

CHINA'S WAR CONCEPTS

GURMEET KANWAL

*Observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly,
hide our capacities and bide our time, be good at maintaining
a low profile, never claim leadership.*

— Deng Xiaoping¹

NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

China's is moving steadily forward on its long march to acquire world power status and has formulated a meticulously crafted grand strategy to chart its course towards that goal. China's aim is clearly to become the dominant economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific region by 2010-15 and a major power internationally by about 2025-30. Its strategy of "four modernisations", formally adopted in 1978, is bearing fruit and is leading to fairly rapid, though regionally skewed, development and modernisation, including modernisation of the armed forces. In recent years, the Chinese have stressed the importance of "comprehensive national strength" in determining the country's role in international affairs. Their concept of national defence is no longer limited merely to the defence of territory but has been expanded to include the seaboard and outer space. In maritime security, the erstwhile strategy of "Coastal Defence" has been converted to a strategy of "Oceanic Offensive". The recent emphasis on bolstering

Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd.) is senior Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

1. Then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping formulated this 24-character strategy to give direction to China's national security and foreign policies in the early 1990s. Later, the phrase "make some contributions" was added. The United States Department of Defence, *Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005*, p. 11.

naval and air forces stems from a desire to project power well away from China's shores. Consequently, China has redefined its 'strategic frontiers'.² The Chinese now think in terms of their strategic frontiers encompassing "defence of air, space and sea frontiers." China defines strategic frontier as the living space of a state and a nation that contracts with the ebb and flow of comprehensive national strength.³

The salient aspects of China's proclaimed national security strategy in the mid-1990s were as under:⁴

- The primary objective of China's security strategy (for the future) will be to safeguard a security environment favourable to the country's economic construction.
- Peaceful reunification of the Motherland is one of the strategic objectives set by the Chinese government. (The merger of Taiwan with China is implicit in this).
- To safeguard the country's territorial integrity has always been one of China's objectives for national security.
- China will continue to persist in the principle of no first use of force in settling boundary differences.
- China's modern security strategy pays great attention to establishing friendly and good-neighbourly relations with surrounding countries.
- China's geographical location dictates that the priority of its security strategy should be based on developing bilateral security cooperation with its neighbouring countries.
- While paying much attention to bilateral security cooperation, China will also be more and more active and energetic in its attitude toward multi-lateral cooperative security mechanisms.
- As the post-Cold War weapons proliferation is evidently harmful to China's security, China claims to have been actively aiding international efforts to prevent arms proliferation.

2. Strategic frontiers is a fairly common term in the West, but one that has been adopted in China only over the last decade or so.

3. Colonel Narendra Singh, "Chinese Armed Forces," *USI Journal* (New Delhi), October-December 1998, pp. 587-608.

4. Yan Xuetong, "Orientation of China's Security Strategy," *Contemporary International Relations* (Beijing: China Institute of Contemporary International Relations), vol. 6, no. 2, 1996, pp. 2-5.

- The guideline for China's defence construction in the next 15 years is to build a smaller but better army to reinforce the country's defence strength.
- China's earlier military strategy of "luring the enemy in deep" and the present strategy of "positive defence" adhere to the principle of self-defence.

China's National Defence in 2004, the White Paper issued by the Government of the People's Republic of China, lists six "troubling" security trends: the failure to establish a fair and equitable world order; continuing competition for resources and geo-strategic position; increasing global economic disparities; increasing importance of the military element of national power; new threats posed by traditional and non-traditional (transnational) security issues; and, that hegemonism and unilateralism have gained new ground. Flowing from these national security concerns, the 2004 White Paper, lists China's basic national security goals and tasks for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as under:⁵

- To stop separation and promote reunification, guard against, and resist, aggression and defend national sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests.
- To safeguard the interests of national development, promote economic and social development in an all-round, coordinated and sustainable way and steadily increase the overall national strength.
- To modernise China's national defence in line with both the national conditions of China and the trend of military development in the world by adhering to the policy of coordinating military and economic development, and improve the operational capabilities of self-defence under the conditions of informationalisation.
- To safeguard the political, economic and cultural rights and interests of the Chinese people, crack down on criminal activities of all sorts and maintain public order and social stability.
- To pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and adhere to the new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and

5. *China's National Defence in 2004*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China.

coordination with a view to securing a long-term and favourable international and surrounding environment.

