CHINA'S WESTERN THEATRE COMMAND: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The military reforms currently underway in China are leading to a major overhaul of the prevailing Chinese military system. While the process was initiated in January 2016, over the course of the past year and a half, what seems to have emerged is a major shake-up of the military structure, unlike the ones witnessed in the past. With the dissolution of the four very powerful General Departments, namely the General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department and the General Armament Department, these have been replaced by 15 functional units. These 15 functional units have been divided into three categories – seven departments, three commissions and five affiliated offices. The intent of this is to ensure more accountability and transparency in the running of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) administration.

Further, there is also the introduction of new divisions within the Services, along with the upgradation of an existing division into a fully independent Service in the case of the PLA Second Artillery Corps into the PLA Rocket Force. Similarly, there is also the establishment of a new entity called the

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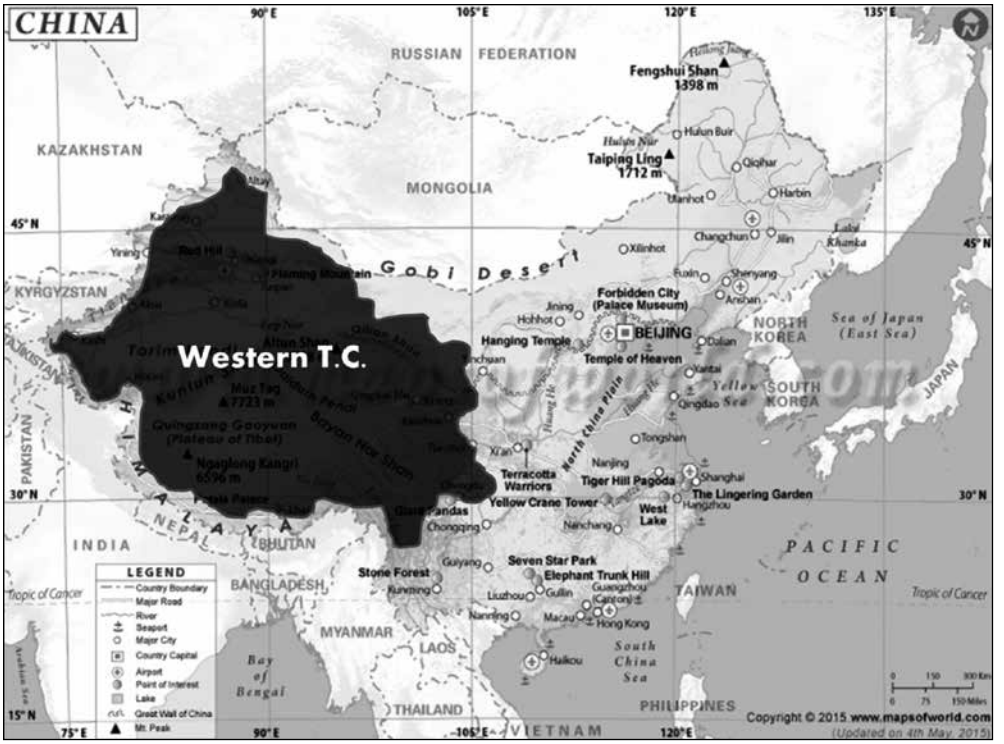
PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) for carrying out cyber and technical reconnaissance, including information warfare. This has been established after the closure of the four General Departments that were under the Central Military Commission (CMC). In this, the PLA General Staff Headquarters was responsible for collecting military information and overseeing military intelligence collection, and the Foreign Affairs Bureau of the former PLA General Political Department was responsible for political warfare and propaganda, carrying out technical reconnaissance, cyber intelligence and electronic warfare. It can be said that the newly established entity, PLASSF, would act as an information umbrella for the various military Services. These are ongoing reform processes and are expected to be completed only by 2020; it is only then that we would have a clearer picture.

The newly established Western Theatre Command (TC) is more of a concern for India and this paper attempts to look into some of the possible threats that could emerge from this development. This threat perception is based on the assumption that a unified theatre command along with the various military reforms that are under way would create a more cohesive, agile and lethal PLA force. Given the relations between India and China—along with the persisting territorial dispute – it becomes imperative for India to study these developments carefully and gear up in terms of its own defensive as well as its offensive capabilities.

