	Tactical warfare	Regulatory warfare
Electronic warfare	Smuggling warfare	Sanction warfare
Guerrilla warfare	Drug warfare	Media warfare
Terrorist warfare	Virtual warfare (deterrence)	Ideological warfare

Note: - These are terms used by the Chinese, indicating an overlap of the military and trans-military domains – the 'grey zone of warfare'.

Under this grand strategy, China has enunciated its framework of 'Three Warfares', which in peacetime and wartime alike is intended to control the prevailing discourse and influence perceptions in a way that advances China's interests,

while compromising the capability of opponents to respond²⁴. It comprises of the Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare and the Legal Warfare. Several recent texts present authoritative perspectives of these and illustrate the extent of their integration into the PLA's strategic thinking and officers' curricula. These include the latest editions of influential PLA texts on military strategy, the 2013 Academy of Military Science (AMS) edition of *Science of Military Strategy* (SMS), 战略学) and the 2015 National Defense University (NDU) SMS, as well as teaching material used by the NDU, *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare* (舆论战心理战法律战概论).²⁵

Concurrently within the region it is also applying the concepts of its ancient game of 'Wei Qi' or Go - an 'encirclement game'. This game, along with the URW aptly sums up their strategy and operational art. The game entails 'multiple battles to gain space' over a wide front, while concurrently 'balancing the need to expand' with the need to 'build protective clusters to defend own interests'²⁶; such clusters are better protected when they are along the near edge and the immediate flank – hence the Chinese push to protect its edge, the South and East China Sea and its flank, i.e., South & SE Asia (including its flagship the CEPC).

This strategy encompasses two ideas - '*the Strategy of Common Imitation*' and '*Confucian Improvement*'. The *strategy of common imitation* is regarded in Game Theory as the key to the formation of a stable institution, since it is argued that

24 'The PLA's latest Strategic Thinking on Three Warfares, Elsa Kania, China Brief, 22 August 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-plas-latest-strategic-thinking-on-the-three-warfares/>

25 *ibid*

26 Keith Johnson, 'What Kind of Game is China Playing?', Wall Street Journal 11 Jun 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304259304576374013537436924>

a common imitation of the best strategy given by the leader and abided by the players will lead to a stable equilibrium.²⁷ It implies that these small under-developed nations in the neighbourhood would perforce abide by the 'Strategy of Common Imitation', i.e. follow China's lead and abide by its decisions. It would prefer that these nations then change their model of governance, akin to the Chinese model of socialism, a contrarian model to the Western narrative of liberal democracy economic and overall growth, a '*Confucian Improvement*'. The same was showcased and offered to the small nations by Xi Jinping as a model to achieve development and economic growth, during his address to the 19th Congress of the CPC in October 2017, his New Year speech to the nation and in his address to the 13th National Peoples' Congress in March 2018.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) appears to be a part of these overarching strategies to achieve an *integration of the Comprehensive National Power (CNP)* 'of the *Neighbourhood*' with itself in a *step by step approach*, whereby the accumulated gain would radically alter the geo-economic and geo-commercial balance in the Indo-Pacific in its favour. It would aim to restrict space for competing **nations to isolate** this region and continue with its *creeping assertiveness* on strategic territorial space based on *specious historical claims*. Yet the challenges abound as more and more countries are having second thoughts on trading their sovereignty for short term economic gains under the umbrella of BRI. Xi does not seem to have any answers for this challenge at the moment other than soft pedal the issue till the concerned country's CNP is degraded drastically, thereby inhibiting its options.

Concurrently, Xi Jinping is pushing for a Regional Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific (Asia-Pacific) region, without any external powers. In his keynote address to the 4th

27 Zhang Feng, , 'The Tainxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia', China Heritage Quarterly, No 21, March 2010

Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) Summit that was held in Shanghai on 21 May 2014, *‘Xi Jinping stressed that China will work along with other parties to advocate common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept in Asia, establish a new regional security cooperation architecture,’*²⁸. On 11 Jan 2017 China issued a white paper on policies related to such an Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation, “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation,” in Beijing, outlining its concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, the white paper explained the Chinese approach to achieving peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region²⁹, much in line with Xi Jinping’s address to CICA in May 2014.

28 The 4th Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) Summit Held in Shanghai Xi Jinping Presides over the Summit and Delivers Important Speech, Advocating Common, Comprehensive, Cooperative and Sustainable Security in Asia for New Progress in Security Cooperation of Asia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peoples Republic of China, 05 May 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/yzxhxzyrcshydsch/t1162057.shtml

29 Hui, Lu. “Full Text: China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation.” January 11, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2017-01/11/c_135973695.htm.

PART II – ROLE OF PLA AND ASSESSMENT OF ONGOING PLA REFORMS

The Role and Tasks of PLA.

In its march towards a ‘full spectrum’ domination of Asia, China needs to first secure its heartland from land, sea, space, cyber, economic, commercial, diplomatic, social and air threats. The PLA thus has a major role in ensuring that the growing assertiveness is backed by hard power to coerce smaller neighbours and to enable Xi Jinping to establish ‘*Great Power Diplomacy*’ with Chinese characteristics³⁰, with USA.

The sword arm of the Communist Party of China (CCP), the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) has been at the forefront in extending the Peoples Republic of China (PRC)’s geo-political and geo-strategic reach around the periphery of the Han Heartland. The occupation of Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan) and Tibet, its entry into the Korean War and creation of North Korea as a buffer state, the 1962 Border war with India and the 1979 Border war with Vietnam are prime examples of it.

The PLA has formed a very essential part of CCP’s strategy at every stage, since its establishment as the Red Army on 01 Aug 1927. Its structure and doctrinal concepts have kept pace with the overall vision of CCP and then the PRC (since 1949),

30 ‘Jinping, Xi. Addressed, “The Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs Was Held in Beijing,” China, Beijing. November 29, 2014. Accessed August 16, 2018. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml.

and has seen its evolution and transformation accordingly. The strategic continuum of 'China Dream', to surpass USA, has been a constant, based on which the PLA was restructured and modernized in a gradual manner, especially since the late 1980s, to avoid being noticed negatively by the West and USA.

While the modernisation of the PLA had made impressive strides over the past decades, its major weaknesses centred on archaic structures lacking jointness had inhibited the development of a professional force. The PLA operational doctrine and strategy also evolved from the pre-1979 'People's War', to 'People's War under Modern Conditions', to the 1980 'Local Wars under Modern Conditions'. Thence it evolved to 'Local Wars under High Tech Conditions' of 1993, to the post 2004 'Local Wars under Informatised Conditions', which has now been upgraded by Xi Jinping to 'Winning Informationised Local Wars', in the 2015 Defence White Paper. The set of 'strategic tasks that the White paper laid down for the PLA are as enunciated below (with new tasks in bold)³¹,

- To deal with a wide range of emergencies and military threats, and effectively safeguard the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea;
- To resolutely safeguard the unification of the motherland;
- **To safeguard China's security and interests in new domains;**
- **To safeguard the security of China's overseas interests;**
- To maintain strategic deterrence and carry out nuclear counterattack;
- **To participate in regional and international security**

31 Fravel, M. Taylor. "China's New Military Strategy: 'Winning Informationized Local Wars'." (2015).

cooperation and maintain regional and world peace;


- To strengthen efforts in operations against infiltration, separatism and terrorism so as to maintain China's political security and social stability; and
- To perform such tasks as emergency rescue and disaster relief, rights and interests protection, guard duties, and support for national economic and social development.³²

According to the 2015 Defence White Paper, “*The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests.*” The White Paper further adds, “*In line with the evolving form of war and national security situation, the basic point for preparation for military struggle will be placed on winning informatized local wars, highlighting maritime military struggle and maritime preparation for military struggle.*”³³ The ongoing reforms further these views and look at creating a PLA structure to effectively carry out its tasks, under the political control of the CPC.

Chinese military modernization had made impressive strides in the past decade enabling it to fight ‘short-duration, high-intensity local wars’, yet its modernization had been “incomplete” to undertake the emerging role of PLA as envisaged by the Central Military Commission (CMC) under Xi. Prior military reforms had made only limited and incremental adjustments to the PLA’s structure to meet the immediate needs for the defence of the country during its phase of ‘Keeping a Low Profile’, ‘Peaceful Rise’ and ‘Harmonious


32 China's Military Strategy, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, May 2015, Ministry of National defence, PRC, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/index.htm>

33 *ibid*

rise', since a rise in its military capabilities could be seen as a threat by the other countries who could have impacted its economic rise. To balance the  economic needs for social development projects with military modernisation, the PLA resorted to arming a few formations with state of art weapons and equipment and nominating these as the 'Rapid Reaction Forces' to meet emergent eventualities.

Seminal work has been done regularly at the Academy of Military Sciences and the National Defence University to enunciate China's doctrine and concepts for the PLA, to assist in achieving its dream. The assessments are based on extant geo-political and geo-strategic environment and lays down the trajectory for the PLA to follow, both for its modernisation and its strategy. The one constant that has stayed this entire course since 1949, and been the basis for successive strategic guidelines, has been the concept of *Active Defence*.