LEARNING FROM RECENT WARS

China is engaged in developing a "revolutionised, modernised and regularised people's army with Chinese characteristics. (It is) endeavouring to transform its armed forces from a numerically superior to a qualitatively superior type and from a manpower-intensive to a technology-intensive type, as well as to train high-quality personnel and improve the modernisation of weaponry in order to comprehensively enhance the armed forces' combat effectiveness."⁶ The Gulf War of 1991 brought about a rude awakening as China realised that there was a wide gap between its technological capabilities and those of the West. In August 1991, President Jiang Zemin said, "The Gulf War let us further realise the importance of technology in a modern war. Although we believe that the decisive factor in winning a war is human power not firepower, advanced weaponry is very important and we cannot neglect (the impact of) science and technology (in a modern war)."⁷ Despite the rhetoric about

(It is) endeavouring to transform its armed forces from a numerically superior to a qualitatively superior type and from a manpower-intensive to a technology-intensive type.

"human power", the Chinese military planners were forced to accept that the PLA was still in the so-called "people's war" groove and that it would be quickly out-gunned, out-maneuvred and hopelessly upstaged electronically if it were to face a modern army—or, air force and navy, for that matter. Since then, the Chinese defence budget has witnessed a double-digit rate of annual growth.

The Chinese noted the application of modern military technology during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the Falklands War in 1982 and US air strikes against Libya in 1986. The campaigns in Lebanon and the Falklands, in

6. *China's National Defence in 2000*, White Paper on national defence published by the Government of the People's Republic of China, issued by the State Council, Beijing. www.china.org, October 2000.

7. President Jiang Zemin in Andrew Lai, "Preparation for High-Tech Regional Wars: Beijing's Strategic Shift in Military Policy and its Impact on the Modernisation of China's Arms," *Institute for National Strategic Studies – Strategic Forum* (Washington D.C.).

particular, were seen as key examples of combined land-sea-air operations. Since then, China has carefully observed the planning, manoeuvre and strike capabilities displayed by modern Western armed forces in Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf War in March 1991 that led to the

Modern wars are technologically intensive; hence, attaining technological superiority should be a military priority.

liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, Operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in November 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003. The Chinese have taken note of the technological gap with the West, particularly US forces, in reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA), command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (C²ISR) and precision strike capabilities and the network-centricity that now marks the new high point in the ongoing revolution in military affairs (RMA). They have also taken pains to identify weaknesses that can be exploited through the asymmetric application of force. The Gulf War prompted the PLA to review its doctrine and force structures for joint and combined operations. The PLA learnt useful lessons about "low-tech counter-reconnaissance and tactical deception measures." The PLA revised its air-defence concepts to "three attacks, three defences" (attack stealth aircraft, cruise missiles and helicopters; defend against precision strikes, electronic warfare and enemy reconnaissance).⁸ It also began to acquire larger numbers of cruise missiles and short range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) armed with conventional warheads and air-to-air refuelling capability to extend the range of PLA Air Force (PLAAF) aircraft for strategic-level air operations. PLA leaders have also noted the high degree of 'jointness' and interoperability among Coalition forces, as also the flexibility exhibited in logistics plans for fast-moving mechanised operations.

After an extensive review of regional wars since the 1980s, the PLA leadership came to the following conclusions regarding hi-tech modern wars:

8. United States Department of Defence, *Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005*, p. 16.

- Modern wars are technologically intensive; hence, attaining technological superiority should be a military priority.
- New means of precision firepower and the common use of such means are important factors in determining the outcome of modern military operations.
- The degree of jointness and overall coordination between the different branches of the armed forces has to be substantially increased; hence, highly advanced all-round skills need to be developed in military units.
- Short-duration hi-tech wars generally tend to have specific political goals; hence, there is a need for quality military commanders and subordinate personnel.

