

## **India and China: Military Capacities to Handle Conflicts**

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### **Abstract**

Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020) type of incidents on the LAC and subsequent troop buildup of 50,000 plus for the fourth consecutive year, has proved beyond doubt, that such incidents will continue to take place in future. Diplomatic and military level talks are ongoing, but, the two sticking points of Depsang and Demchok remain. There is a stalemate between both nations on border negotiations, with delineation of LAC remaining highly unlikely.

War is not in the interest of either nation. However, India needs to remain prepared for long and protracted war with China, since era of short and swift wars is over. This is the lesson learnt from the Russia-Ukraine conflict that started in Feb 2022 and shows no signs of coming to an end.

China's defence budget is three times that of India and there is a wide differential between the capacities of both militaries to handle conflict. We must analyse PLA's preparedness levels for war in Taiwan/Himalayas, along with recent transformation in its organisation and structures. PLA is not invincible and has numerous weaknesses.

Indian armed forces are professional and can hold their ground in adverse situations on the LAC. However, India's capacity to rely on its own defence industry to support war is limited. Atmanirbharta has made rapid progress, but, needs to maintain this trajectory and momentum in future. Indian Armed Forces have made transformational changes for joint, tri-service integration, and need to move towards theaterisation for effective joint operations in future.

**Key Words:** Border talks, LAC conflicts, India, China, transformation of armed forces, jointsmanship, integrated battles, Atmanirbharta.

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## **Introduction**

India and China have been witnessing heightened friction on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) since 2012. Galwan in June 2020 was a major incident, where Indian Army had 20 fatal casualties and 76 injured; while the Chinese casualties were 25 to 40 killed and 60 plus injuries; though they accepted only 4 fatal casualties and 1 injured. Analysis suggests, that it was a deliberate, preplanned military operation, sanctioned at the highest levels in the Chinese hierarchy. The PLA was surprised and got jittery when Indian Army occupied the Kailash Range, which led aggressive firing by both sides on 07 Sept 2020, at Mukhpari Top in Chushul, Eastern Ladakh. This was the first time in the last 45 years that shots were fired on the LAC. This was a disturbing development, because even Galwan had been fought brutally by spiked machetes and bare hands. Tensions were high and it is to credit of the local military commanders, on both sides, that the situation was brought under control.

Galwan was preceded by a three months tense standoff in Doklam in 2017. It is assessed that these incidents will continue to take place on the LAC, since both sides have differing perceptions of LAC, which leads to military stand offs or clashes at amazing regularity. The continuous infrastructure development by both sides, further increases the possibility of such face offs. PLA did not achieve its strategic aims in the Galwan and felt humiliated. A stalemate is not a victory for PLA, since it perceives itself to be the larger force in the region and hence invincible. PLA will not sit easy and may retaliate to get even with the Indian Armed Forces. The question to be answered is; when and where will PLA retaliate or create a new friction on the LAC? A limited conflict can spiral out of control, much against the wishes of the adversary. The era of short and swift wars is over and India needs to be prepared, for an all-out war which can become long and protracted.

Military level talks continue to take place at Corps Commander, Divisional Commander and post level and hot lines have been set up to resolve local incidents/differences. While the communication levels have increased, the differences of both sides have not been reduced. Therefore, occurrence of conflict cannot be totally ruled out. Corps Commander level talks, post Galwan have taken place 21 times till Feb 2024, but, the sticking points on the LAC still remain.

Diplomatic level talks include Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) were started in 2012 and are held at Joint Secy level. The Indian side is headed by

Joint Secy (East Asia) from MEA and the Chinese side is led by the Director General Boundary and Oceanic Development of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The WMCC has met 29 times, with the last meeting held on 27 March 2024 in Beijing. These talks were held in a cordial atmosphere with in depth exchange of views on achieving complete disengagement and resolving remain issues on the LAC. These talks always end with statements of keeping military and diplomatic channels open and upholding peace and tranquility on the borders in accordance with existing bilateral agreements and protocols.

### **Objective of this Article**

There is a need to ascertain the likelihood of limited or all out conflict between the two Asian giants, including analysing their military strengths and transformation and reorganisation into joint tri-service theatre commands, for fighting integrated battles of the future. While China has a definite edge, India is not far behind. Self-reliance of defence industries is vital element to be analysed. Theaterisation of Indian Armed Forces is a work in progress. China is adept at playing the ‘long term game’ and border resolution is not likely to take place soon.