Mao Tse Tung defined *Active Defence* as assuming a strategic defensive posture, but using offensive means to achieve decisive ends – essentially an Offensive Defence strategy. This entails adherence to the unity of strategic defence and operational and tactical offense. Under this overarching concept China also considers any threat to its core interests as a threat to its security and an act of war. Thus a *Pre-Emptive* offensive to secure its core national interests forms part of this strategy.

By the 1980s as the Soviet Union got embroiled in Afghanistan and observing its lack of support to Vietnam in the 1979 Border War, Deng Xiaoping appreciated a shift to regional conflict and enunciated the concept of Local Wars under Modern Conditions and d the War Zone Campaign (WZC) Doctrine to fight such wars. These two aspects – Local Wars and the WZC have stayed constant along with the overall strategy of Active Defence, and have been the basis for the evolution of the PLA.

The overall Strategy of ‘Active Defence’ stayed course with the 1985 concept of ‘War Zone Campaign’, with the **Maritime Strategy** gradually evolving to ‘Offshore Defence’ from ‘Coastal Defence’ with the modernisation of PLA Navy, as enunciated by Admiral Liu Huaqing in 1986³⁴ forming the foundations of the Grand Strategy of the PLA. The above coupled with the expansion of military domain by the Chinese into Space, Cyber and Information Warfare entailed a restructuring of the PLA with far reaching reforms to strengthen its *‘shi’*, thereby ensuring that China can grasp the strategic opportunity resolutely to achieve its Dream of an Asian Order with Chinese characteristics, in its march towards World domination.

Among the major weaknesses, as outlined by Xi Jinping at the Third Plenum of the 18th Congress in November 2013, was the PLA antiquated organizational structure, which had experienced few major changes since the 1950s. Key problems included,

- (a) Lack of a permanent joint command and control (C2) structure;
- (b) Inadequate central supervision—which bred corruption, lowered morale, and inhibited the development of a professional force; and,
- (c) Institutional barriers in the Defence Research and Development (R&D) process.

Military reforms were discussed as an integral part of the overall reform program, with advocates arguing that China could not achieve prosperity without a strong military. However, building a strong military required several fundamental changes, including to the PLA’s size, structure, human resource policies, professional military education (PME) system, budgeting

34 Hartnett, Daniel. “The Father of the Modern Chinese Navy—Liu Huaqing.” Center for International Maritime Security 8 (2014).

processes, and defence industrial base. In short, the party decided that the complete structure and ‘human resource’ of PLA needed to be updated.

The Ongoing PLA Reforms.

After the Third Plenum, the PLA set about crafting a specific reform plan. This process was led by a CMC military reform Leading Small Group chaired by Xi Jinping. Intellectually, PLA analysts from organizations such as the Academy of Military Sciences and National Defence University studied lessons from Chinese history and assessed how foreign militaries, specially the U.S. and Russian armed forces, are organized for modern warfare. Politically, the PLA carried out a major propaganda offensive to cultivate a reform mind-set among rank-and-file of the PLA.

An anti-corruption campaign was also launched within the PLA, targeting both senior and more junior officers (known colloquially as “tigers” and “flies”). This effort put the PLA on notice that resistance to reforms would not be tolerated. The PLA restructuring can be understood as the product of two basic considerations:

- (a) The need to tighten political control over the PLA; and,
- (b) The imperative to enhance the military’s ability to carry out modern joint operations.³⁵

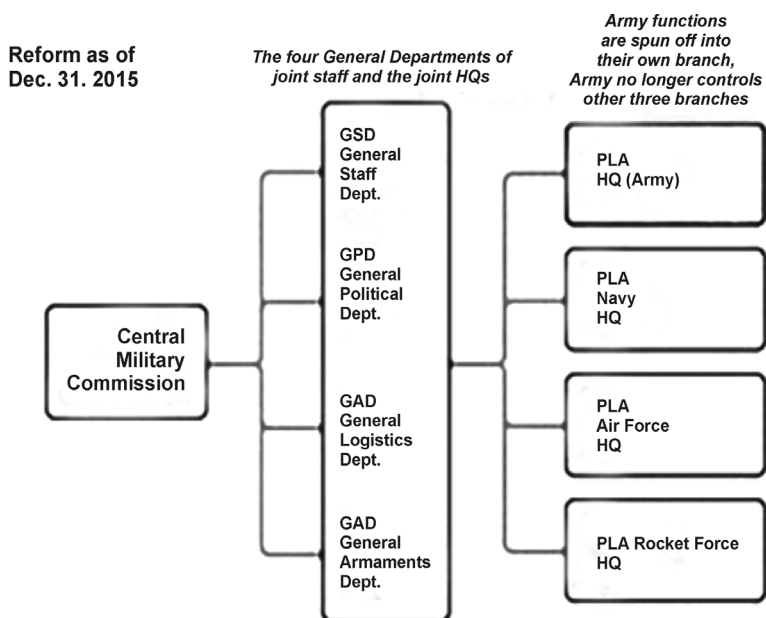
Xi Jinping reckoned that the four departments within the CMC with direct control by the Vice Chairmen over them led to large scale corrupt practices. The arrest of late Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong was a precursor to widespread anti-corruption crackdown and led to stark restructuring of the CMC to prevent

35 Saunders, Phillip C., and Joel Wuthnow. *Chinas Goldwater-Nichols Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms*. National Defense Univ Fort Mcnair Dc Washington DC United States, 2016.

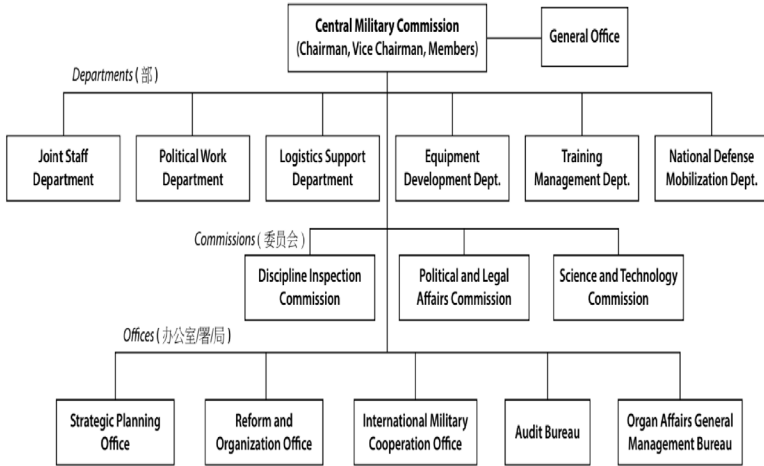
such centralised power with the Vice Chairmen. The practice of exchanging “cash for ranks” was widespread during their term as Vice-Chairmen; the practice was ostensibly common from the highest-ranking officers to the rank-and-file.

In late 2015 and early 2016, Xi Jinping sought to correct these major problems by enacting a series of major structural reforms that are to continue till 2020. These changes, part of a broader set of national defence reforms being pursued under his leadership, represent the most ambitious, wide reaching, and important restructuring of the PLA since 1949. The changes that have occurred since Dec 2015 include:

- Separate national and theatre-level ground force headquarters were established for the first time. Previously, the general departments served primarily as PLA army headquarters and only secondarily as a joint headquarters, while the seven military regions (MRs) were overwhelmingly focused on ground force affairs.



- The four semi-autonomous general departments (responsible for operations, political work, logistics, and armaments/equipment) were disbanded and replaced by 15 functional departments, commissions, and offices within the CMC.³⁶



- ❖ The MRs themselves were replaced by five Theatre Commands (TCs), which are responsible for leading joint operations in their respective regions – Western, Southern, Eastern, Northern and Central TCs.

³⁶ Wuthnow, Joel, and Phillip Charles Saunders. Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications. Government Printing Office, 2017.