The PLA leadership also concluded that a hi-tech war requires a more coordinated effort among reconnaissance and intelligence efforts, command and control and communications systems, weapon systems and logistics. Though the basic principles of war do not change in a hi-tech war, its effective execution requires speed and mobility, the ability to carry out a decisive first strike and a highly efficient command system for a speedy response. To make up its perceived deficiencies, the PLA decided to focus on developing new technologies in microelectronics, computers, explosives, nuclear weapons and space technologies. Other defence expenditure priorities include organisational restructuring; improvements in training and readiness; logistics infrastructure; and weapon systems upgrades.

The overall aim of modernisation is to transform the PLA from a "mass army designed to fight a protracted war of attrition within its territory to a smaller, modern, professional force capable of fighting high-intensity, local wars of short duration against high-tech adversaries."⁹ In order to fund the PLA's modernisation drive and build up the capabilities of the Second Artillery missile forces, the PLA Navy and the PLA Air Force, the Central Military Commission (CMC) has approved gradual reduction in the size of the PLA Army, which is now approximately 2.3 million strong.¹⁰ Above all, the PLA leadership concluded that old doctrines needed to be reviewed and adapted to modern conditions.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 18. (2005 report to Congress).

10. In keeping with the increasing emphasis being laid on the contribution that the navy and the air force are expected to make to national security in the future, the chiefs of the PLA Navy and the PLA Air Force were elevated to the CMC in 2004.

NEW DOCTRINES: ACTIVE DEFENCE AND HI-TECH LIMITED WAR

China has spelt out its aim for developing the PLA into a modern force in these words:¹¹ "A major strategic task of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in exercising state power is to secure a coordinated development of national defence and the economy and to build modernised, regularised and revolutionary armed forces to keep the country safe." The PLA is gradually becoming a more modern and professional force capable of dealing with diverse threats. This transformation is being fuelled by significant changes in doctrine and tactics, the introduction of sophisticated command and control systems, the gradual acquisition of state-of-the-art hardware, an enhanced training regime and steady downsizing of paramilitary personnel to improve the teeth-to-tail ratio. Since China's ignominious incursion into Vietnam in 1979, PLA doctrine has evolved from Mao's "people's war", characterised by protracted, large-scale land warfare, through a "limited/local war" phase, to "people's war under modern conditions" introduced in 1993.

PLA doctrine of "active defence" calls for forward positioning, frontier defence, engagement of the enemy at or over the border and potential engagement in conflict beyond China's immediate periphery.

Underpinning the new professionalism of the PLA is the new doctrine of "active defence" (*jiji fangyu*) that seeks to conduct "people's war under modern conditions" but is better understood as "local wars under hi-tech conditions" (*gaojishu tiaojian xia de jubu zhanzheng*). The "active defence" doctrine calls for integrated, deep strikes – a concentration of superior firepower that is to be utilised to destroy the opponent's retaliatory capabilities through preemptive strikes employing long-range artillery, SRBMs and precision-guided munitions. David Shambaugh has written:¹² "Rather than conducting a 'people's war' (a strategy to 'lure the enemy in deep' into one's own territory), the PLA doctrine of 'active defence' calls for forward positioning, frontier defence, engagement of

11. n. 5, White Paper.

12. David Shambaugh, "China's Security and Military Policy and Potential for CBMs in the Region," *Asian Security Series* (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Centre, December 1996).

the enemy at or over the border and potential engagement in conflict beyond China's immediate periphery. Compared with China's historically reactive stance of luring the adversary deep inside and destroying him through strategic defence, this doctrine is essentially proactive and seeks to take the battle into enemy territory." The doctrine emphasises the effective use of advanced equipment wielded by elite units, with a focus on joint operations. The overall aim in this "limited war under hi-tech conditions" doctrine is to disrupt the enemy's combat forces and logistics but not annihilate him so as to bring about a negotiated end to the conflict or dictate terms if possible. Beijing has defined the following five likely limited war scenarios:

- Military conflict with neighbouring countries in a limited region.
- Military conflict on territorial waters.
- Undeclared air attack by enemy countries.
- Territorial defence in a limited military operation.
- Punitive offensive with a minor incursion into a neighbouring country.