THE WESTERN THEATRE COMMAND

One of the major outcomes of the ongoing military reform process is the restructuring of China's seven Military Regions (MRs) into the more American military styled and oriented Theatre Commands (TCs), leading to the reconfiguration of the seven MRs into five TCs. Each of these five new TCs will focus on combat operations and enhancing joint training of subordinate forces based on war-time missions. The formation of the five TCs will ensure better streamlining and the quick and more efficient deployment of military assets on land, air and sea. Furthermore, unlike the old MR system that was oriented for multi-layered defence, the new TCs are for head-on and proactive defence.

Fig 1: Representative Western Theatre Command in the Map of China[1]



The new commands include the Eastern TC based on the former Nanjing MR responsible for Taiwan operations and territorial disputes with Japan; the Southern TC, based on the Guangzhou MR, responsible for operations against Vietnam and the South China Sea region, as well as providing forces for operations in a Taiwan conflict; the Northern TC based on Shenyang MR plus Inner Mongolia and Shandong provinces, responsible for responding to potential instability on the Korean peninsula or possibly supporting operations against Japan; and the Central TC, based on the Beijing and Jinan MRs, with responsibility for capital defence and serving as a strategic reserve to reinforce the other theatres. The Western TC is the largest of the five commands in terms of size as it encompasses almost half of China's

1. China Map, "Maps of China", http://www.mapsofworld.com/china/. Accessed on March 30, 2017.

One major inference from the ongoing PLA military reorganisation is that the PLA Army has managed to retain its traditional control over the PLA – with many of the army generals being just reshuffled into the various departments, including being given charge over the newly formed TCs – mainly to ensure continuity during this reform transition and prevent dissent within the ranks and Services.

land territory. The map in Fig 1 is a rough representation of the area covered under the newly formed Western TC.

The Western TC has been established by merging the former Chengdu and Lanzhou MRs, and would represent the most expansive amongst the newly established Theatre Commands, with complex internal and external operational requirements, as it covers the entire Indian subcontinent, including the countries along the Mekong river. The Western TC, headquartered in Chengdu, includes the services, departments and other specialised elements. Embedded into this TC would be the ground forces from the army, all air support, including combat and defence from the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and the additional missile support force from the PLA Rocket Force. There would also be the PLA Strategic Support Force that would provide an information umbrella in order to ensure information symmetry and, thus, ensure coordination during the conduct of military operations. However, it must be reiterated here that since the reform is still an ongoing process, each TC established will require some time to fully transition from the army dominated MR Headquarters (HQ) towards establishing joint commands since it will take a considerable amount of time for the now integrated Services to gain familiarity, as well as train personnel, in their newly joint positions. Furthermore, one major inference from the ongoing PLA military reorganisation is that the PLA Army has managed to retain its traditional control over the PLA – with many of the army generals being just reshuffled into the various departments, including being given charge over the newly formed TCs – mainly to ensure continuity during this reform transition and prevent dissent within the ranks and Services. The next decade could see some changes in this trend, with the first major overhaul

of the CMC due in 2017, when as many as half of the present generals will retire. Furthermore, we have the former PLAAF chief, Gen Xu Qiliang, who has been appointed as one of the two vice-chairmen of the CMC, with President Xi Jinping as the chairman. This indicates a further change in the structure of the PLA in the future, with a more diverse representation from the various Services of the PLA.

The Western TC, with its headquarters in Chengdu, came as a consequence of the merging of the Lanzhou MR with the Chengdu MR. The Chengdu-based Western TC is already experienced in steering the military operations of the Tibet military command – whose status had been elevated in 2016 by one level compared to other provincial-level military districts placed under the PLA Army – while most provincial-level military districts are under the National Defence Mobilisation Department of the CMC, with responsibility for reserves, militia and conscription.

PLA Army Deployment

The commander of the Western TC is Army Gen Zhao Zongqi, former commander of the Jinan MR. Gen Zhao had participated in combat against Vietnam, served as commander of the 52nd Mountain Brigade in the early 1990s, and was commander of the 14th Group Army (GA). These experiences provided him extensive operational knowledge of mountain warfare, which will be valuable while dealing with the topography of the region under the Western TC.[2] Gen Zhao came to India for an official visit on December 8, 2016. During his three-day visit, he met the Indian Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), the deputy chief as well as the Eastern Army Commander, Lt Gen Praveen Bakshi. In the meetings, both sides agreed to pay attention to the cooperation between the PLA Western TC and the Indian military. The two sides also agreed to jointly implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the

2. Kevin McCauley, "Snapshot: China's Western Theater Command", *China Brief,* The Jamestown Foundation, vol. 17, issue: 1, https://jamestown.org/program/snapshot-chinas-western-theater-command/. Accessed on March 30, 2017.