PLA Theatre Commanders

Western theatre command	Southern theatre command	Eastern theatre command	Northern theatre command	Central theatre command
Cdr: Gen Zhao Zhongqi (Ex Cdr Jinan MR)	Cdr: Vice Adm Yuan Yubai (Ex Cdr North Fleet)	Cdr: Gen Liu Yuejun (Ex Cdr Lanzhou MR)	Cdr: Lt Gen Li Qiaoming (Ex Cdr Gf Ntc)	Cdr: Gen Yi Xiaoguang (PLAAF, Ex Dy Chief of Joint Staff)
Pol Commissar: Gen Zu Fuxi	Pol Commissar: Gen Wei Lang	Pol Commissar: Gen Zheng Weiping	Pol Commissar: Gen Chu Yimin	Pol Commissar: Gen Yin Fanlong

As in Jul 2018

- Both a Joint Strategic Support Force (SSF)—responsible for consolidating operations in the information domain, including space, cyber, and electronic warfare, and a Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF), with its HQ at Wuhan plus Centres in all five TCs, to provide an integrated logistics support to all the Theatre Commands, were created.
- The PLASSF is composed of the various operational elements previously under the direct subordination of the GSD and GAD responsible for electronic intelligence and warfare (ELINT/EW), cyber warfare, and space operations. The two branches that have been identified within the PLASSF's order of battle: the Military Space Force and Network & Information Operations Force³⁷. This provides the PLA with asymmetric capabilities in the sensitive space and cyber domains, directly under the CMC. *The PLA SSF will thus provide an information umbrella to the Theatre Commanders, which will reduce the Observe, Orient, Decide and Act (OODA) loop and also reduce the time for PLA to react to any of adversary's actions*³⁸.
- The JLSF is the key to building a modern logistics support system, and critical for implementing integrated joint operations, supporting joint training, and providing strategic and campaign joint logistics. Joint logistics modernization emphasizes incorporation of information technologies, the use of logistics networks and databases, and systems to monitor supply levels and

37 PLA Strategic Support Force, China Defence Today, 08 September 2017, <https://sinodefence.com/pla-strategic-support-force/>

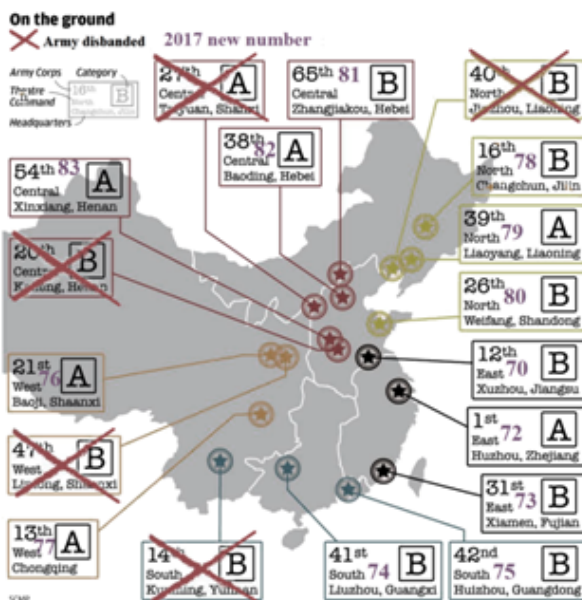
38 Lt Gen S L Narasimhan. "Peoples Liberation Army's Strategic Support Force (PLA SSF)." Defenceaviationpost.com. January 06, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://defenceaviationpost.com/peoples-liberation-armys-strategic-support-force-pla-ssf-the-game-changer/>.

unit requirements. The PLA's ultimate objective is to achieve a precision logistics support capability to meet the requirements of a dynamic, fluid battle space³⁹.

- Joint Command & Control Centres were established in the CMC and the five TCs to co-ordinate an integrated multi-service campaign directly under the control of the CMC / Xi Jinping.
- The responsibilities of key PLA components were adjusted so that TCs would concentrate on combat preparations and the service headquarters, which had previously led peacetime operations, would focus on what in the U.S. military are called “organize, train, and equip” missions.
- In April 2017 China announced the ‘84 Corps Level Units’ that would form part of this restructured PLA.⁴⁰ The breakdown of these units is attached as Appendix.
- Reduction of the Group Armies (GAs) from 18 to 13, and their re-numbering from 71 to 83 – likely an attempt to break from the past, as part of the overall reduction plan of 3 lakh troops from PLA.

39 China's Military Reforms and Modernization: Implications for the United States, Kevin McCauley, Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 15 February 2018, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/McCauley_Written%20Testimony.pdf

40 Tao, Zhang. “China Reshuffles 84 Corps-level Military Units - Ministry of National Defense.” Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan Issue Joint Statement on Anti-terrorism. Accessed August 17, 2018. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/focus/2017-04/18/content_4778679.htm.



战区	原号	新号	军部驻地	军长	政委
东部	12	71	徐州	王印芳	徐德清
	1	72	湖州	朱晓辉	王文全
	31	73	厦门	胡中强	杨诚
南部	41	74	柳州	徐向华	刘洪军
	42	75	惠州	公茂栋	秦树桐
西部	21	76	西宁	范承才	张红兵
	13	77	重庆	林火茂	李泽华
北部	16	78	哈尔滨	吴亚男	郭晓东
	39	79	辽阳	徐起零	余永洪
	26	80	潍坊	王秀斌	朱玉武
中部	65	81	张家口	黄铭	方永祥
	38	82	保定	李向阳	张孟滨
	54	83	新乡	谢增刚	卢小平

该图由 XueGL 上传到 club.china.com
 该图由 fengyue3 上传至超人军事网

41 Blasko, Dennis J. "What Is Known and Unknown about Changes to the PLA's Ground Combat Units." Jamestown. May 11, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://jamestown.org/program/known-unknown-changes-plas-ground-combat-units/>.

- Restructuring of the Divisions in the GAs to Combined Arms Brigades and formalising the GA Orbat⁴² as under,
 - Six x Combined Arms Brigades (one based on Armoured Brigade, one – two on Mechanised Brigades, balance on Motorised / Light Mechanised / Jungle / Mountain Brigades),
 - One Artillery Brigade,
 - One AD Brigade,
 - One Engineering Brigade,
 - One Special Ops Brigade,
 - One Joint Logistics Support Brigade, and
 - One Army Aviation Brigade / Air Assault Brigade in a few Group Armies.

(Only the 4 x Motorised / Mechanised Divisions of Xinjiang Military District – 4, 6, 8 and 11, appear to be the remaining Divisions, as yet)

- Creation of two Air Assault Brigades, 121 and 161 Air Assault Brigades (based on Aviation and Jungle / Motorised Infantry Brigades)⁴³, one each with Southern and Central TCs (more possible?).
- Restructuring the 15 Airborne (AB) Corps⁴⁴ from 3 x Divisions to,
 - Six x AB Brigades,
 - One Special Ops Brigade,

42 Inputs from Chinamil.com, Xinhua, Dennis Blasko, James Mulvenon, Kenneth Anderson, Xinhui

43 ibid

44 ibid

- One x AB Support Brigade and
- One x Aviation Brigade (consisting of an Airlift Regiment and a Helicopter Group).
- Renamed as PLA AB Corps.
- Creation of a Marine Corps under PLAN⁴⁵, with
 - Six x Marine Brigades (transfer of four x Motorised / Mechanised / Infantry Brigades from the disbanded GAs),
 - One x Special Ops Brigade,
 - One x Marine Support Brigade (one x Marine Aviation Brigade?).
- Likely Brigadisation of PLA AF⁴⁶.
- Reduction of 14 x Infantry Divisions transferred from PLA to PAPF in late 90s into 4 x Brigades and the PAPF placed directly under the CMC⁴⁷.
- Ongoing Brigadisation of Border Defence Forces and placed directly under the CMC⁴⁸.
- Possible creation of a Joint Rapid Reaction Force, with the PLA AB and Marine Corps and the two x Air Assault Brigades⁴⁹.

The restructuring reflects the desire to strengthen the PLA's Integrated Joint Operations capabilities on land, sea, aero-space, cyber, information and asymmetric domains. It

45 ibid

46 ibid

47 ibid

48 ibid

49 ibid

would thereby enable it to undertake operations across the full spectrum of Hybrid Warfare to deter and defeat USA and other Rising / Middle Powers of the region (like India), in South and SE Asia, Western Pacific and enable its reunification of its 'territories'. It also intends to increase Xi Jinping's control over the PLA and re-energise the political hold of the CPC over it. This was starkly reflected in the smaller reconstituted CMC at the 19th Party Congress in Oct 2017. The smaller CMC implies a very strict oversight on the PLA, indicating centralised control on all issues at the highest level.

Instead of eight regular members in addition to the chairman and vice-chairmen of the 18th CMC, the 19th CMC has only four regular members (refer to the table below) – a sign of the concentration of decision-making authority in Xi and his few CMC members.

Ser No	Name	Appointment	Age
Chairman			
1.	Xi Jinping	Gen Secy, CCP	64 yrs
Vice Chairmans			
2.	Gen Zu Qiliang	Second Tenure as Vice Chairman	68 yrs
3.	Gen Zhang Youxia	Ex Director Weapons Development Department	67 yrs
Members			
4.	Gen Wei Fenghe	Ex Commander PLA RF	63 yrs
5.	Gen Liu Zuocheng	Director Joint Staff Department	64 yrs
6.	Adm Miao Hua	Director Political Works Department	62 yrs

7.	Gen Zhang Sheng-min	Director Discipline and Inspection Commission	59 yrs
----	---------------------	---	--------

The Service Chiefs no longer find space on this high table, while the Director of Discipline and Inspection Commission's elevation coupled with the large number of senior PLA officers purged under the 'anti-corruption' drive appears to be a message to the PLA that Xi Jinping would brook no challenge to his directions. Such an *autocratic control* could lead to errors in strategic decision making as the senior staff officers may hesitate to give a contrarian narrative, fearing a corruption backlash. The repeated reference to the PLA being subordinate to the Party during his address to the 19th Party Congress in Oct 2017 could indicate to a possible discontent within its rank and file.

Further, the changes and restructuring do not, as yet, match with the philosophy that drove the major military reforms since late 2015. The three key drivers that had been identified were,⁵⁰

- i) Improving the ability to conduct joint operations across multiple domains,
- ii) Improve supervision over a force seen as increasingly corrupt and undisciplined,
- iii) Advancing civil-military relations, especially in the defence R&D.