### **Transformation of PLA under Xi Jinping**

President Xi Jinping came into power in 2012 and initiated the PLA transformation and reorganisation as a vital component of China’s Comprehensive National Power (CNP). He has been stressing in various forums, on PLAs need to prepare for war for China to regain its rightful place in a Sino-centric world order. The PLA gradually gained in strength on the back of China’s economic growth, which enabled Beijing’s aggressive posturing in South China Sea (SCS), across the Taiwan Strait and along the LAC against India. This aggressiveness or belligerence is expected to increase in the coming decades. However, PLA lacks battle experience with the last war being fought with Vietnam in 1979. Its forays into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), SCS, Indo-Pacific and along the LAC with India, are providing it the much needed training and battle experience for future conflict situations.

The PLA belongs to and is loyal to the Communist Party of China, unlike Indian Armed Forces, which belong to and are loyal to the Constitution of India. The PLA shares a mutually symbiotic relationship with CPC and is well represented in the Politburo and Central Committee of the apex policy making bodies. The Party lays major emphasis on unquestioned obedience of the PLA to the Party command and running it in accordance with the law. The

transformation of PLA aims to prepare them for China's expanding global role, which envisages making it a joint tri-service force with new organisational structures and redefining of its operational role and war-fighting doctrines.

President Xi Jinping wears two hats; Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the apex defence body and that of the Commander-in-Chief with direct control over the PLA. The CMC established a Joints Operations Centre in 2016 and is rapidly modernising to provide combat and joint experience to its senior military leaders. The existing 17 army, air force and navy military regions were reorganised into five theatre commands. The Western Theatre Command (WTC) is responsible for manning the entire border with India and also covers the Tibet and Xinjiang region. In addition, 84 corps-size formations were created which included 13 operational corps, further organised into combined arms brigades capable of rapid deployment (Diwedi, July 30, 2022).

The 'White Paper on National Defence 2015' provided strategic guidance and the focus of PLA shifted to 'active defence'. The naval strategy changed from 'coastal defence' to 'offshore waters defence with open sea protection'. The defined timelines include mechanisation by 2020, basic modernisation by 2035 and transformation into a world class force by 2050 (ibid). Elevating China's armed forces to world class status is a 'centenary goal' of President Xi Jinping.

China's 2019 Defence White Paper (Cordesman, 2019) brings out that America is China's main competitor for becoming a superpower and its growing military forces will be able to challenge the USA, at some point in time. It blames the US for adopting unilateral policies and strengthening Asia Pacific alliances that add complexities to regional security. It states that USA is provoking intense competition among countries and forcing them to increase their defence expenditures. It describes China's modernisation and expansion of armed forces as defensive and justifies that from modern times China has suffered aggression and wars and have learnt to defend their peace. It claims that since founding of Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, it has never started any war or conflict.

The ibid White Paper amplifies that it's armed forces, defend, important waters, islands, and reefs in the East China Sea, the South China Sea and Yellow Sea to acquire full situation awareness of adjacent waters, conduct joint rights, protection and law, enforcement operations,

properly handle maritime and air situations and resolutely respond to security threats, infringements, and provocations on sea. China resolutely opposes wrong practices and provocative activities of US regarding arms sales to Taiwan, sanctions on the CMC Equipment Development Department and its leadership, illegal entry into China's territorial waters and maritime air spaces, near relevant islands/reefs and wide range/frequent close in reconnaissance. It discusses Taiwan issue being critical to Chinese strategic interests and indicates willingness of China to escalate to any form of serious conflict with US.

China has highest levels of self-sufficiency in defence/weapons production in the Indo Pacific region with Japan, South Korea and India being next. It is domestically producing more than 90% of its weapons and four Chinese companies, dealing with arms manufacture are among the top 10 companies in the world (as claimed by China).

China's defence budget has increased almost ten-fold in the last two decades, from \$22.93 billion in 2000 to \$230 billion in 2022. China generally manipulates its reporting figures and therefore, the actual military expenditure, may be much higher. Expenditure on PLA modernisation has never reduced with new weapons, based on innovations in technology; the latest being laser technology, hypersonic msls, big data analytics, quick decision making on battlefield, drones and Unarmed Vehicles (UAVs) etc.