The new doctrine and the strategy and tactics associated with it have been influenced by the lessons of the Gulf War in 1991 and the Iraq War of 2003 that have been extensively studied by Chinese scholars. The doctrine demands the creation of a capability to project force across China's borders through rapid deployment, conventional SRBMs and cruise missiles, information warfare, electronic warfare, precision-guided munitions, night fighting capabilities and other advanced military technologies. The building of these capabilities, in turn, drives procurement and defence production policies, the command and control structures and training. The present doctrine represents a Chinese adaptation of the United States' (US') RMA concepts to achieve victory by reorganising the military to exploit rapid advances in technology. The PLA has appreciated that modern hi-tech war, whether defensive or offensive, generally has limited political goals and it is necessary to achieve political objectives as quickly as possible and with the minimum possible casualties. This is to be achieved by:¹³

13. US DoD report to Congress Pursuant to the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2000/china06222000.htm>

- Gaining the initiative by striking first.
- Achieving victory with one strike.
- Concentrating China's strength to attack the core of enemy defence.

The new doctrine is also more assertive than previously and is not bound by any restrictions to confine and limit future conflict to within China's national boundaries. China claims that it has only peaceful intentions and does not believe in launching aggression and that it fights wars only to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. According to China's White Papers on national defence, active defence is a defensive military strategy. However, it is clear from Chinese writings that the major characteristics of active defence are distinctly offensive in nature. The PLA publication *The Study of Campaigns (Zhanyi Xue)* published in 2000, highlights this offensive approach:¹⁴ "While strategically the guideline is active defence, in military campaigns, though, the emphasis is placed on taking the initiative in 'active offense'. Only in this way the strategic objectives of 'active defence' can be realised."

INFORMATIONISATION

Subsequently, early in the 21st century, based on recent conflicts, the CMC called for a detailed study of the concept of "people's war under informationisation conditions." Ka Po Ng, an associate professor at Aichi Bunkyo University, Japan, sums up the new concept in these words:¹⁵ "...What the PLA is prepared to fight is a people's war in the form of a 'local war under high-tech conditions' with increasing attention to the application of information technology." It emerges clearly that China is engaged in assessing the implications of information technology and knowledge-based warfare on the modern battlefield.

The PLA expects to fight the next war under conditions of what it calls "informationisation" or "informationalisation".¹⁶ In the White Paper on national defence issued in 2004, informationisation has been explained only

14. United States Department of Defence, *Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2004*, Section II: Trends in Military Strategy, Doctrine and Training – China's Military Strategy.

15. Ka Po Ng, *Interpreting China's Military Power: Doctrine Makes Readiness* (Abingdon, Oxon: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 21.

16. Western governments and analysts are using both the terms "informationisation" and "informationalisation" interchangeably. It has not been possible to get an exact equivalent to the corresponding Chinese phrase from an authoritative source. From the point of view of language aesthetics and phonetics, the term informationisation is preferred here.

in general terms:¹⁷

To adapt itself to the changes both in the international strategic situation and the national security environment and rise to the challenges presented by the RMA worldwide, China adheres to the military strategy of active defense and works to speed up the RMA with Chinese characteristics:

- To take the road of composite and leapfrog development. Going with the tide of the world's military development and moving along the direction of informationalization in the process of modernization, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) shall gradually achieve the transition from mechanization and semi-mechanization to informationalization. Based on China's national conditions and the PLA's own conditions, the PLA persists in taking mechanization as the foundation to promote informationalization, and informationalization as the driving force to bring forward mechanization. The PLA will promote coordinated development of firepower, mobility and information capability, enhance the development of its operational strength with priority given to the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force, and strengthen its comprehensive deterrence and warfighting capabilities.

- To build a strong military by means of science and technology. The PLA works to improve its combat capabilities by taking advantage of scientific and technological advances and aims at building qualitative efficiency instead of a mere quantitative scale, and transforming the military from a manpower-intensive one to a technology-intensive one. Implementing the Strategic Project for Talented People, the PLA focuses on training a new type of high-caliber military personnel. It works to build up a complete system of weaponry and equipment by stepping up development of new- and high-tech weaponry and

The PLA will promote coordinated development of firepower, mobility and information capability, enhance the development of its operational strength with priority given to the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force.