two countries and the relevant agreements between the two countries and militaries, promote mutual understanding, enhance pragmatic cooperation, safeguard peace and stability in the border areas and try their level best to make positive contributions towards the healthy and stable development in the relations between the two countries and their militaries. It must be realised that the Western TC, with its headquarters in Chengdu, came as a consequence of the merging of the Lanzhou MR with the Chengdu MR. The Chengdu-based Western TC is already experienced in steering the military operations of the Tibet military command – whose status had been elevated in 2016 by one level compared to other provincial-level military districts placed under the PLA Army – while most provincial-level military districts are under the National Defence Mobilisation Department of the CMC, with responsibility for reserves, militia and conscription. The military action in the Tibet military command requires specialist mountain skills and long-range capabilities, which need the deployment of special military resources; the selection of Gen Zhao is very strategic, given his experience in operating in this kind of topography that includes desert and high mountains.[3]

The Tibet Military Command will be responsible for operations against India, at least in the Arunachal Pradesh area, training forces for specialised high-altitude mountain warfare and long-range mobility for any future military contingency. Further, the Xinjiang Military District is also under PLA Army command. Some of the main army units that would be under the Western TC are the 13th, 47th and 21st Group Armies (GAs) typically consisting of 46,300 troops and up to four divisions that include infantry, armour, artillery, air defence, airborne, and air support elements. The 47th GA is a 'Category B', unit indicating that it still has outdated equipment and is smaller than the 'Category A' army unit. It is headquartered in Lintong, Shaanxi, and comprises a division of motorised infantry brigade, an armoured brigade, an anti-aircraft artillery brigade and an artillery brigade

3. Atul Aneja, "Head of China's Western Theater Command Vists India", *The Hindu*, December 15, 2016, http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Head-of-China%E2%80%99s-Western-Theater-Command-visits-India/article16833513.ece. Accessed on April 13, 2017.

with speciality in operating in complex terrain.[4] The 21st GA is a 'Category A' unit, well-endowed for defensive as well as offensive capabilities along with a mobile force.[5] Both the 47th and 21st GA units were originally from the former Lanzhou MR that represents the troublesome regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as minding the long borders with India. The 13th GA, formerly of the Chengdu MR, is much better equipped than the 14th GA that was allocated to the Southern TC. It has superior mobility, which is appropriate since it must cover a larger swathe of territory.[6] The 13th GA consists of two divisions, an armoured brigade, an anti-aircraft artillery brigade, a field artillery brigade and a communications regiment. The unit is considered to be a 'Category A' unit, indicating that the 13th GA's subordinate units are fully trained and have been fully equipped with modern weapons.[7] Its inclusion into the Western TC indicates that the Indian frontier is the primary area for any future combat operations, while the other two GAs would lend support.

PLA Rocket Force Deployment

The PLA Rocket force is an upgrade of the PLA Second Artillery Corps (SAC) – an outcome of the ongoing PLA military reform. The PLA Rocket Force has become an independent service under the CMC and has been defined as "the strategic deterrent for the PLA" by President Xi. It will absorb all conventional as well as nuclear weapons carrying missiles under one command and will command all the three legs of China's nuclear triad that include its strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine launched ballistic missiles. The former PLA SAC was the component of the PLA that controlled China's nuclear ballistic and conventional missiles.

4. "47th Group Army", *Global Security.org,* http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/47ga.htm. Accessed on April 6, 2017.
5. "Group Armies/Combined Corps", *Global Security.org,* http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/ga.htm. Accessed on April 6, 2017.
6. Gordon Arthur, "PLA Theatre Commands Outlined", *Shephard,* http://www.shephardmedia.com/news/defence-notes/pla-theatre-commands-outlined/. Accessed on March 29, 2017.
7. "13th Group Army or Chuan Army", *Global Security.org,* http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/13ga.htm. Accessed on April 6, 2017.