### **Reorganisation and Modernisation of PLA**

**Peoples Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF).** This was formerly the Second Artillery Corps and converted to PLARF in 2016, as part of the transformation process. It controls the strategic and tactical missile forces of China; both nuclear and conventional and is the fourth branch of PLA, directly under the CMC. The nuclear segment of the PLARF forces includes three Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs) to be fitted on the PLARF's most advanced Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), the Dong Feng (DF)-41 (Kalpit A Mannikar & Kartik Bommakanti, Aug 11, 2023). China's nuclear stockpile from the current 400 weapons, is likely to increase to 1,000 weapons by 2030 and additional increase of 500 weapons to 1,500 weapons by 2035 (Diwedi, July 30, 2022). China's 'Rocket Force' arsenal which is estimated to be 250-300, is expected to scale up to around 700 by 2027. China has nearly 100 Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), including DF-41, capable of delivering up to 10 Warheads with a range of over 12,000 Km. The DF 17 (replacing DF-21)

and DF-26 are the medium and intermediate range missile forces respectively and have increased from 16 to 200 during the last few years. Further, the in service DF-31A Missiles are being replaced with a more advanced variant of DF-31AG Missile. China is known to have developed ‘Hypersonic Glide Vehicle ’and ‘Hypersonic Cruise Missile’.

**PLA Strategic Support Force PLASSF and Latest PLA Information Support Force (ISF).** This was formed in Dec 2015 as part of transformation to integrate PLA’s Space, Electronic Warfare, Cyber and Psychological Warfare capabilities under one umbrella (Chopra, 2022). All these elements are part of Information Warfare (IW) and will support the combat and kinetic operations, as China prepares to fight wars under ‘informatised conditions’. PLASSF is directly under the CMC. In the latest development in April 2024, the PLASSF has been reorganised into Information Support Force (ISF) and the President personally provided it with a military banner. Details of this change are yet to be known, but, this organisation will also report directly to the CMC. It will have a Military Aerospace Force, Network Space Force and Joint Logistic Support Force as “branches” alongside the four Services of the PLA Ground Forces, PLA Navy, PLA Air Force, and PLA Rocket Force (Chang, April 29, 2024).

**PLA Air Force (PLAAF).** PLAAF revised its role to include ‘territorial air defence ’ encompassing defensive and offensive operations and ‘ air space defence force ’in order to have power projection capabilities. It is likely to have 1300, 4th-5th generation fighters, including a few squadrons of J-20 and F-31/J stealth fighters in its inventory. China is still dependant on Russian engines for its indigenous aircrafts like J-20 etc, but, is rapidly closing the technical gap for its engine development. It is focusing on logistic drones with higher load carrying capabilities and greater endurance, which can be modified for strike roles in the future. It has domestically developed fourth generation fly by wire Z-20 helicopters, which are supposedly more technically advanced than the US Black Hawks.

**PLA Navy (PLAN).** The PLAN has revised its role to enhance its outreach and become a ‘blue water navy’ from its erstwhile status of ‘brown water navy’. It has got three Aircraft Carriers and the fourth one is on the drawing board and expected to be ready by 2025-27. This clearly signals China’s intentions of having power projection capabilities in the Global seas. It is competing with American Navy which has 11 Aircraft Carriers. It is majorly focussing on submarine development, which is used for area denial activities in the seas called ‘Anti Access Area Denial (A2AD), especially against US Navy.

It is developing Lithium ion batteries and pump jet propulsion for additional thrust to submarines and reducing noise levels by 90%, to operate the new generation submarines. It is developing its amphibious assault ships for carrying out landing operations in sync with helicopter operations. Additionally PLAN is focusing towards the Arctic (Polar Silk Road), the next maritime frontier. Numerically, China already has the largest Navy in the world with more than 350 Ships, although, it lags behind the US in terms of capability. By 2035, PLAN plans to have over 450 Ships. The Chinese Coast Guard is the largest in the world with over 100 Ocean-going platforms (Ibid).

**Militia.** China currently has 8 Million Militia, which are military reservists, for various tasks like Land based Militia, Maritime Militia, Cyber Militia and Tibetan Militia. It was created in 1922 to fight the Japanese and Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) Forces. Later, Fishing Militia were raised for coastal patrols. China has actively used Maritime Militia in the grey zone to secure its military objectives in the SCS; as per its doctrine of isolating the opponent and establishing geopolitical and military superiority to achieve victory, without fighting. Most recently the Tibetan Militia are being raised for the LAC.