17. n. 5. White Paper 2004, p. 5.

equipment while upgrading those in active service. In an innovative spirit, the PLA endeavors to improve its training system as well as the means and methods of training so as to raise its military training to a higher level. Relying on national economic, scientific and technological development, the PLA is devoted to improving the level of scientific management and achieving a higher overall cost-effectiveness in military expenditure so as to modernize the armed forces with less input and better results.

- To deepen the reform of the armed forces. Based on the transformation of modern warfare and the requirements of the socialist market economy, the PLA seeks to achieve development and breakthroughs in the process of reform and innovation. The PLA develops its military theories in an innovative spirit, and explores the laws of building the army and conducting operations under the condition of informationalization. In accordance with the principle of making the troops smaller and better, as well as more integrated and efficient, and with emphasis on adjusting the organizational structure and reforming the command system, the PLA works to build and further improve the military structure and organization to make them appropriate in size, optimal in structure, streamlined in institutional set-up and flexible and swift in command. The PLA also works to readjust and regulate the relationship within the military as well as that with the government and society so as to put in place policies and mechanisms which will help motivate officers and soldiers.
- To step up preparations for military struggle. The PLA takes as its objective to win local wars under the conditions of informationalization and gives priority to developing weaponry and equipment, to building joint operational capabilities, and to making full preparations in the battlefields. Meanwhile, it adheres to the people's war concept and develops the strategies and tactics of the people's war. To meet the requirements of integrated and joint operations, the PLA endeavors to establish a modern operational system capable of giving full play to the overall efficiency of the armed forces as well as the national war potentials. The PLA conducts more training and exercises with specific objectives in order to raise its capabilities in coping with various crises and contingencies.

- To carry out military exchanges and cooperation. In line with the national foreign policy, the PLA conducts military cooperation that is non-aligned, non-confrontational and not directed against any third party. The PLA takes part in the UN peacekeeping operations and international counter-terrorism cooperation. While promoting military exchanges in various forms, the PLA works to establish security dialogue mechanisms in order to create a military security environment featuring mutual trust and mutual benefit. It takes part in bilateral or multilateral joint military exercises in non-traditional security fields so as to enhance the joint capabilities to cope with threats in those fields. The PLA learns from, and draws on, the valuable experience of foreign armed forces, and introduces, on a selective basis, technologically advanced equipment and better management expertise from abroad to advance the modernization of the Chinese armed forces.

PLA analysts have called the ongoing RMA an "informationised military revolution."¹⁸ It emerges that informationisation "clearly relates to the PLA's ability to adopt information technologies to command, intelligence, training and weapon systems. This would include broad investment in new automatic command systems linked by fibre-optic Internet, satellite and new high-frequency digital radio systems... The PLA can also contest the information battle space with its new space-based, airborne, naval and ground-based surveillance and intelligence gathering systems and its new anti-satellite, anti-radar, electronic warfare and information warfare systems... there is increasing 'information content' for new PLA weapons as it moves to link new space, ELINT sensors to missile, air, naval and ground-based 'shooters' to enable all its services to better use new precision-strike weapons."¹⁹ According to the 2004 White Paper, "In its modernisation drive, the PLA takes informationalisation as its orientation and strategic focus." The PLA has adopted what it calls a "double historical mission" and a "leapfrog

18. Zhou Fangyin, "The Impact of Information Revolution Upon Military Affairs and Security," *Contemporary International Relations*, 7 (2001), p. 28.

19. "China's Military Power: An Assessment from Open Sources," Testimony of Richard D. Fisher, Jr., International Assessment and Strategy Centre, before the Armed Services Committee of the US House of Representatives, July 27, 2005; www.strategycenter.net.

development strategy" – accelerating military informationization while undergoing mechanisation.²⁰

The denial of information, strategic deception and the achievement of psychological surprise have for long been an integral part of Chinese military doctrine. The Chinese find information warfare (IW) extremely attractive as they view it as an asymmetric tool that will enable them to overcome their relative backwardness in military hardware. The Chinese are devoting considerable time and energy to perfecting the techniques of IW to target the rapidly modernising Western armed forces that are becoming increasingly more dependent on the software that runs computer networks and modern communications. In Chinese thinking, IW presents a level playing field for projecting power and prevailing upon the adversary in future wars. However, it has not been possible to ascertain from open public sources whether IW is fully