The basic objectives of Xi's reforms since Dec 2015 were twofold: to centralise PLA 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. It is

50 Wuthnow, Joel, and Phillip Charles Saunders. Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications. Government Printing Office, 2017.

worth noting that during the 90th Anniversary of the PLA in Aug 2017, while addressing the troops in Zhurihe Combined Arms Training Base, Xi focused on the Party's goal of building a strong military under 'the new situation', which he briefly summarized as having three core elements:⁵¹

- a) Building a People's Army which obeys the party's command and can fight and win battles and has excellent work style,
- b) Creating a new military strategic command,
- c) Developing new military strategies and guidelines.

The tasks given to the PLA by Xi Jinping while making major structural changes to the CMC and the PLA since Dec 2015 demanded increased levels of joint / integrated training for its operational and tactical units, higher quality of joint tactical command, service headquarters, and unit staffs that would be crucial for the planning, command, and control of campaigns. But, the changes to the 19th CMC, which indicate very close oversight, runs contrary to these requirements

There is a need for greater delegation down the chain if the PLA is to overcome these shortcomings and be a nimble-integrated force, i.e., needs to have **a directive style of command**. Centralisation of all decision making with Xi, in the CMC, implies an autocratic style of command, wherein it kills the initiative down the line and inhibits field commanders from exploiting fleeting opportunities on the battlefield as they wait for orders from above. Thus these shortcomings would continue for some time more since the military leadership may feel inhibited from independent decision making, a key requirement necessary to win future network centric hybrid wars.

51 Mulvenon, James. "Oh Fang, Where Art Thou? Xi Jinping and the PLA's 90th Anniversary." Hoover Institution. September 11, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://www.hoover.org/research/oh-fang-where-art-thou-xi-jinping-and-plas-90th-anniversary>.

Xi could also be exerting such control to weed out the entrenched corruption within the PLA. Hence such disruptive pressures would be necessary for at least the next five to ten years, **which implies that it would take more than a decade for the PLA to become a nimble, integrated force that Xi Jinping desires it to be.** In this interim it would lead to 'mediocracy, as only the politically correct would rise up the ranks. This poses grave challenges to the PLA in the near future and places a question mark over its capabilities.

This flux in the PLA, therefore, inhibits Xi Jinping from permitting any incident to escalate into a major conflict since the PLA currently may not be fully prepared to manage or fight major battles till it achieves some degree of stability. Doklam Stan-off and the subsequent Wuhan Informal Talks could be seen in this light.

Further, it would need many years of joint training to be able to achieve some degree of integration and comprehend the employment of the drastically restructured formations, command and control structures and the joint logistics apparatus. This does not imply any reduced threat to its neighbours, as it would continue to utilize asymmetric means and URW to degrade their CNPs. With the creation of the Strategic Support Force, it has enabled a focussed and centralised effort to plan, prepare and prosecute these strategies.

The Strategic Continuum of PLA Reforms

There exists a strategic continuity even in the transformation of the PLA that was done since the 1980s in a phased adaptive manner and thus went under the radar of most strategists. The changes and restructuring were being put in place for the PLA to be better able to execute its military strategy of War Zone Campaign and URW to achieve its strategic and military objectives in the future, and yet not attract undue attention.

The necessary infrastructure, military technology and training had been put in place under Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zhemin and Hu Jintao. The restructuring done during their period was more superficial, and intended to reduce the overall strength of the PLA to ensure adequate funds were available for developing its military technology and creating the necessary infrastructure to facilitate execution of its strategy.

Concurrently, the aim was to keep a low profile and abide by its outward projection of a 'TGYH', 'Peaceful Rise' and 'Harmonious Rise'. The stress was on creating 'Pockets of Excellence', which were not only available as the Rapid Reaction Force but also to test the new weapons & equipment for further technological improvements and modifying its tactical, operational and strategic plans to effectively employ these in future.

Work towards restructuring the Divisions into Brigades began in the early 2000s. These were put through extensive exercise and training processes to finally arrive at the correct model. The need to restructure the divisions into brigades was imperative to enable a faster movement and deployment of its forces to sensitive areas. It had drawn its lessons from the problems faced in movement of PLA to assist in the devastating Sichuan Earthquake in 2008. Towards that end since 2009 the PLA has been regularly conducting exercises for such long distance movement. These long distance movement and exercises of formations, moving from one theatre to another, has now become a regular annual feature.

Xi Jinping is now able to create these new radical reforms and structures, since the basic foundations for the same had been established by his predecessors, and without which he would not have been able to execute his plans to match his aggressive stance on the World stage.

PLA's Military Objectives & Strategy

The strategic overarching thought that the PLA has followed since inception is the concept of 'Active Defence' enunciated as – “The strategic concept of active defence is the essence of the CPC's military strategic thought. From the long-term practice of revolutionary wars, the people's armed forces have developed a complete set of strategic concepts of active defence, which boils down to: adherence to the unity of strategic defence and operational and tactical offense; adherence to the principles of defence, self-defence and *post-emptive strike*; and adherence to the stance that “We will not attack unless we are attacked, but we will surely counterattack if attacked.”⁵²

The PLA considers the future wars, in the near to medium term, that it needs to fight would be against regional power(s), and NOT against any Super Power. It opines that local, limited wars over maritime and land territories assume importance, and these local wars would presumably be of shorter duration, fought on the high seas or in remote border regions that are sparsely populated and have less depth for manoeuvrability. Such wars also usually require technology-based forces and arms, capable of forward deployment.

The aggressive posturing in the South China Sea and the stringent voices that emerge in its state controlled media, on US-India alignment in the Asia-Pacific, India's firm stance along the LAC and the re-emerging Quad, are symptomatic of its fear of threats to its stated goals. Implication of its National Strategic Goals, and the new timelines post the 19th Congress, seem to indicate that it sees the first half of this century as **strategic opportunity** to dominate Asia and the latter half as the period for **strategic expansion** for dominating the World space.

52 China's Military Strategy, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, May 2015, Ministry of National defence, PRC, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/index.htm>.

To cater for such regional wars, *the War Zone Campaign* (WZC, *zhanqu zhanyi*) was first enunciated in 1985, as ‘*local wars under modern conditions*’. Since then it has moved from ‘*local wars under high tech conditions*’ in 1996 to ‘*local wars under informatised conditions*’ in 2002, to the latest being ‘*winning local wars under informatised conditions*’. The recent restructuring from Military Regions to Theatre Commands is a step towards effective implementation of this campaign under one overall commander. Through all these modifications, the essence of the doctrine has remained the same, a **three-phase operation**, with political pauses in between, as under,

- **Phase - 1: Elite Forces and Sharp Arms (EFSA, jingbing liqi)** - achieve local and temporary superiority through the concentrated use of EFSA. It entails use of elite forces (Special Forces, 5th columnists, asymmetric warfare), denude enemy’s CNP, and deny access to enemy ground forces to build up, coupled with a show of force on the borders, thereby force the enemy to come to the negotiating table. *There is a school of thought that this phase is part of its Doctrine of URW and is ongoing even during peace time (External Calm, Internal Intensity)*. If the enemy accedes to the demands, then a political victory would have been achieved, if not then the Phase - 2 unfolds, the build-up for which would have continued even during the pause.
- **Phase - 2: Gaining Initiative by Striking First (xianji zhidi)** – Seize the initiative by striking first and securing the key / critical areas, across the borders, utilizing the Rocket Force conventional strikes, air power, heavy firepower, Airborne Corps and ground forces. The access and area denial of Phase -1 continues even during this Phase. The resources used would be those available to the Theatre Commander within his Orbat as allocated for the campaign. Even as the movement of

reserves from other Theatres continues, another pause would be taken for the enemy to agree to come to the negotiating table. Should the enemy accede, then a political victory would have been achieved, if not then Phase – 3 unfolds to achieve a crushing military victory.

- **Phase - 3: Quick Battle to force a Quick Resolution (suzhan sujue)** – achieve a crushing military victory with overwhelming force in all spectrums of warfare.

The essence of the WZC (refer to Figure 3 below) is single *strategic direction with several campaign fronts and multi-dimensional space*.



Figure 3: Essence of WZC (Self-Maintaining Warfare Concept)

Each Service plays a leading role in its sub-campaign, while others play a supporting role within it. Several autonomous, sequential and simultaneous sub-campaigns are conducted in separate but inter-connected time & space domains.

The key elements for a successful prosecution of this WZC Doctrine are,

- Effective use of ‘Unrestricted Warfare’ especially the asymmetric warfare with Special Forces, terrorists and non-state actors, to force increased deployment of Military and CAPFs on such Internal Security duties, degrade the enemy’s CNP and inhibit effective deployment for border management. Coupled with it would be the disruption of the command & control communication setup, including space based assets.
- Planned targeting of airfields, choke points, military installations by Rocket Force (conventional warheads), UCAVs, Special Forces, terrorists and non-state actors, to disrupt and delay build up thereby ensuring optimum tactical and operational superiority in the critical areas to enable swift capture of the same.
- With continued disruption of the enemy build-up, ensure swift build-up of own Trans Theatre Reserves and swift capture of sensitive depth areas for an early termination of war, with military and political defeat of the enemy.
- Concurrently disrupt the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs), degrade enemy (ies) naval assets and capture key littoral objectives in the Western Pacific and / or Indian Ocean.