The Chinese Militia is categorised into the ‘Basic/Primary Militia’ or first category of reserve consisting of soldiers who are under 35 years of age and have retired from active service. This includes young women between 17-22 years of age, who are organised into teams for various tasks and receive frequent training. The second category is the ‘Ordinary Militia’ or second category of reserves and include Chinese citizens between 16-50 years of age. They receive limited training and are used during wartime for logistic support or labour type of duties. Militia have advantage of local customs, conditions and language for communicating with the local people. The Tibetan Militia came into prominence after Galwan 2020, with the need to train and induct more Tibetans into the PLA ground forces. Reportedly five Militia units have been raised in Tibet Military District (TMD) which is under the Western Theatre Command (WTC) opposite India, as reported in the Global Times and covered in Claudearpi Blog dated 18 June 2020. These are deployed opposite Eastern Ladakh and Chumbi Valley in Sikkim and are likely to be used for scout type of tasks, to include gaining information inside enemy territory and giving advance warnings.

**Tibetans in PLA.** Historically Tibet maintained their own army and defended Tibet against invasions by Mongols and Chinese warlords. Post occupation of Tibet by China in 1950, the Khampa Warriors of Tibet origin, rose up in rebellion and proved their mettle. However, post 1959 the Tibet Army was defeated and disbanded. Currently PLA is a Conscript Army (compulsory recruitment) and very few Tibetans are enrolled in the Regular Army of PLA. Their current strength is 7000 Tibetans in an Army of 2 Million, which constitutes 0.35% of total strength. There are a handful of Tibetan Officers (Colonels, Senior Colonels and Major Generals) in PLA, who have been approved by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) based on good communist credentials or whose parents or at least relatives have been part of CCP. They serve in the Tibet Military division (TMD); but, under Han Commanders. Tibetans are considered uncultured, lazy and dirty people by Chinese and have to undergo various loyalty tests, before they can join the PLA. They must not have any links with Dalai Lama or any overseas organisation. There is a underlying trust deficit between CCP and the Tibetans, due to the treatment of Dalai Lama. China has been focussing on action plan to impart ‘military style’, ‘vocational training’ to reform the ‘backward thinking’ and improve the ‘work discipline’, ‘law’ and ‘Chinese language’ of the Tibetans. This sums up the mindset of China towards Tibetans. There has been a Special Recruitment Drive (SRD) to recruit and train Tibetan youth for Special Tibetan Army Unit (STAU), including recruiting female soldiers. China has formulated a strategy to get blessings of Tibetan monks for deriving religious mileage. However, the response has been tepid and religious strategy has not succeeded. The advantages of ‘sons of the soil’ soldiers, tough and sturdy, duly acclimatised to the rugged terrain and advantages of local language and acceptability to the Tibetans are immense. They are best suited for employment in scout roles like early warning and operating behind the enemy lines etc. They could also be dove tailed into the border villages or ‘Xiaokang’, which are being developed for dual use; civil and military. These developments could have a bearing on future conflicts between India and China, along the LAC, especially in the Tibet region.

### **Mr Xi Jinping’s Focus on Preparation for War**

Mr Xi Jinping has repeatedly stated since assuming Presidency in various stages/forums that PLA has to prepare for war. His strategy involves trying to redeem the situation, through the three facets of diplomacy, technology and military. Diplomacy and technology are being

exploited to create trade and military is vital for providing security and facilitating a conducive environment, for these two facets to flourish.

Every President in the past gave directions on how PLA should fight. It transitioned from 'local wars under conditions of informatisation' to Mr Xi Jinping's directions to 'fight local wars under intelligised conditions (AI)'. This implies a network forced with good Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and precision guided weapons with large emphasis on a blue water maritime force, with nuclear capability. Under the current President, it is quite evident that PLA will not hesitate in seeking war with US, over the Taiwan issue. China has an aggressive stance with India on the land borders and with smaller nations like Philippines and Brunei, on various islands issues. Smaller nations cannot handle PLA and will rely on bigger nations like the US and like-minded nations for support. History suggests that in battle of unequal nations, the weaker force can also win or prolong the war to an extent, where the larger country has no clear exit strategy. For e.g., Vietnam and US; Vietnam and China; Taliban and US; Russia and Ukraine etc. A well-motivated and logistically sound defender, can extend the length and cost of war, to the detriment of the attacker and deter or even defeat a clearly superior enemy. China is also worried of 'chain reaction warfare' with other countries, though the main theatre of war would be Taiwan. Two or more fronts of war create complexities for China, which may lead to domestic turmoil, which, the CPC has to think through.