The denial of information, strategic deception and the achievement of psychological surprise have for long been an integral part of Chinese military doctrine.

integrated with the doctrine of people's war under modern conditions or if it is still treated as a separate but complementary pattern of war (*zhanzheng xingtai*). There is also some confusion created by the use of the term informationised warfare (*xinxihua zhanzheng*) instead of IW (*xinxi zhanzheng*).²¹ However, there is no ambiguity in the manner in which the Chinese view information operations:²²

- Intelligence operations, which include intelligence reconnaissance and protection.
- Command and control operations to disrupt enemy information flow and weaken his C² capability while protecting one's own.
- Electronic warfare by seizing the electromagnetic initiative through electronic attack, electronic protection and electronic warfare support.
- Targeting enemy computer systems and networks to damage and destroy critical machines and networks and the data stored on them.

20. Ng, n. 15, p. 109.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

- Physical destruction of enemy sources like information infrastructure such as C²ISR through the application of firepower.

The Chinese call their pursuit of information warfare and other hi-tech means to counter Washington's overwhelmingly superior conventional military capabilities "acupuncture warfare", a term that first surfaced in a 1997 PLA National Defence

Acupuncture warfare was described as "paralysing the enemy by attacking the weak link of his command, control, communications and information as if hitting his acupuncture point in kung fu combat."

University publication entitled "On Commanding Warfighting Under High-Tech Conditions".²³ Acupuncture warfare (also called "paralysis warfare"²⁴) was described as "paralysing the enemy by attacking the weak link of his command, control, communications and information as if hitting his acupuncture point in *kung fu* combat." Acupuncture warfare is a form of asymmetrical warfare dating back to the teachings of Sun Tzu, China's preeminent

military strategist from the 5th century BC. For quite some time now, the PLA has been simulating computer virus attacks in its military exercises.

According to a US Congressional Research Service report entitled "Cyberwarfare", authored by Steve Hildreth, China is developing a strategic information warfare unit called "Net Force" to neutralise the military capabilities of technologically superior adversaries.²⁵ This new information warfare unit will "wage combat through computer networks to manipulate enemy information systems spanning spare parts deliveries to fire control and guidance systems." Though the PLA's research into the theoretical aspects of information warfare is

23. Barbara Opall-Rome, "PLA Pursues Acupuncture Warfare," *Defense News* (Springfield, Virginia, USA), March 1, 1999.

24. "According to the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence, China is shifting from deterrence-based strategy to preemptive strike strategy... Paralysis warfare features web-based information warfare, saturation ballistic missile attacks, joint precision strikes and seizure of the enemy's capital city by special operation units... Such tactics will become major options for the Chinese military in its choice of modes of attack..." Srikanth Kondapalli, *A Great Leap Forward Modernization: China's Armed Forces in 2003* (Taiwan: Centre for China Studies, National Chengchi University, 2005), p. 27, cited from Brian Hsu, "China Developing 'Paralysis Warfare,'" *Taipei Times*, October 8, 2003, FBIS-CHI-2003-1008, October 10, 2003.

25. Jason Sherman, "Report: China Developing Force to Tackle Information Warfare," *Defense News*, November 27, 2000.

fairly advanced, it does not appear to have developed a coordinated and integrated information warfare doctrine as yet.

Chong-Pin Lee, vice chairman of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, says Beijing is redirecting its emphasis away from nuclear deterrence to this new asymmetrical strategy and its "overarching

purpose is to deter the United States from intervening around China's peripheries and to seize Taiwan with minimum bloodshed and destruction."²⁶ In another five to 10 years, China will develop depth and sophistication in its understanding and handling of information warfare techniques and information operations. With Indian society becoming increasingly dependent on automated data processing and vast computer networks, India will also become extremely vulnerable to such information warfare techniques. The fact that it can be practised from virtually any place on the earth even during peace-time makes acupuncture warfare even more diabolical. India can ill-afford to ignore this new challenge to its security.