The five pillars on which the success of this WZC Doctrine rests is as given in Figure 4 below,

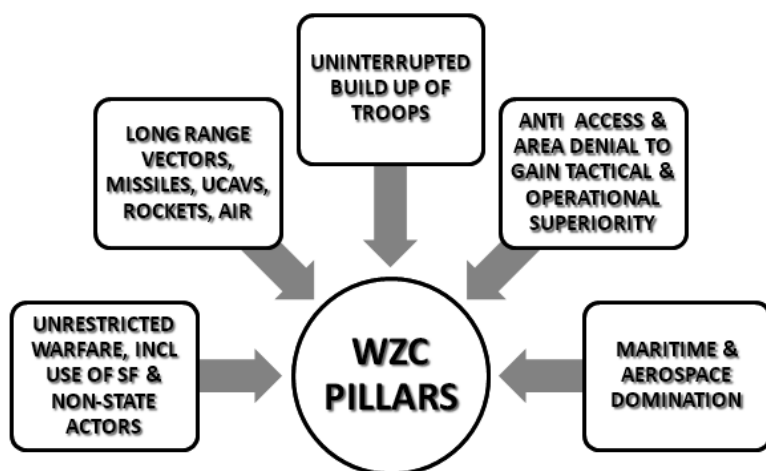


Figure 4: The 5 Pillars of WZC (Self Made)

The figure above also indicates the process of PLA modernisation put in place by Deng Xiaoping and has continued since then. The infrastructure to ensure smooth build-up of the Trans Theatre Reserves was put in place first; concurrently the Long Range Vectors were assiduously increased (in numbers, range, accuracy and potency) for its Anti- Access and Area Denial operations to inhibit any intervention by an external power in the region.

Due attention was also paid to building up its Maritime strength, air and aero-space power, vertical envelopment capabilities and its asymmetric capabilities. Having achieved the desired levels, and to exploit the window of the strategic opportunity that it feels is available, Xi Jinping has been able to attempt the far reaching restructuring needed to convert the PLA into a nimble, modern integrated force.

It would thus be incorrect to downplay the role played by Xi's predecessors in ensuring that a strong base was put in place

for Xi to build on. *This 'Strategic Continuum' covers all domains – Military, Trans-Military and Non-Military.*

While the response to the Unrestricted Warfare needs a multi-agency governmental approach, an effective counter to the other four pillars can be provided by a suitable military strategy that ensures effective neutralisation of the same. Lessons can be drawn from the US AirLand Battle Doctrine to counter the Soviet superiority in Europe, and the Chinese maritime 'Anti Access & Area Denial / Counter Intervention Strategy' concept to counter the US Fleets, to arrive at a comprehensive integrated military strategy.

PART III – IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA AND THE WAY AHEAD

‘The sky cannot have two suns’

.....*Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek*

Implications

China under Xi is determined to show the developing and the under-developed nations that a contrarian model to the Western narrative exists for economic and overall growth – socialism with Chinese characteristics. Xi Jinping showcased the same during his speech to the 19th Congress in Oct 2017 and in his New Year speech to the nation, wherein he stated that socialism with Chinese characteristics could be the path for developing nations to follow to achieve modernisation. It sees a great opportunity of expanding its sphere of influence in Asia and Africa, amongst the global South, where it could sell this narrative and so realise its ‘Dream’.

A rising, liberal and a democratic India poses a direct challenge to this narrative – proverbially the second sun in the Asian sky.

It would continue with its strategy of ‘*String of Pearls*’ with a view to curtailing India’s space within the Indo-Pacific. China is propping up Pakistan to counter India, and provides tacit support to its proxies to bleed India with a ‘*thousand cuts*’. The thwarting of India and USA’s efforts to name Masood Azhar, the man behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks, as a terrorist in the

UN, and its continued support to Pakistan despite calls for it to be named as a state that sponsors terrorism, is part of this strategy.

Along the LAC, China may currently avoid pushing the envelope with regulars currently as the PLA is still in a flux and would need time to stabilise. As such use of ‘Tibetan herders’ for orchestrated stand-offs, backed by the Border troops or PLA soldiers in such a garb, provides an escape clause to Xi Jinping despite show of aggressiveness. This does not imply that Border troops would not be used in areas where the PLA has better infrastructure and connectivity.

The challenge from the PLA in the near to medium term could be more in the asymmetric domains since the structure of the 19th CMC does not augur well, at present, for delegation of authority to the field commanders. The asymmetric threats from China’s disruptive technologies, standoff along the LAC and possible use of proxies to disrupt India’s internal security could be a possibility.

It could also push Pakistan to raise the ante against India, to force India’s hand for a conventional show down and thereby disrupt India’s rise. This would be an apt example of the Ancient Chinese Strategy, as mentioned below,

“Chapter 1, Strategy 3, Strategies of Ancient China (借刀杀人) Borrow one’s hand to kill / Kill with a borrowed knife”; Attack using the strength of another (because of lack of strength or do not want to use own strength). Trick an ally into attacking the enemy, bribe an official to turn traitor, or use the enemy’s own strength against him.”⁵³

The Theatre Command Structure ensures a focussed single

53 “Chinese War Strategies.” 36 Strategies of Ancient China (Overview). January 01, 1970. Accessed August 17, 2018. <http://chinesewarstrategies.blogspot.in/2008/11/36-strategies-of-ancient-china-overview.html>.

strategic direction for all arms and services to achieve the goals enunciated by the CMC. The Western Theatre Command (across the Northern borders) and the Southern Theatre Command (Indian Ocean Region) should be the prime focus for India along with the Rocket Force and Strategic Support Force footprints.

The current flux in the PLA, due to the restructuring and centralised control, provides India with some elbow room for the next decade, not only for modernisation of its Armed Forces but also for integrated infrastructure development and restructuring of the Higher Defence Organisation. Beyond 2020-30, by when Xi aspires that China should be well on the road to being a ‘moderately prosperous society’, India would have to contend with a very aggressive China that may not hesitate to the use limited force to secure its ‘claims’.

This now provides India with some elbow room, not only for modernisation of its Armed Forces but also for integrated infrastructure development and restructuring of the Higher Defence Organisation (HDO). Towards that end it needs to move fast on creating the modern integrated military, with a responsive restructured HDO concurrently with a restructured comprehensive Internal Security architecture. The political hierarchy and the bureaucracy have to realise that economic growth without military muscle will not be in India’s interests. Both need to grow, hand in hand, to ensure a stable and secure India.

Integrated Front HQ: Towards a Focussed Single Strategic Direction

The aspect of setting up Integrated Theatre Commands (ITCs) is being discussed and written about by many military strategists. Lt Gen Prakash Katoch (Retired) opines that ‘The need of the hour is that all single Service Commands gradually evolve into either ITCs (akin to ANC) or Integrated Force

Commands (IFCs) akin to the Strategic Force Command (SFC). The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) should exercise full operational control on the Commands. Reorganisation of the 17 single service Commands can be on the lines of four to five ITCs based on defined geographical theatres in addition to the ANC.⁵⁴

However, AVM Manmohan Bahadur opined otherwise, ‘The analogy of theatre commands of the US/China is misleading as it would only address the “under command” syndrome of the ground-based forces in India. The truism that “air power is indivisible” and works best under an airman should not be violated. Since India has a status quoist stance on boundary matters, the blocking of air assets by splitting them under ITC commanders would be sub-optimal. If one were to follow the US/China model, then there would be just two “theatres” — the Northern and Western. Both would be unwieldy considering the diverse requirements of equipment and training for troops (desert, plains and hills) — so more (smaller) commands would be required, bifurcating air assets further, reducing their potency’.⁵⁵

The problem with creating such ITCs is that there are going to be at least 3-4 such Commands opposite our Western front, and 2-3 opposite our Northern Borders. **It defeats the very purpose of having a ‘Single Overall Military Strategy’ – a focussed single strategic direction, to prosecute a War.** It also suffers from a lack of understanding of operations done by other services, the issue of reallocation of resources to various

54 Lt Gen. Katoch, Prakash. “Integrated Theatre Commands.” Indian Defence Review. October 15, 2013. Accessed August 17, 2018. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/integrated-theatre-commands/2/>.

55 AVM Bahadur, Manmohan. “Building Deterrence.” The Indian Express. February 23, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/war-army-defense-technology-in-war-hdo-us-china-4540616/>.

Integrated Commands, and the role of the Service Chiefs within this ambit.

Further, the sensitive and disturbed borders along both Western and Northern fronts, the asymmetric threats and the internal security dynamics necessitate that any changes that are done to the Armed forces should have minimum disturbance to the extant structures. Any major structural changes would lead to a major flux and have a negative effect on the overall security dynamics, something which the creation of ITCs would lead to. Also, the essence of creating such HQs is to have **UNITY of Command** for operations.