### **Analysis of PLA Strengths and Weaknesses**

These are being listed based on authors experience in the Army and service along the LAC. PLA strengths include effective Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), which provides them good situational awareness and quick reactions on the LAC. This is backed by good weapon and equipment profile, across all arms and services, which makes PLA a modern Army. PLA officers have good negotiation skills at military levels talks, which is backed by meticulous record keeping and institutional memory. PLA officers do multiple tenures on the LAC, unlike the rotational tenures of Indian Army, which gives them a definite edge in all domains on the LAC. Availability of infrastructure, right upto the passes along the watershed, gives them a distinct mobilisation advantage, with better response timings.

Weaknesses include PLA being a hierarchy driven conscription force, with lack of battle experience and their tactical commanders lacking mental mobility. This implies PLA officers looking towards their superior officers for clarifications, confirmations and orders.

PLA is very sensitive to loss of face. In comparison, the Indian Army is a trained and battle hardened force, with vast battle experience, from the wars that it has fought with Pakistan and the counter insurgency operations in J&K and the North East.

Very little literature exists on PLA in the open domain. PLA is more inclined to being a political organisation and was historically used to control political turmoil. Deng used PLA to forcefully implement his decisions, which is indicative of its employment. It is the 'Army of the Party' and not of the 'State'. PLA has not fought since 1979; where they were defeated. PLA being the President's biggest strength, can also be his biggest weakness.

Lack of manoeuvre in their writing or thinking is a weakness of the PLA. Their inability to manoeuvre was seen in Eastern Ladakh, where they got outflanked in Finger 4, when Indian Army occupied Kailash Range. Subsequently, the initiative shifted to our side and things changed rapidly. This lack of manoeuvre was also evident in the 1979 Vietnam War. Further, PLA lays excessive focus on 'winning wars without fighting', with credible deterrence. Since they do not practice manoeuvre, they may end up losing war, without fighting. The dual Commissar and Command system does not give them flexibility either.

There are two big gaps of information regarding PLA. The first gap is military modernisation versus competing with advanced militaries like US and India. White papers of PLA suggest that they are always aspirational and trying to catch up with US. The second gap of information is how PLA will deal with lesser forces or nations.

Mr Xi Jinping always demands absolute loyalty of PLA. However, there are three doubts that persist in the minds of military planners. First doubt is whether the Party enjoys the absolute loyalty of PLA. The President keeps summoning Generals to Beijing to ensure Party loyalty. The Party must command the Generals, but, is also wary of the Generals betraying the Party. In the recent past many PLA Generals have been sacked, which does not augur well for the professionalism and morale of the PLA. The second doubt is whether PLA will fight victoriously, when needed. This is due to the lack of battle experience, since the Vietnam War of 1979, post which they have not gone to war. Thirdly, whether PLA Commanders are competent to fight and win wars. Corruption is rampant among senior officers and any Army with commercial interests, will tend to be professionally weak. Incapabilities have been highlighted by Mr Xi Jinping from time to time, to include, perceived leadership deficit in

senior officers and their failure to judge situations. They lack ability to understand higher commanders' intent and take operational decisions to deal with unexpected situations. This is unheard of in Indian or US commanders or officers. Therefore, this is a serious underlying issue in the PLA.

President Xi Jinping faces 'echo chamber effect'. This means that advisers and subordinate of an authoritarian leader always tell the news, which the leader wants to hear. They hide the unpleasant news, due to fear, or, for own career enhancement. Thus, the President seldom gets to hear the truth.

There is a serious issue of tyranny of distance, which means that PLA lacks experience in fighting away from its land borders. The wars that PLA seeks in Taiwan, would be far from its land borders and requires high degree of tri-service integration, planning and execution. Naval campaigns, backed by amphibious war fighting ability, in the Indo Pacific or Indian Ocean region, are complex and need to be mastered.

Another important element is that PLA psychological preparation to fight wars is suspect. PLA tends to repeat local skirmishes, whether on the LAC with India or in the disputed islands areas and wants to win in these local wars. For e.g. Depsang, Demchok, Yangtze, Doklam, Galwan and latest clashes with the Philippines in the Second Thomas Shoal. PLA clearly wants to win without fighting, as part of its doctrine on war fighting.

