Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)
Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

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Title: **Chinese Air Power: Doctrine, Secondary Artillery and Analysis of PLAAF Capabilities against India**

Chairperson: *Gp Capt **Mondar Bandopadhyay**, Senior Fellow, CAPS*

Speaker: *Gp Capt **Ravinder Singh Chhatwal**, Senior Fellow, CAPS*

Discussant: *Ms **Sana Hashmi**, Associate Fellow, CAPS*

Rapporteur: ***Shaheli Das**, Research Associate, CAPS*

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The Chairman, Group Captain Mondar Bandopadhyay underscored the importance of China in the present international order. He gave viewpoints of the different schools of thought on a rising China. Some view it in terms of its geo-political importance, some view it in terms of its political influence but he said that he looks at China militarily.

The speaker Gp Capt R.S. Chhatwal focussed on China's military doctrine, strategy and military capability.

The military doctrine of China has undergone a shift from "people's war" postulated by Mao in 1949 to "local wars under high-tech conditions" in the 1990s to "local war under conditions of informationization" in 2004.

The process of informationization involves fighting for the usage of space assets, joint services network centric combat campaign and battlefield situational awareness. In 2004 for the first time PLAAF was given its independent strategy in the "Integrated Air and Space Operations, Being Prepared for Simultaneous Offensive and Defensive Operations".

Through its experience in local wars which would be high intensity dispersed operations, China has realised the importance of having access to space. The importance of space lay not only in prosecuting asymmetric warfare but also imparting time critical targeting information for the shooter to hit the target accurately. PLA seeks to maintain its space domination through an integration of its space capabilities with the capabilities of navy, air force, army, second artillery and complete access to all information from space based assets through a synergy of civil and military space programs.

The operational component of China's military strategy is "active defence". The strategy refers to the art of preparing for a counteroffensive. More precisely, the strategy advocates that China would not initiate war but would engage in it only to maintain its territorial integrity and national sovereignty. There are two components to it : attack campaigns and defensive campaigns which are put to use either independently or in collaboration with other services.

There has been a marked shift in the doctrinal influence of PLAAF Air Defence Strategy from the People's War which emphasised on numerical superiority and employment of forces in mass to the Soviet doctrine which relied heavily on surface to air missiles (SAM) in the tactical battle area (TBA).

In 1950, China formed its independent Air Defence Force on the lines of the Soviet Air Defence Forces based on a mix of different weapons of varying performance capabilities and features so that there is dense coverage from the low to the high level and consequently extending into the enemy air space. The Soviet concept underscored full freedom to ground based air defence weapons in the TBA.

With regard to China's military capability Group Captain Ravinder Singh Chhatwal discussed the PLA Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) which is China's strategic rocket force

and is responsible for the country's strategic nuclear and conventional ballistic and cruise missiles.

The primary objective of SAF, which was formally established as an independent force on July 1, 1966, is to defend China from nuclear attack. However China follows a policy of no first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons and in case of a nuclear attack the second artillery will launch retaliatory counterattacks with nuclear missiles. The total strength of SAF is 100,000 personnel and in addition to its headquarters has six operational missile bases.

The force structure of SAF comprises Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM), Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM), Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM), Short Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBM) and Cruise Missiles. In terms of cruise missiles the main GLCM in the SAF inventory is Dong Hai-10. Further the PLAAF has also deployed the YJ-63 air launched land attack cruise missile (LACM). At present it is developing two new air launched LACMs with 1500 km range and 10m accuracy. It is contemplated that although China has the capability to arm cruise missiles with nuclear warheads, however, the Second Artillery cruise missiles are likely to be armed with conventional warheads only.

The next significant issue highlighted by the speaker was the location of China's missile bases. It was identified that the Second Artillery is organised in six operational missile bases which include Shenyang in Liaoning province in north eastern China, Tunxi in Anshui province in south eastern China, Kunming in Yunan province in south China, Luoyang in Henan province, Huaihua in Hunan province in southern China, Xining in north central China and one central storage complex.

It was interesting to observe that the brigades for contingency purpose against India are located near Korla in Xinjiang province. Also the missile bases at Kunming and Xining are of concern to India due to their location. The DF-21 ballistic missile and DH-10 LACM have the capability to target north, east and central India. Although no permanent brigade is located in Tibet yet SRBM, MRBM and cruise missiles are mobile systems and can be moved to Tibet if required.

Owing to PLA's potential to use its conventional missiles as part of its "Anti-Access Strategy" in case of any future conflict with India, the speaker suggested certain upgradations that could be worked upon by the IAF. These were:

- the need to upgrade its terminal air defences;
- provision of ABM (Anti Ballistic Missile) capability by long range SAMs against China's ballistic missiles;
- Since cruise missiles fly at low levels therefore to counter them the first requirement is detection. Thus, IAF needs to consider development of low cost aerostat radars to pick up cruise missiles;
- Deployment of CIWS (Close in Weapon Systems) of Vulcan Phalanx class (to destroy cruise missiles) needs to be considered.
- IAF needs to use passive methods to absorb damage by any missiles which get through the defences such as adequate number of hardened aircraft shelters (HAS) to park fighter aircraft and deployment of modern means of runway repair material in the form of aluminium mats which can keep the runway down time to minutes instead of hours.

However, the best defensive strategy against China's missiles is to deter them by developing similar capabilities so that India can strike targets in China.

PLA is organised on a regional basis with the country being divided into seven military regions (MRs). There are only two military regions opposite India: Lanzhou is opposite Ladakh and Chengdu is opposite India's north east region and parts of the central sector.

However, against India PLAAF will have limitations in deploying fighter aircraft due to limited number of airfields in Tibet and inadequacy of airfield infrastructure. Therefore, it is likely that PLAAF will deploy its mobile SAMs of S-300 class and other SAMs to create a strong air defence umbrella in the TBA and try to achieve air superiority in the missile zones.

The discussant Ms Sana Hashmi, an Associate Fellow at the centre identified that though the paper was structurally extensive and rich in content yet there was an excessive use of secondary sources. She suggested greater input of information from primary sources. She emphasised on a greater attention to certain facts that deserved mention in the presentation, such as : the PLA modernization which is integral to China's national interest, China's attempt to procure Su-35, the increase in the number of Fourth generation aircrafts being fielded by the country, its endeavour to project itself as a geo-political power in East Asia, the necessity to bridge the asymmetry between PLAAF and the IAF by the Indian side and finally the need to seek measures to avert the escalation of the border dispute between China and India.

During the **Question and Answer** session some significant information came to the fore. It emerged that Indian Air Force possesses six tankers as against China's ten (more have been ordered). IAF can also refuel Jaguar, Su-30 and Mirage 2000. Tunnels for storage

of Chinese aircraft are not constructed in any of the airfields near India. They have been built for the Taiwan contingency. The Urumqi base is well equipped with tunnels. Further China considers Taiwan and Japan, and not India, as its primary threat. It is aware that in a situation of conflict with Taiwan the USA will intrude, as a result of which it is developing its Second Artillery Force. Another area of tension is the South China Sea, an abode of Small Island nations with which China shares territorial disputes. Since it is aware that the US could intervene in this area as well, the PLAAF aims to take every measure to prevent the US intervention and consequently curb the possibility of a war.