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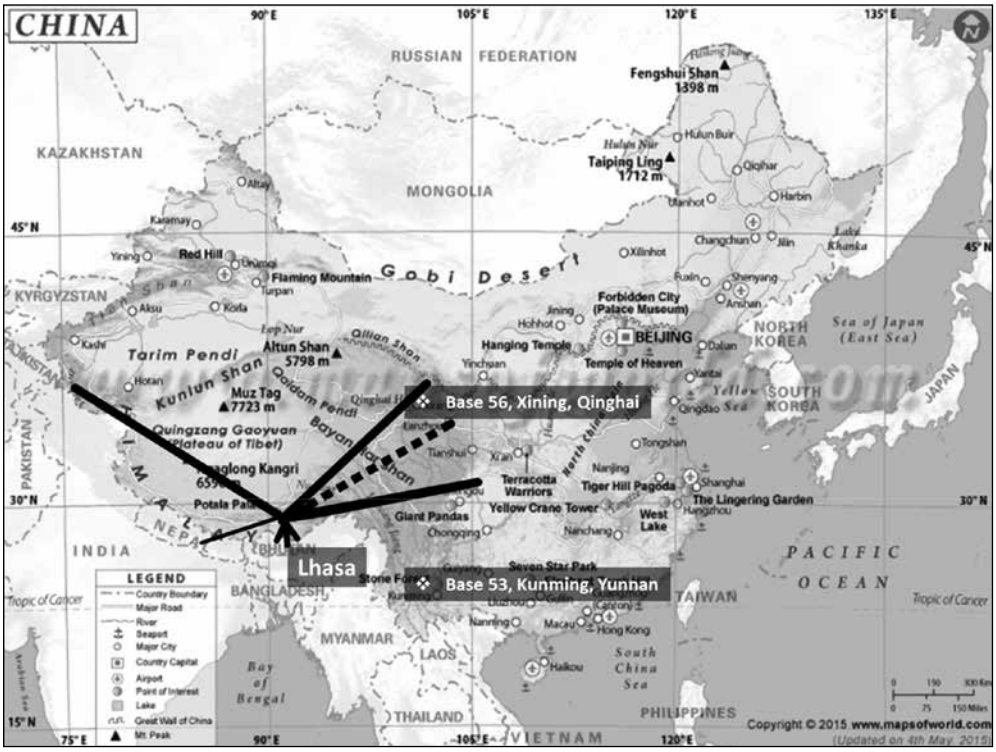
In the past, because of budget constraints and a primary focus on homeland defence, China focussed more on its missile arsenal as against the modernisation of its other Services such as its air force. This meant that discussions on the use of air power by China were confined to neutralising an attacking air force through the use of anti-aircraft artillery, missiles, and forms of information warfare, such as jamming enemy targeting systems, and so on. This provided the platform for the PLA to build a well-endowed missile defensive as well as offensive capability. Thus, even before the official establishment of the PLA SAC on June 6, 1966, the Surface-to-Surface Missile (SSM) units were under the PLA artillery corps. China's total nuclear arsenal size is estimated to be about 240 nuclear weapons, with about 180 of them actively deployed. The SAC comprised approximately 90,000-120,000 personnel and six ballistic missile brigades.[8] With the upgradation of the PLA SAC into the PLA Rocket Force, there would also be integration of the triad of China's nuclear carrying capacity, that is, the submarines, missiles, and strategic bombers. This would further create cohesiveness in terms of deployment and operations in the event of a conflict.

Fig 2 shows a rough representative map of China's current deployment of the PLA Rocket Force missile bases in the Western TC. India's concern is with Base 56 in Xining, Qinghai, and Base 53 in Kunming, Yunnan, which, post the formation of the theatre commands, comes under the single Western Theatre Command. The area is well connected through China's high speed railway line between Lanzhou and Lhasa (represented by the broken bold lines in Fig 3) that would

8. "PLA Second Artillery Corps", *Scholar Warrior,* Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Spring 2011, http://www.claws.in/images/journals_doc/Spring%202011-%20Final%20Issue.41-42.pdf. Accessed on April 3, 2017.

make for quick deployment of men and equipment in the case of any military operations. Furthermore, the area is also well connected with roadways, as highlighted by the broad bold lines, connecting to Lhasa; these are all-weather roads and there is also the Lhasa-Kathmandu roadway (part of the Sino-Nepal Friendship Highway) shown by the bold black line. Another major roadway is from Nagqu to the provincial capital, Chengdu; this road network would be of great strategic significance in the case of a Sino-India conflict, as it would ensure the quick mobility and deployment of troops and equipment.

Fig 2: Representative Map of China's Missile Base, High Speed Railway Lines and Roadways[9]



9. n. 1.