Defence analysts Timperlake and Triplett have written that economic, political and social systems are essentially unprotected against Chinese information warfare attack. In their view, China has adopted a comprehensive strategy to further its information warfare plans:²⁷

- Information warfare has the support of the top PLA brass.
- The PLA's best strategists and defence scientists have had extensive open discussions about information warfare.
- The PLA is conducting military exercises in information warfare.
- It is expanding its already strong signals intelligence (SIGINT) capability in Cuba.
- The PLA is buying the necessary hardware. (As supercomputers require huge capital investments, a strong political and financial commitment is implied.)

26. Robert Karniol, "Power to the People," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, (Surrey, UK), July 12, 2000.

27. n. 1.

- The Chinese are recruiting scientists and technicians.
- The PLA is building related weapons (high-powered microwave weapons).

To prepare itself for a conflict with an RMA-ready opponent, China's military thinkers recommend that China must:²⁸

- Close the information gap.
- Network all forces.
- Attack the enemy's C'I to paralyse it.
- Use directed energy weapons.
- Use computer viruses.
- Use submarine-launched munitions.
- Use anti-satellite weapons.
- Use forces to prevent a logistics build-up.
- Use special operations raids.

Compared with China's historically reactive stance of luring the enemy in deep and destroying him through strategic defence, the present doctrine is essentially proactive and seeks to take the battle into enemy territory. It also strives to achieve surprise in a proactive manner that is demonstrated by new "quick-strike" tactics. The aim is to catch the enemy unprepared in order to inflict substantial damage on strategic targets and disrupt logistics to gain psychological ascendancy. While the land frontier is expected to continue to generate some local tensions, the CMC has identified space and the oceans as the new areas where future conflicts might take place.

The Chinese have rejected the doctrine of deterrence as, in their view, it is associated with imperialism, amounts to military blackmail, glorifies the use of force and would be an empty threat if not substantiated by tangible power.²⁹ The "active defence" doctrine also calls for integrated, deep strikes – a concentration of superior firepower that is to be utilised to destroy the opponent's retaliatory capabilities by employing long-range artillery, SRBMs and precision-guided

28. J. S. Bajwa, *Modernisation of the PLA: Gauging its Latent Future Potential* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 2002), p. 216. (Cited from Michael Pillsbury, "PLA Capabilities in the 21st Century: How Does China Assess its Future Security Needs?" Article in Larry M. Wortzel, ed. *The Chinese Armed Forces in the 21st Century*, pp. 113-114).

29. Singh, n. 3.

munitions. The doctrine emphasises the effective use of advanced equipment wielded by elite units, with a focus on joint operations. The overall aim in this "limited war under hi-tech conditions" doctrine is to disrupt the enemy's combat forces and logistics but not annihilate him so as to bring about a negotiated end to the conflict or dictate terms if possible.

FORCE MODERNISATION

While speaking at the plenary session of the People's Congress in March 1998, President Jiang Zemin, who was also the chairman of the CMC at that time, had urged PLA delegates to "heighten its (the PLA's) sense of discipline, maintain a high degree of stability and unity and build a smaller but stronger army with science and technology."³⁰ However, despite the highest-level approval for rapid military modernisation, Chinese scholars spare no effort to downplay the actual attempts that are underway and the expenditure being incurred to acquire hi-tech capabilities. Yan Xuetong, deputy director, Centre for China's Foreign Policy Studies at the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations, states that even by 2010, China will not have an offensive military capability to pose a threat to others even if it had the ambition to do so:³¹

In the next 15 years, China's military strength will grow at a pace lower than its economic strength. In 2010, there will still be a great gap between China's military strength and that of the world military powers. China's defence expenditure only accounted for 1.3 per cent of its GDP in 1994... Judging by its limited defence expenditure, China's military power cannot but be defensive in nature 15 years hence, far from becoming an ocean going offensive force... The military technology gap between China and the US is about 40 years at present. Even if China can complete a 30-year course of military technology development in the next 15 years, the level of China's military technology by 2010 will still be only equal to that of the US in the late 1980s.