Hence, it is more prudent to step back and create an ‘**Integrated Front HQ (IFHQ)**’, with extant Commands all being in place with minimal change in their role and tasks. This would create minimum disruption and not impinge in any way with the ongoing operations.

The IFHQ does the overall planning for the Military Strategy, in consultations with the extant Commands, who would then execute their respective plans as ‘sub-campaigns’ within that overall plan. The orchestration and synchronization of these ‘sub-campaigns’ would be done as per the overall plan of the IFHQ. Such a structure would be practical, make the best use of the resources and ensure that planning for respective ‘service sub-campaigns’ is done by respective service commands themselves.

These IFHQs would have all troops deployed with respective Commands under their operational control only and they themselves would be under the operational control of the CDS. **The Service Chiefs would have NO operational responsibilities.** They would continue to be responsible for training, force modernisation, force structuring, force sustenance and administrative issues.

The air, space, information and cyber domains essentially encompass the ‘Force Multiplier’ and ‘Combat Support’ domain and cannot guarantee any victory, without effective land and maritime forces to counter the main threats across the land and maritime frontiers. In this construct, the Army and the Navy encompass strategic, operational and tactical spheres of their battle spaces, while the Air Force essentially covers the strategic sphere in its domain and provides combat support to Army and navy within their respective domains.

In this future battle field milieu with wars likely to be very intense and of short duration, the effect of destruction/degradation at the strategic value targets, one of the primary roles of the Air Force, would have limited impact on the progress of Land and Maritime operations. However, for the success of their operations, air, space, information and cyber domains need to provide effective, dedicated and integrated combat support operations. The main threat to India would be across its Northern and / or Western borders, with a complementary/supplementary threat across the high seas to its SLOCs, island territories and its Eastern and/or Western seaboard.

This aspect, coupled with the domain knowledge and expertise has been factored in the proposed recommendations. It envisages *an Integrated Armed Forces HQ under a CDS / Permanent Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (PCOSC), with (refer Figure 5 below),*

- 04 Integrated Force HQ,
- 02 Integrated Functional Commands, and
- 02 Integrated Strategic Commands.

Each of the IFHQ would be responsible for conduct of operations in respective theatres, while the Functional Commands for providing integrated cyber, communications, information warfare and logistics support to the Armed Forces.

The Integrated Strategic Commands – Strategic Special Forces and Strategic Reserves Command would provide adequate flexibility to the CDS to generate requisite influence over the designated areas of interests based on the overall strategic plan. The extant Service Commands continue as hither-to-fore and go operationally under the respective IFHQs.

There would be voices raised that India is not yet ready for such Integration. This is despite all studies indicating that the future battlefield milieu would need an Integrated Plan to succeed. It may be noted that any such restructuring needs at least 5-10 years to mature, and be able to function effectively. As such, unless steps are taken now India may find itself short-changed in future wars.

The Ajai Vikram Singh (AV Singh) Report, implemented over the last decade in two phases has given adequate additional posts in the officer rank to enable the creation of these IFHQs. There would be a need for some additional posts and some additional senior ranks, especially four star generals who would command these Integrated Fronts and the three star Apex ranks for the Functional and Strategic Commands. For the balance rank and file, there would be a need for a pragmatic cadre review to cater for these additional posts to man these IFHQs.

INTEGRATED ARMED FORCES HQ CDS/PCOSC (4 STAR GEN/EQUIVALENT)

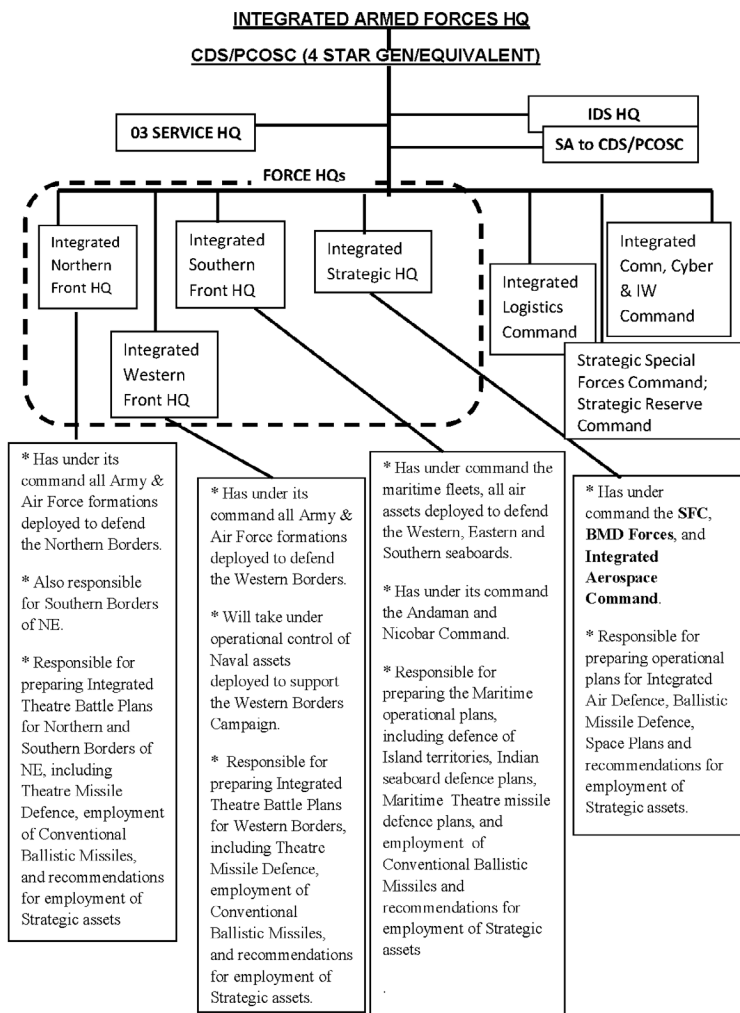


Figure 5: Self Made

Restructured Ministry of Defence (MOD): A Recommended HDO

The Allocation of Business (AOB) /Transaction of Business (TOB) Rules relevant to MOD need a review to enable and strengthen it, thereby making it capable to face emerging and future challenges. The following aspects need attention,

- The Services should form part of the MOD and cease to be 'attached offices'.
- The CDS / PCOSC should be responsible for all operations and for the defence of India.
- Creation of Integrated Front HQs, to cater for the threats across Northern, Western and Maritime frontiers, directly under the CDS / PCOSC.
- Re-creation of the Military Wing in the Cabinet Secretariat by locating the Chairman Chiefs of Staff (COSC) HQ there.

The need is for a structure that is inclusive of the military, thereby ensuring a holistic and focussed approach towards strategic decision making (refer Figure 6 below).

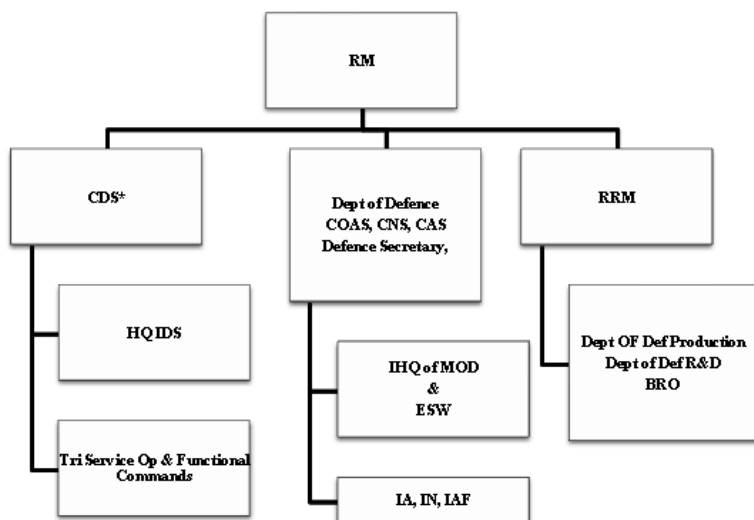


Figure 6: Self Made

*Note: - * The CDS has only operational control over all field formations, and provides input to the RM and CCS on all operational issues.*

The CDS/ PCOSC should be a permanent member of CCS (chaired by the PM), Defence Minister's Committee, and the Strategy Policy Group. Posting of Service Officers within the Ministry and equating the Services with Central Services Group A, as mentioned in various committee reports bears mention again. Mere creation of CDS/PCOSC without a concomitant restructuring of the HDO, with relevant changes in the AOB/TOB Rules would serve no purpose. The fractured and fragmented planning would continue as hitherto-fore. The CDS would be seen as another hurdle by the Services to overcome in their quest for expanded relevance and procurement priorities.