Base 53 in Kunming is more of a concern due to its proximity to India; the facility was the headquarters for one of the six divisions of the former Second Artillery Corps, with SSM related installations at Tienwei and another missile complex eleven nautical miles southwest of Kunming. The images taken by US imagery intelligence satellites in 1996 had revealed that large scale training on the DF-3 was being undertaken at the Kunming missile training facility. The US Air Force (USAF) also acquired a videotape of the exercises that involved three launch units practising to use the DF-3. The missile garrison near Kunming was one of six DF-3 deployment areas, operational as of early 1998, with a total of eight missiles deployed. The 80303 Unit, headquartered in the eastern suburbs of Kunming, Yunnan province, has two brigades. One of the brigades is equipped with DF-21s, located in Chuxiong, approximately 100 km west of Kunming, while the other is located at Jianshui, south of Kunming. These missiles have the range to engage several targets in India and Southeast Asia.[10] Further, Kunming, under Yunnan province, is densely populated, with the largest number of ethnic minorities in China who do not seek any kind of political separation from the Mainland, unlike in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. This makes the region very stable, and being well connected to the more developed eastern sectors of China, can provide a strong lifeline in the case of any sustained military engagement.

PLA Air Force Deployment

The PLAAF was established on November 11, 1949, with its headquarters in Beijing. Since its establishment, the PLAAF's primary responsibility has been the territorial air defence for China's major cities. Like the US Air Force (USAF), the PLAAF was founded as part of China's army. However, unlike the USAF which has developed employment concepts and doctrine independent of the US Army, the PLAAF's doctrine, despite

10. "Kunming Base 53/ 3 Division 25°04'N 102°41'E", *GlobalSecurity.Org* http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/china/kunming.htm. Accessed on April 3, 2017.

progression since 1949, has struggled to move out of the army's shadow. The PLAAF doctrine has mostly evolved in step with that of the PLA ground forces. However, the Gulf War of 1991 and the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1996 renewed the Chinese military strategies to further modernise their air force capabilities as well as enhance the air force's role during military operations. Thus, the ongoing PLA reform, along with China's own internal as well as external engagements such as its military outreach in the East and South China Seas have today further enhanced the role of the PLAAF within the PLA. With the abolishment of the seven MRs, today, we have the PLAAF, like the other Services, also getting embedded into the five newly created theatre commands.

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The map of China in Fig 3 shows the existing PLAAF divisions within the Western TC. Starting from the top, we have the 37th Fighter Division in the west, which is based in Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region; the 6th Fighter Division in Yinchua, which is the capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region; the 36th Bomber Division at Lintong, that is one of the nine districts of Xi'an – the capital of Shaanxi province; the 4th Transport Division in Qionglai – a county level city under the jurisdiction of Chengdu in Sichuan province; and, finally, we have the 33rd Fighter Division at Dazu, a district under Chongqing in Sichuan province.

Fig 3: PLAAF's Divisions in the Western Theatre Command[11]

The integration of the former Lanzhou MR (that covered the Xinjiang and Aksai Chin sectors) with the Chengdu MR (that covered the Tibetan region) has led to the unification of these PLAAF divisions under the command of a unified Western Theatre Command that would incorporate the Services from the PLA Rocket Force, along with the necessary tactical and information support from the PLA Strategic Support Force, creating a cohesive unit as well as a more agile and lethal entity in the case of any military operations.

However, it has been argued that the high altitude plateau in the region of Tibet presents a major operational challenge for the PLAAF.

11. n. 1.

Tibet is a high altitude plateau, with airfields mostly at altitudes of more than 3,000 m amsl (above mean sea level). At these high altitudes, aircraft operations suffer from load penalties due to the reduced density of air. This will be a serious limitation for the PLAAF considering that its mid-air refuelling tanker fleet has limited numbers.[12] Chinese airfields facing the northeast of India are located in Pangta, with an elevation of 4,334 m and a runway length of 5,500 m; it is about 170 km from the Indian border. Another airfield is at Linzhi which is just 30 km away from the India border. One of the prerequisites for any successful and sustained air campaign is the need to have airfields at a reasonable distance from each other so that they can be mutually supporting; this is not so in the case of the Chinese airfields, especially in the western region. For instance, in the northern sector, there are only three airfields, namely Hotan, Kashgar and Korla. It can be seen from Fig 4 that the distance between Hotan and its nearest airfield, Kashgar, is 450 km; between Hotan and Korla, it is 750 km; and from Hotan to Gargunsa, it is 550 km. Thus, there is no mutual support between these airfields.[13]