PLA is highly modernised, but, its competence and capabilities remain untested. China wishes to learn from the Russians experience, but, it is prudent not to emulate the methodology of Russian war fighting in Ukraine. Further, fighting local wars is the doctrine of PLA, whereas, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a major war and does not fit into the doctrinal concepts of PLA. The intelligence void which remains is whether, China is prepared for a long war, with a clear exit option. Lack of exit options can be seen in the wars of US in Afghanistan; US in Iraq; Pakistan in Kargil and Russia in Ukraine. If there is no exit option, a nation should not get into a war at all. In the Indo-Chinese context, a stalemate is not a victory for China.

China's top level planning/directions and execution of war in PLA is suspect. There are three red herrings to doubt its prowess - a dysfunctional civil military relationship under an

authoritarian leader, plausibility of insider critics, which is ever present and a military command structure, which is highly centralised and top down.

There are four ‘news’ - new soldiers, new equipment, new organisation and new rules. It will take considerable time for these issues to settle down and mature, since it involves change in doctrine, philosophy, training and maintenance of equipment. PLA has numerically more battle ships and fighter planes, but, their operating rates are not exactly high and it is unable to train sufficiently in higher numbers. There are major issues of repair and maint of hardware and software of platforms and huge teething problems of new equipment. PLA tries to offset the above, by non-contact warfare and remotely piloted aircraft etc.

Three Aircraft Carriers implies three Fleets. However, these need to be ready and enmeshed. Further joint operations and synchronisation of the PLAN, with the Five Theatre Commands and preparing them for a new global role also takes time. Add to that, the far too many inductions of untested equipment and technologies. The role of PLA, to include domestic security and external security is very challenging. The three Carrier Task Forces of US in near vicinity of China and land border theatre with India, does not make this job any easier.

This problem gets compounded due to conscription of PLA soldiers every two years, which involve large turnovers. Further, PLA has a ‘single child’ Conscript Army, which is relatively weaker than that of the Mao era. In this backdrop, China, like any other country will find it difficult to accept body bags, especially with declining demographic trends.

There are reports of lack of motivation to join Army in China and also reports of China trying to fix unemployment, through over recruiting drive in Army, which is not the best way ahead.

### **Jointness, Integration and Theatrisation of Indian Armed Forces**

India needs to formulate its National Defence Policy, Joint War-Fighting Doctrines and reorganise its armed forces into Tri-Service Theatre Commands to facilitate operations along northern borders with China, western borders with Pakistan and the maritime frontiers along India’s vast coast line. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) after much delay, was finally created in Jan 2020. The CDS wears three hats, i.e., Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee, Secretary

Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and Head of Tri Service Organisations. The DMA was created along with the CDS and the 170 civil posts were transferred to the ibid Department. The Department of Defence (DOD) remains a separate vertical under MoD and is headed by the Defence Secretary. The other verticals in MoD are the DRDO, Department of Defence Production (DDP) and Department of Ex Servicemen Welfare (DESW).

However, the CDS currently controls only modernisation, training and logistics in the tri-service domain and true integration requires operation control of the tri-service military assets with CDS acting as a single point of contact to the Raksha Mantri (RM). This is a work in progress.

The National Security Strategy has not been formulated, from where the National Defence Policy and Military Strategy would have emanated. In its absence the RM Operational Directive forms the guiding document for all matters military. The Union War Book exists and needs to be updated. Issues which require attention are border management on the principle of 'one border one force', integrated development of military infrastructure and fast tracking of procurement-cum-acquisition procedures. The tri-service organisations need to be 'ready' i.e., operational readiness in time and space, 'resurgent' i.e., transform as part of new India by adopting organisational, equipment and human resources reforms and remain 'relevant' to the nation. Atmanirbharta is a vital component, which is actually much more than 'self-reliance' and must evolve to include 'self realisation'.

Jointness in spirit and employment; integration of operations, intelligence, logistics, training, HR, administration and legal aspects and theatreisation of tri-service organisations, for each border, are three distinct, yet, simultaneous steps to be initiated in this direction. The ibid process has gathered momentum. Enabling provisions of common Military Act to govern the personnel of three Services, was approved by Parliament in Aug 2023. Other provisions like common Annual Confidential Reports for two star and above ranks and common training and logistics, are being put in place. These are incremental steps and many more are being taken to achieve true integration.