However, a wholesome restructuring of the HDO suitably backed by the creation of the CDS/PCOSC and amendment

to the relevant AOB/TOB Rules would lead to a better Comprehensive National Power (CNP), and support India's quest for greater say in the regional and world order with effective use of 'smart power' and CNP. This can be achieved if both the restructuring are done concurrently – MOD and the Services thereby enabling an 'Integrated Approach' towards war fighting – **an MOD and Tri-Service transformation.**

Overall Armed Forces Structure

The Indian Armed Forces need to evolve into a networked, technology enabled, lean, and mean mechanised and mobile force, strengthened with force multipliers and capable of responding to a full spectrum of threats. Rather than work with combat/force ratios, the need should be to graduate towards a capability based force based on the Military Strategy to fulfill the Political Aims and Military Objectives.

The proposed structure(s) present minimum turmoil and turbulence, since these are super-imposed over the extant force structures. The AV Singh Reports Parts I & II have provided adequate additional ranks to be able to man these structures, less the Integrated Front Commanders who would be Four Star ranks.

Indian Army

The Army needs to look beyond numbers and add force multipliers, like Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance Reconnaissance (C4ISR), long range vectors, Unmanned Combat Aerial vehicles (UCAVs), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Attack Helicopters, Mechanised Forces, Special Forces, Layered Air Defence & Ballistic Missile Defence, Motorised Infantry, Modernised Logistics, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics, and Information Warfare.

Need to look beyond the legacy formations and structures, especially in the Infantry and replace boots with firepower and mobility. Change the basics from **attack – capture – hold**, to **clear – secure – hold**, *with increased priority to precision targeting based on PSA leading to effective destruction and degradation of the objective and the disruption of reserves and reinforcements*. This would effectively change the way combat/force ratios are currently planned, a legacy of the ‘old school’ warfare.

Need is to restructure and convert, to save costs and improve effectiveness. Need a network enabled force that can deliver the ‘*degrade, disrupt, destroy and defeat*’ (D4) approach, essential for the change to ‘**clear-secure-hold**’ method of tactics, in future battlefields functioning under a nuclear umbrella. Concurrently, there is a need to look at creating a ‘multi-front’ dilemma for our adversaries also with relevant strategic alliances.

Indian Navy

The Indian Navy needs to ensure the security of Indian Littorals and the Peninsula by progressing from ‘Sea Denial’ to ‘Sea Control’, at least in the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea (covering Indian EEZ) and the Northern reaches of the Indian Ocean. If need be, strategic alliances with the Littoral States in the Indian Ocean region need to be considered in the medium to long term to facilitate the same.

The need is to place requisite assets, of all 3 Services, on the Andaman & Nicobar Islands to dominate the access to the Bay of Bengal from the Pacific Ocean. It needs to be viewed as the ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’ available to India. This would enable the Indian Navy to monitor movement of shipping via the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits effectively, and extend its reach to the South China Sea, should the need arise, in future.

Concurrently modernise the Navy to a network enabled maritime force capable of sustained operation across the deep waters of Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea, Western Philippines Sea, South Pacific and West Pacific Ocean. It also implies self-contained force protection from sub-surface, surface and airborne threats (including nuclear) and a sustainable logistic reach / grid, to enable a persistent presence in these areas.

Indian Air Force

The Indian Air Force has a much larger role to play in not only providing optimum combat support for the Land and Sea Campaigns but also to execute the Strategic Campaign thereby ensuring a favourable situation for the execution of the plans of the Integrated Force HQs.

Networked platforms that can get real time feeds from the surveillance assets, suitably equipped with precision weapons and Information warfare assets would be the need to prosecute future wars. The Air Force would be a key enabler in the *'degrade, disrupt, destroy and defeat'* approach to war-fighting, with intimate Close Air Support (Counter Surface Force Operations) over the critical Tactical Battle Area(s).

Towards that end, the need is to move from the capability to provide a local favourable air situation, to the capability for a favourable air situation, to finally achieve air superiority over critical ballet areas. While in the medium to long term it should be feasible to achieve such air superiority over the Western front, achieving a favourable air situation in the medium to long term along the Northern Borders would be a more achievable target.

Strategic Forces

There is the need for the 'triad' to be in place and under the command of the Strategic Forces HQ, both the warheads and

the delivery means. Further, it is preferable that the 'Sword and the Shield' be under the same command to ensure better co-ordination of effort. As such the Ballistic Missile Defence should come under the ambit of the Strategic Forces Command, and should be geared to ensure a '360 degrees surveillance and protection capability' to blunt a nuclear threat from any direction.

While it needs to be ensured that India possesses an effective second strike capability, at the same time, there is a need to relook our nuclear doctrine in line with what the Chinese appear to be propagating. While PLA does talk of No First Use (NFU), there are preconditions. The Chinese have listed out 4 scenarios for lowering their nuclear threshold⁵⁶,

56 Jin, Yu. *The Science of Second Artillery Operations* (Dierpaobing zhanyixue), ed. 2004, Beijing: People's Liberation Army Press, pp294-296. The four scenarios listed are,

- (a) *When enemy forces threaten our nuclear infrastructure (nuclear power plants) by carrying out conventional attacks.* In order to prevent a catastrophic leak of nuclear radiation, our nuclear missile forces must measure for measure use nuclear missiles to carry out effective nuclear coercion in order to achieve deterrence of the enemy's plot to carry out conventional attacks against our nuclear infrastructure.
- (b) *When the enemy threatens major strategic targets* affecting the security of the lives of broad masses of our people, *such as large hydroelectric plants, with conventional attacks*, we should, obey the coercion orders of the Supreme Command, threaten to use nuclear-armed missiles against the enemy, in order to protect the absolute security of our major strategic targets.
- (c) *When the enemy threatens to carry on high and medium level conventional attacks against our capital, large and medium sized cities, our political and economic centres* etc., our nuclear missile forces should obey the orders of the Supreme Command, resolutely send out threats to the enemy to use nuclear weapons in order to achieve the goal of diminishing the severity or bringing a halt to enemy bombing.

which India could also consider while reviewing their nuclear doctrine.

Prompt Regional Strike Capability. In the medium to long term, India should look at achieving this capability with its Tri Service assets of Strategic Forces in the region to ensure its security is not compromised. Such a capability, backed by positive alliances in the region would ensure the stability necessary for the economic growth of the region. The assets would be tri-service, with an effective and robust 24/7 C4ISR network.

Special Forces

These forces play a key role in any warfare, and would continue to be an asset in future too. It has a special place in the 4th Generation and Unrestricted Warfare scenarios that are emerging. Their domain spans Strategic, Operational levels of War, and is also a key enabler in the Grand Strategy.

The Indian Special Forces need to expand their scope from the tactical and operational domains to the strategy and grand strategy levels. The savings generated by moving away from combat/force ratios with increased priority to precision targeting providing effective destruction and degradation of the objective and the disruption of reserves and reinforcements leading to a change in basics from attack –capture - hold, to clear - secure – hold, could also be used to expand the Special Forces that would be centrally co-ordinated for Grand Strategy and Strategic objectives. As such, a separate Special Forces Command needs to be created and placed under the Integrated Strategic Force HQ.

-
- (d) *When conventional war continuously escalates and the strategic situation is extremely disadvantageous to us, and the safety and survival of the nation is seriously threatened*, in order to force the enemy to stop a war of invasion, and rescue the nation from the midst of calamity, our nuclear missile forces should obey the orders of the Supreme

Persistent Situational Awareness (PSA)

An effective PSA needs a 24/7 ISR capability based on a satellite grid, Near Space vehicles, SIGINT, ELINT, HUMINT, and UAVs, with a robust media, communication and computer grid to handle large volumes of data and sift information.

- **Space based Surveillance (SBS)/Satellite Grid.**
The grid needs to be based on **Geo Synchronous, Sun Synchronous, Low Earth Orbit Satellites and Near Space Vehicles**. Considering the progress being made in ASAT systems, such an integrated grid becomes essential to defeat it.
- **Surveillance Grid.** The surveillance grid based on Radars (of all kinds), UAVs, SIGINT, ELINT and HUMINT, integrated with the SBS would enable an efficient 24/7 PSA.
- **C4I Grid.** A robust media with sufficient bandwidth is the sine-qua-non for ensuring real time dissemination of Information, decision making, transmission of executive instructions and its execution.
- **Information Dominance.** Ensure superiority in the generation, manipulation, and use of information sufficient to enable a full spectrum military dominance. Its three essentials are,
 1. *Command and control* that provides 24/7 PSA over the battle space, and enables speedier decision making and execution of operations as necessary.
 2. *Intelligence* that provides the full range of inputs for both the commander and the weapon platforms to *'degrade, disrupt, destroy and defeat'* the enemy.
 3. *Information warfare* that confounds enemy information systems at various points (sensors, communications, processing, and command), while protecting one's own.

Reallocation of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)

CAPF units and formations (Sectors) are also allocated for the Defence of India, based on parameters arrived at between the Ministries of Defence and Home. Their deployment is based on the operational plans and are utilised for securing select Border outposts, depth defensive positions/vital areas, defence of low priority sectors and for Rear Area Security (RAS).

There is hence a need to review such allocations, de-novo as the two tasks of policing and defence are as different as chalk and cheese. Apropos, it may be prudent to earmark battalions dedicated for Defence of India duties, which would be trained and equipped appropriately for the same. This could lead to saving of many Infantry units / formations and assist in creation of reserves / Special Forces, by deployment of some CAPF units / Sectors for defence of less sensitive forward locations that are currently being held by regular troops.