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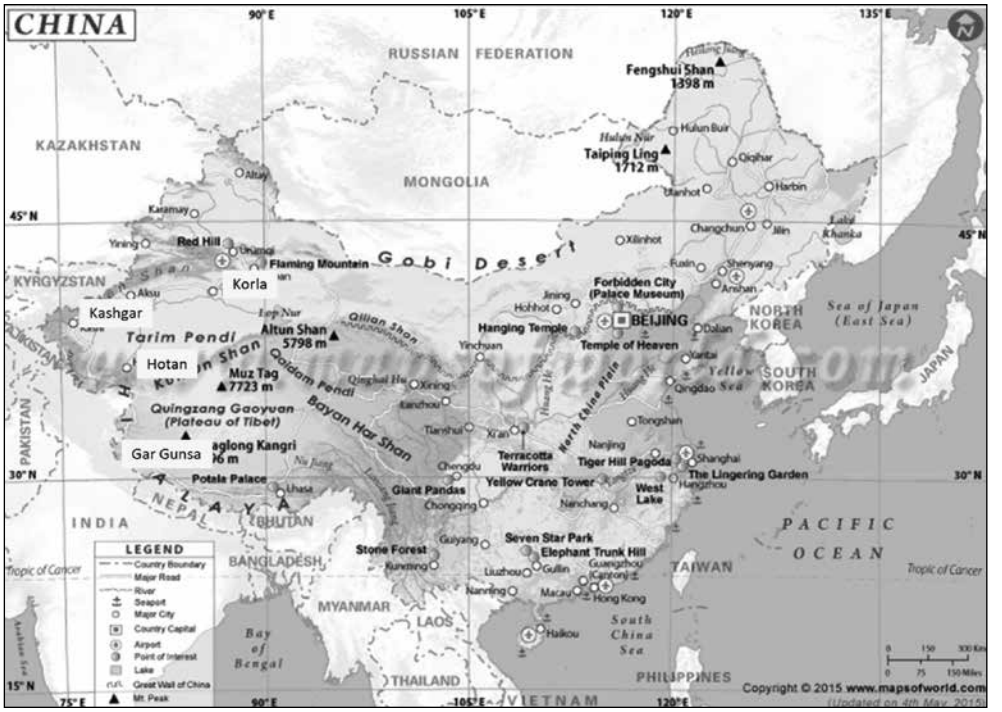
12. However, it should be mentioned here that China is attempting to overcome this limitation by its jumbo military aircraft transport carrier, the Y-20, having with the capability for mid-air refuelling.
13. Ravinder Chhatwal, *The Chinese Air Threat: Understanding the Reality*, (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2016), pp. 195-198.

Fig 4: Chinese Airfields in the Northern and Western Sectors[14]



China is likely to be well aware of the shortcomings in its airfields which currently do not possess the infrastructure and capabilities for sustained fighter operations against India. However, as of now, China appears to have addressed these shortcomings through the deployment of its missiles that include its anti-aircraft artillery and the placement of surface-to-air missile defence systems. India, on its part, needs to constantly monitor any new developments undertaken by China for establishing or even upgrading its current infrastructure, since this would indicate that it is attempting to overcome its current shortcomings, and also indicate its future intent which could be against India's interest.

14. n. 1.

CHINA'S INFRASTRUCTURAL CONNECTIVITY TO OVERCOME CONSTRAINTS

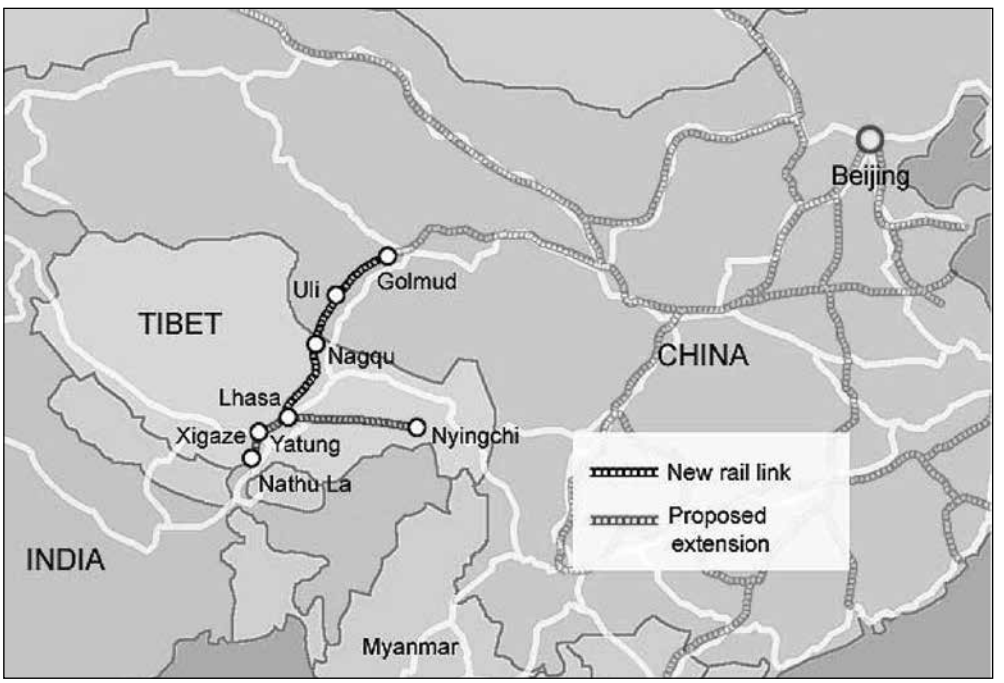
Any map of China would show the difficult terrain in the regions that would be under the Western TC. This physical challenge poses a major obstacle for quick and efficient mobility of troops and equipment during military operations. China is attempting to correct this shortcoming by undertaking massive connectivity infrastructural projects in the region. Since 2006, China has made huge investments in railways, especially in high-speed routes both north-south and east-west of China with the aim of creating deep linkages aimed towards military deployments in its regions of unrest, Tibet and Xinjiang, while, at the same time, creating economic opportunities in the remote and relatively underdeveloped regions of China. This undertaking by China's central leadership is more to do with the high priority given by Beijing for ensuring the containment of any kind of instability in the two troubled regions. Now that the Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs have been abolished and replaced by a single Western TC, the establishment of these high speed railway lines would help in speedy movement of military assets into the Tibet and Xinjiang regions. With this in view, China has announced, that as part of its 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20), it will fund, and proceed with, a highly ambitious rail line from Chengdu to Lhasa that would cover a time period of three successive Five-Year Plans.