Jointness and integration is achieved through tri-service organisations such as the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS). India currently has two fully functioning Unified Commands; Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), set up in 2001 and Strategic Forces Command

(SFC), set up in 2003. Currently there are 17 single Service Commands -7 of the Army, 7 of the Air Force and 3 of the Navy. Each of these Commands is located in a separate geographical area and the operational roles are not congruent. As per latest reports, the Defence Ministry is finalising three Theatre Commands, namely one for northern borders with China, the second for the western borders with Pakistan and a Maritime Command for seaborne threats and power projection into the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Each of the ibid Commands would be commanded by a 'four star rank' Officer. The Government of India has not issued any statement, but it likely that the commands will be adversary specific, as explained above. It is learnt that the Government will ensure that other verticals such as Cyber, Space, Intelligence, Missile, Drone, National Defence University and Logistics Command are created so that there is no loss of jobs at the 'three-star rank' (Lieutenant General), 'two star rank' (Major General) or 'one star rank' (Brigadier) level officers, after the Theatre Commands are created (Gupta, June 20, 2023). There were talks and hope that this would be declared in 2024, as a political achievement of the Government. This is a deliberate process and would then require four to five years for actual operationalisation on ground. The operational planning directorates of the three Services will have to merge as part of Integrated Defence Staff.

### **Atmanirbharta**

This is the most crucial aspect in order to have our indigenous defence and industrial base to support our Armed Forces during war or conflicts. Post-independence we faced wars on western borders with Pakistan in 1947, 1965, 1971 and 1999 and in 1962 with our northern adversary, China. Our natural alignment was with erstwhile USSR and our major weapons and equipment sourced from them, included MIG aircrafts, helicopters, tanks, submarines etc. The negative impact was that our indigenous defence industry, R&D and industrial base got stymied in its growth. India became the largest importer of defence equipment and our technology did not keep pace with the global developments. Our preference in Defence Acquisition Process (DAP) was 'Buy Global' instead of 'Make in India'. The associated ammunition and maintenance systems were also from outside Indian shores. This implied that during war, e.g., 1999 Kargil War, instead of supplying us critical arms and ammunition, albeit at a huge cost, India was given sermons of peace. We had undergone a similar situation in 1971 war too. There is an apt saying that 'those who do not learn lessons from history are doomed to repeat it'. Therefore, we have rightfully decided to focus on 'Make in India', 'Atmanirbharta' and 'Rakshanirbharta' initiatives.

Military requirements lead to technological advancements through R&D, which further gets used for civil purposes. An apt example is the GPS system developed by US, initially for military use only, but, today has transcended all boundaries and is used extensively in all civil applications. Conventional means of fighting are getting reinvented due to technology, as seen from extensive use of missiles and drones in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Atmanirbharta has been in special focus since the last decade and 75% of capital acquisition budget, amounting to One Lac Cr has been budgeted for Indian industry. Further 25% of budget has been dedicated for R&D, which is crucial for the growth of the defence industry. Innovations are being encouraged through the Innovation of Defence Excellence (iDEX) platform, with a dedicated Ten crore budget, which is engaging industries including MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, R&D institutes and academia and providing them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D development for future adoption in Indian defence and aerospace sectors. Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI) and India US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) is bridging the defence innovation between the two countries and paving the way for vibrant innovations in the Sector.

Financial loans and ease of doing business processes, are being enhanced. The defence industry has to contribute in a major way for India to achieve its aim of a \$5 Trillion economy. As per Niti Ayog, India spends only 0.7 percent of its GDP on R&D, as against nations that are technologically advanced and spend 2 percent of their GDP. Israel spends nearly 5 percent of its GDP on R&D (TOI, June 27, 2023). While the Government shoulders 55 percent of the R&D budget, the private sector share in R&D is quite low and needs to be boosted. The World Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Organisation ranks countries based on domestic patent applications for every \$100 billion of GDP. India was ranked 25th in 2021, while South Korea, China and Japan occupy the top three spots. India ranks ninth globally, in terms of patent applications, which mostly come from IITs and CSIR. The private sector needs to contribute more in R&D and growth of India's intellectual capital should be our focus for the future.