Centralised Reserves

With additional reserves being available there is a need to review the way the 'reserves' are currently being applied at the strategic level. Need to restructure and place these 'strategic reserves' under a HQ, with the Integrated HQ for both fronts, while also ensuring that the Command reserves are not frittered away.

Centralised Reserves should be held at the Strategic level, and released for ensuring the achievement of the Strategic Military Objective(s). Application of reserves at various levels needs to be as part of the overall Integrated Military Strategy. There is thus a need to have a Strategic Reserve Command under the Integrated Strategic Force HQ.

PART IV – CONCLUSION

The aggressive posturing by China under Xi Jinping and his growing assertive diplomacy and the perceived strategic retrenchment of the USA and the West has led to a hype of China moving away from Deng Xiaoping's policy of TGYH under Xi. It has led to a hype being built around Xi, thereby missing the wood for the trees.

China has always had the Dream of surpassing USA and being the sole World Power. It has visions of re-establishing its ancient concept of '*Middle Kingdom*', but now at the world stage. It was Dr Sun Yat Sen who laid out the vision for China by giving the Three Principles of Nationalism, Democracy and Socialist Economy to be followed to eventually surpass USA⁵⁷ as far back as 1923-24.

While Mao Tse Tung failed in his attempts through '*The Great leap Forward*' and '*The Cultural Revolution*', Deng Xiaoping can be considered as the true '*Father of China's Transformation*'. Post the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989 and the unravelling of the Communist East European States, Deng came up with his famous dictum of TGYH – essentially to '*bide time*' and avoid a similar fate. The West conveniently forgot this aspect of Deng's advice and concentrated only on '*Keep a Low Profile*', blindsided as they were in countering the Soviet Union, initially, and Russia later.

57 'Sun, Yat-sen. Fundamentals of national reconstruction. China Cutural Service, 1953.

Each Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping has contributed in a step-by-step phased adaptive approach to creating institutions and infrastructure across the world, thereby avoiding the harsh gaze of the strategists across the World. The lexicon of 'Peaceful Rise' and 'Harmonious Rise' was effectively used as a cover for its gradual spread of geo-economic influence, especially in the regions of Asia and Africa. While Deng Xiaoping opened China to the West to become its manufacturing hub, he also ensured that thousands of Chinese students were able to pursue higher studies in US and Western universities – an investment for creating future 'innovators'.

Jiang Zhemín sent the State Owned Enterprises out to control the natural resources around the world that China needed for its growth to ensure a stable import flow, while continuing with Deng's policy. Hu Jintao added to Jiang Zhemín's strategy and both set-up a wide range of parallel structures to the US and Western led financial institutions essentially targeting the smaller marginalised countries that are seeking out new partners for international development assistance and their foreign relations⁵⁸.

China is keen to integrate its neighbourhood with an umbilical connect with itself centred on commercial penetration through infrastructure projects and selling a short term 'economic dream' to the underprivileged nations on its periphery. Commercial penetration is the precursor to the 'strategic equity' squeezed out from these nations due to the debt trap caused by these unviable projects thereby gaining political, diplomatic and geopolitical space needed to achieve the China Dream of becoming a 'Great Power' now by 2050 – a Unipolar Asia centred around China. Towards that end

58 Heilmann, Sebastian, Moritz Rudolf, Mikko Huotari, and Johannes Buckow. "China's shadow foreign policy: parallel structures challenge the established international order." *China Monitor* 18, no. Oct (2014): 1-9.

it appears to be utilising its doctrine of *Unrestricted Warfare* to denude the CNP of the developing nations of the region, thereby making it easier to coerce and integrate them with China.

Concurrently within the region it is also applying the concepts of its ancient game of 'Wei Qi' or Go - an 'encirclement game'. This game, along with the URW aptly sums up their strategy and operational art. The game entails 'multiple battles' over a wide front, while concurrently 'balancing the need to expand' with the need to 'build protective clusters'⁵⁹. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) appears to be a part of this overall strategy, whereby the accumulated gain would radically alter the geo-economic and geo-commerce balance in the Indo-Pacific in its favour.

A rising, liberal and a democratic India poses a direct challenge to this narrative – proverbially the second sun in the Asian sky.

In its march towards a 'full spectrum' domination of Asia, China needs to first secure its heartland from land, sea, space, cyber, economic, commercial, diplomatic, social and air threats. The PLA thus has a major role in ensuring that the growing assertiveness is backed by hard power to coerce its neighbours. Accordingly, slow and steady reforms were carried out to the PLA along with due stress on RMA since the time of Deng Xiaoping to move away from the archaic concept of Peoples War.

To avoid raising fears of growing PLA strength, pockets of excellence were created to field and test new weapons and equipment and ascertain battle drills, battle procedures and operational doctrines needed to apply its '*War Zone Concept*' as enunciated by Deng in 1985. As the modernisation of the PLA

59 Johnson, Keith. "What Kind of Game Is China Playing?" The Wall Street Journal. June 11, 2011. Accessed August 17, 2018.

progressed, its operational doctrine and strategy also evolved from the pre-1979 'People's War', to 'People's War under Modern Conditions', to the 1980s 'Local Wars under Modern Conditions'. Thence it evolved to 'Local Wars under High Tech Conditions' of 1993, to the post 2004 'Local Wars under Informatised Conditions', which has now been upgraded to 'Winning Infromationised Local Wars', in the 2015 Defence White Paper.

Thus, the infrastructure to ensure smooth build-up of the Trans Theatre Reserves was put in place first; concurrently the Long Range Vectors were assiduously increased (in numbers, range, accuracy and potency) for its Anti- Access and Area Denial operations. Concurrently due attention was paid to building up its Maritime strength, air and aero-space power, vertical envelopment capabilities and its asymmetric capabilities. Having achieved the desired levels, and to exploit the window of the strategic opportunity that it feels is now available, Xi Jinping has been able to attempt the far reaching restructuring needed to convert the PLA into a nimble, modern integrated force.

It would thus be incorrect to downplay the role played by Xi's predecessors in ensuring that a strong base was put in place, in all domains – Military, Trans-Military and non-Military, for Xi to be able to build on. Without such a strong foundation it would not have been feasible for Xi Jinping to take such an aggressive and assertive stance.

The current flux in the PLA, due to the major restructuring that is likely to continue well beyond 2020 by when this restructuring is likely to finish and thus provides India with some elbow room in the coming decade not only for modernisation of its Armed Forces but also for integrated infrastructure development, restructuring of the Higher Defence Organisation and right size the three services based on

increased C4ISR, Precision Strikes, Long Range Vectors, Force Multipliers, mechanisation and manoeuvre, with less emphasis and dependence on 'traditional boots' and combat/force ratios.

Towards this end there is a need to have a CDS with Operational Role. The AOB/TOB Rules relevant to MOD needs a review to enable and strengthen it, thereby making it capable to face emerging and future challenges posed by the reforms of the PLA. The following aspects need attention,

- The Services form part of the MOD and cease to be 'attached offices'.
- The CDS/PCOSC should be responsible for all operations and for the defence of India.
- Creation of Integrated Front HQs, to cater for the threats across Northern, Western and Maritime frontiers, directly under the CDS/PCOSC.
- Re-creation of the Military Wing in the Cabinet Secretariat by locating the COSC HQ there.

The need is for an HDO structure that is inclusive of the military, thereby ensuring a holistic and focussed approach towards strategic decision making. It also envisages an Integrated Armed Forces HQ under a CDS/PCOSC, with 04 Integrated Force HQ, 02 Strategic Commands and 02 Integrated Functional Commands. The Northern, Western and Southern IFHQs would be responsible for conduct of operations in respective theatres; the Strategic IFHQ would be responsible for the strategic assets, the employment of strategic special forces and the strategic reserves would be directly under the CDS, while the Functional Commands would be responsible for providing integrated combat and logistics support to the Armed Forces.

The reset timelines, as given by Xi Jinping during the 19th Congress of the CPC and the ongoing flux due to the restructuring of the PLA, provides India a window to seize the moment for its restructuring. This strategic window is small post which it would find it increasingly difficult to counter China's aggressiveness and assertiveness in the region.

Appendix

The 84 Corps Level Units of PLA⁶⁰

Army-Level Units of PLA	
Army	15
Group Army	13
Army Test Base	2
Navy	10
Naval Base	5
Naval Air Force Base	3
Marine Corps	1
Naval Test Base	1
Air Force	12
Air Force Base	10
Airborne Corps	1
Air Force Test Base	1
Rocket Force	9
Rocket Force Base	7
Rocket Force Training Base	1
Rocket Force Engineering Base	1
Strategy Support Force	10
Military Support Force	7
Cyber/Information Warfare Force	3
Provincial Military Command	28
Total	84

60 Blasko, Dennis J. "What Is Known and Unknown about Changes to the PLA's Ground Combat Units." Jamestown. May 11, 2017. Accessed August 17, 2018. <https://jamestown.org/program/known-unknown-changes-plas-ground-combat-units/>.