According to China's state news agency, China started building the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway in December 2014, with an investment of over Yuan 36 billion (about US$ 6 billion), and projected to be completed within seven years. The Lhasa-Nyingchi railway line will be 433 km long, of which 402 km would be newly built.[15] A few days prior to this report, China's top economic planning agency, the National Development and Reform Commission, had approved the plans for

15. "China to Have Built Lhasa-Nyingtri Railway by 2021", *Tibetan Review,* November 5, 2014, http://www.tibetanreview.net/china-to-have-built-lhasa-nyingtri-railway-by-2021/. Accessed on April 17, 2017.

the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway line or the Xigaze-Nyingchi line[16] making it the third railway line in its Tibet Autonomous Region and more of a concern for India since Nyingchi, as shown in Fig 5 below, is only 50 km from the Indian border – a border China does not recognise, while routinely naming the neighbouring Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh as "South Tibet" on all official maps of Tibet.[17]

Fig 5: Proposed Railway Line from Nyingchi to Lhasa[18]



Construction is also underway on the 1,838 km track which starts in Chengdu, passing through the city of Ya'an and Kangding in Sichuan

16. The Lhasa-Nyingshi Railway line has also been called the Xigaze-Nyingchi line in various Chinese media because the line also stops at Xierong, located 32 km from Lhasa.
17. "China Approves Building of Third Railway Line in Tibet", *Tibetan Review*, November 1, 2014, http://www.tibetanreview.net/china-approves-building-of-third-railway-line-in-tibet/. Accessed on April 17, 2017.
18. "China Approves Building of Third Railway Line in Tibet", *Dilemma X*, November 1, 2014, https://dilemma-x.net/2014/11/01/china-approves-new-railway-for-tibet/. Accessed on May 22, 2017.

province, then merging with Nyingchi in the Tibet region and then onwards to Lhasa. The completion of this line, would cost an estimated Yuan 216 billion and would establish a high speed railway line with trains travelling at the speed of 200 km/h, connecting the Western TC headquarters at Chengdu with the strategically important capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Lhasa. This railway line project, which is still under construction, is expected to be completed by 2025, with construction having first begun in 2014. It will make the travel time between the two places only thirteen hours, which is important for the fact that the Chengdu-Nyingchi-Lhasa rail line has a very strong military undertone.[19]

Now that the Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs have been abolished and replaced by a single Western TC, the establishment of these high speed railway lines would help in speedy movement of military assets into the Tibet and Xinjiang regions.