The Army, Navy and Airforce had prepared lists of items that would not be imported any more, thereby supporting the Indian defence manufacturing industries. In the last decade

items worth Six Lac Crores have been procured from Indian Defence manufacturing companies (Tribune, March 13, 2024).

MoD estimates that the Aerospace and Defence industry is a Rs 80,000 Crore industry and private sectors contribution has steadily grown to Rs 17, 000 Crores (Indian Defence News, May 04, 2024). Further the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in defence sector has grown to Rs 2,871 Crores from Rs 1,320 Crores a decade ago (ibid).

Once the Indian defence industry grows and supports our Armed Forces, there will be sufficient space for defence exports to grow. The defence exports since 2014 (10 yrs) has grown eight times from 2000 Cr to Rs 21,083 Crores in FY 2023-24 (ibid). The annual growth is 32.5 percent as compared to last FY 2022-23 and the target is to achieve 50,000 Cr by end of 2030. Further, as per the RM, India's domestic production of defence equipment has reached at Rs One lac Cr and the aim is to increase it three times by 2030 (Verma, Feb 28, 2024). Many countries have shown interest in Tejas, Brahmos Missiles, Akash Missiles, Arty Guns and other weapon systems. Seven defence PSUs/Ordinance factories have been corporatised to make them efficient and synchronise them with the market forces. Hindustan Aeronautical Ltd (HAL) was transformed into a profit making organisation as part of this endeavour.

Two dedicated 'Defence Corridors' are being developed in India, namely UP and Tamil Nadu. UP Defence Corridor will be concentrated around six districts namely, Agra, Aligarh, Lucknow, Kanpur, Jhansi, and Chitrakoot. The Tamil Nadu Defence Corridor consists of five nodes namely, Chennai, Coimbatore, Hosur, Salem and Tirchurapalli. Work is on in mission mode with allotment of land at cheap rates, infrastructure in terms of roads and pre constructed facilities of electricity and water, at these sites. The network of airports and national highways are also been developed concurrently, in a synchronised manner. Big players like Brahmos has decided to set up facility at Lucknow in the UP Defence Corridor, which will lead to development of a large number of ancillary industries. TATAs has decided to set up its Maintenance Repair and Operations (MRO) for the ever expanding Air India at Jewar Airport in UP.

India is focussing on building niche technologies and getting foreign companies to set up base in India, with complete transfer of technology and provisions to allow exports outside

India. The Indo-Russia joint venture to establish AK 203 manufacturing facility in Amethi is a brilliant example. By Dec 2024, 70,000 Rifles will be manufactured and result into complete transfer of technology. There is a huge demand from Asian and African Countries and demand of Ministry of Home Affairs forces like BSF, CRPF etc will also grow exponentially.

The private industry, apart from the DPSUs, which have been corporatised have a major role to play in this transformation. The most crucial aspect is technology transformation with full IPR rights. The picture is fast changing, however, as per annual report of International think tank 'Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India still remained the largest arms importer in the world accounting for 9.8 percent of Global Sales between 2019 and 2023. Further, its arms imports grew by 4.7 percent from 2014 to 2023. India's country wise arms kitty was 36 percent from Russia, 33 percent from France and 13 percent from US in the same period (Tribune, March 13, 2024). Therefore, the desired shift in Atmanirbharta is still in the making and will take considerable time to fructify.

## **Conclusion**

There is a stalemate in the border talks between India and China and Galwan type incidents are bound to continue in the future. There is a military differential between the military capacities of both nations and transformation, joint services integration is being carried out in both the militaries. India's focussed efforts on 'atmanirbharta' is fast closing the gap in indigenisation of its defence industry, to support war. India needs to build its logistical stamina to fight prolonged war, if the need arises.

The PLA has many weaknesses and is not invincible. The Indian Armed Forces can hold their ground as demonstrated in Galwan and Doklam and keep the national flag flying high, in the uncertain times on the LAC. Chances of Taiwan specific conflict are high and aggressive action by China on LAC, to deflect global attention cannot be ruled out.

The focus on niche technologies to drive the Revolution of Military Affairs (RMA) in the Armed Forces must be pursued constantly. Standoff attacks as witnessed in the recent attack by Iran on Israel, using 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles and 120 ballistic missiles is the new normal. While majority of these were shot down by Israel using their 'iron shield' systems,

the American, British, French and Jordanian air forces also pitched in with this effort. India needs to learn lessons from this incident and build up its technological capabilities accordingly.

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