In the southeast of the Western TC, China completed the railway line from Kunming to Dali in 2008. In the second half of 2009, a one-way railway line connecting Dali to Lijiang was also operationalised at a cost of Yuan 4.55 billion (US $699 million). This line is said to have 47 tunnels and 76 bridges and has been designed to ensure a high speed of 120 km/h. Another railway line between Lijiang and Shangri-La in Deqon is under construction at a cost of Yuan 9.2 billion.[20] According to China's National Development and Reform Commission, the 139-km- long Lijiang-Shangri-La railway is a Level 1 national railway, which means that electric traction is employed in the entire length of the line, and the designed speed of the line is 120 kmph. The intent of the construction of this line was made very clear by the Vice Governor of Yunnan province, Luo Zhengfu, who stated that apart from the significance of this line for promoting economic and social development in the region, it would also help in maintaining

19. "Sichuan-Tibet Railway to be Completed in 2025", *Ecns.cn*, November 8, 2016, http://www.ecns.cn/2016/11-08/233106.shtml. Accessed on April 18, 2017.
20. "China Completes 'Lifeline' Railway in Yunnan", *China.org.cn*, September 28, 2009, http://www.china.org.cn/china/news/2009-09/28/content_18621794.htm. Accessed on April 19, 2017.

India needs to be watchful of these undertakings by China since these infrastructural developments, with the ostensible objective of establishing connectivity, have a dual purpose and would also enhance China's military capabilities in the case of any military conflict between the two nations in the future.

stability in the Tibet region.[21] However, the realisation of a complete railway line from Lhasa to Kunming would prove to be a major hurdle due to the very difficult topography – as can be seen from the map in Fig 6– that prevails in this sector.

CONCLUSION

India needs to be watchful of these undertakings by China since these infrastructural developments, with the ostensible objective of establishing connectivity, have a dual purpose and would also enhance China's military capabilities in the case of any military conflict between the two nations in the future. Therefore, India needs to improve its defensive as well as offensive capabilities in its border regions to counter as also to deter any future Chinese transgression. For this, there is a need to further improve the infrastructure in the region to ensure quick deployment of ground troops and equipment. The establishment of Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) in Arunachal Pradesh by the Indian Air Force (IAF) is a right move towards this end. Currently, there are six ALGs in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, namely in Walong, Ziro, Along, Mechuka, Vijaynagar, and Pasighat, with two more coming up in Tuting[22] and Tawang. The establishment of ALGs in the region would also lead to a permanent settlement for IAF personnel for maintenance and repair of aircraft and also the deployment of mobile surface-to-air missiles in order to

21. "The Second Tibet Railway is Going to be Built", *Indian Defence Forum*, September 5, 2009, http://defenceforumindia.com/forum/threads/the-second-tibet-railway-is-going-to-be-built.5030/. Accessed on April 19, 2017.
22. It is also reported that in December 2016, the IAF has also activated the ALG at Tuting that lies in Arunachal's Upper Siang district. See "Eye on China, India to Base First Squadron of Rafale Fighter Jets in Bengal", *The Times of India*, January 7, 2017, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/eye-on-china-india-to-base-first-squadron-of-rafale-fighter-jets-in-bengal/articleshow/56384484.cms. Accessed on April 21, 2017.

protect assets; this would be a major deterrent against any Chinese intent.[23]

Taking note of China's road links closing in to the Line of Actual Control (LAC), India's former Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, on July 20, 2016, had revised the deadline of 39 strategic Indo-China border roads projects and had stated that these projects would be completed within three years. The Indian government has also cleared the deployment of a special version of the BrahMos cruise missile for the northeastern sector. The Indian Army has so far raised three regiments equipped with the two earlier versions of the BrahMos. The new regiment to be raised that has been cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security, chaired by the prime minister, would have 100 missiles, five mobile autonomous launchers on heavy-duty trucks and a mobile command post.[24] Lastly, as reported, the IAF has also finalised plans for the first 18 Rafales to be stationed at the Hasimara air base in Bengal from late 2019; replacing the MiG-27s currently in operation at the air base.[25] Thus, it can be said that the Indian government has taken note of the developments taking place close to its borders and already prepared the necessary roadmap to not only defend but also surge against any kind of threat that may emanate from the newly established Western TC. Finally, it must be realised that the current reorganisation of the Western TC would be an 'uphill' task (for the PLA), given the restructuring needed in the current command and control organisation, along with the additional limitations presented by the geography that obtains in the regions covered under the Western TC.

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23. Temjenmeren Ao, "Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) In India's Eastern Sector: Further Enhancing Defence against China", *In Focus*, Centre for Air Power Studies, August 26, 2016, http://capsindia.org/files/documents/CAPS_Infocus_TJA_09.pdf. Accessed April 19, 2017.
24. Maj Gen Deepak K Mehta, "Rising Chinese Threat on the Border: India Flexes its Muscles", *Indian Military Review*, vol. 7, September 2016, pp. 36-37.
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