The guideline for Chinese defence construction in the next 15 years is to build a

30. Anil K. Joseph, "Chinese Army to Modernise Itself," *The Times of India*, April 7, 1998.

31. Yan Xuetong, "Orientation of China's Security Strategy," *Contemporary International Relations* (Beijing), vol. 6, no. 2, February 1996.

smaller but better army with Chinese characteristics, with a view to raising the quality of the army and reinforcing the country's defence strength... For building its defence industry, China will continue to adhere to the principles of "combining efforts of the army with that of the people" and "being prepared for use both during peacetime and wartime." China's defence industry will continue to make efforts for its further conversion into civilian industry... In 1994, of all the products of China's defence industry, 80 per cent were for civilian use and only 20 per cent for military use... By the year 2010, the gross output of China's defence industry will still mainly come from production of civilian-use consumer goods... arms procurement would not account for a high proportion of its military expenditure... China's expenses on arms procurement rose somewhat to about 31 per cent in the period from 1971 to 1980 and to 31.69 per cent in 1994... Even if China can raise the percentage by 0.5 per cent a year, its equipment expenses would still account for about 39 per cent of its defence expenditure in 2010.

China's arms procurement from abroad would also be limited in the next 15 years. Self-reliance is the fundamental principle for China's defence R&D... China will not procure arms from abroad in any large scale as some other developing countries do... China will in future lay emphasis on its overseas military procurement of military technology rather than on weapons and equipment.

The PLA is acutely conscious of its huge manpower strength and realises that it is neither desirable nor possible to equally upgrade the fighting capabilities of all its forces. Over the last few decades, it has been gradually downsizing para-military forces from the PLA Army and reallocating these units for duties under the Interior Ministry. In 2003, CMC Chairman Jiang Zemin had announced the demobilisation of 200,000 troops by 2005. Srikanth Kondapalli cites Ku Guisheng, deputy director of education at the National Defence University, Beijing, as having said that the PLA should undertake reforms in four fields:³²

- Downsizing and rationalising structure.

32. Kondapalli, n. 10, cited from Ku Guisheng, "The New Change in MI Affairs Calls for the Renewal of the Organisational Set-up of China's Military," *Liaowang*, July 28, 2003, FBIS-CHI-2003-0805, August 15, 2003.

- Integrating and 'modularising' troop composition.
- Making the command system network-based and real-time.
- Integrating and informationising' support systems.

The PLA Navy's aspirations to acquire blue water capability and to reach out to the Indian Ocean are well known. It is engaged in transformation aimed

at information-based platforms with "stealth, 'modularisation' and intelligence-based capabilities." "The concept of a navy is no longer the traditional one of seaborne fighting strength but rather one of a comprehensive military service with high concentrations of technology and knowledge and possessing air, surface, sub-surface and amphibious strengths."³³

While it is modernising and upgrading its capabilities, the PLA Navy has been engaged in launching area domination patrols at progressively increasing ranges,

"The concept of a navy is no longer the traditional one of seaborne fighting strength but rather one of a comprehensive military service with high concentrations of technology and knowledge and possessing air, surface, sub-surface and amphibious strengths."

particularly in the Spratly Islands archipelago. Recent Chinese naval operations included an "intrusion" of a Han-class nuclear submarine in Japanese territorial waters. The Marine Corps is also being expanded and modernised so as to improve rapid reaction capability at sea. Amphibious landings are being increasingly practised, as witnessed during the exercise with Russia called "Peace Mission 2005", held in the last week of August 2005.³⁴ However, given its present capabilities and the slow pace of its modernisation, it is unlikely that the PLA Navy will be able to initiate direct action in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea areas till about 2010-15.

The PLAAF is gradually moving away from quantity to quality. It has already

33. Kondapalli, n. 10, cited from Zhong Hailin, "Naval Development Trends of the New Century," *Liaowang*, July 21, 2003, FBIS-CHI-2003-0730, October 6, 2003.

34. "Russia-China Joint Military Exercises," *Worldpress.org*, <http://www.worldpress.org/Asia/2138.cfm>, accessed October 30, 2005.

acquired and is now manufacturing SU-27 (J-11) fighter aircraft and is in the process of obtaining SU-30 multi-role fighters. At the same time, it has been upgrading its electronic support measure (ESM) capabilities and acquiring beyond visual range air-to-air missiles. Plans are also afoot to acquire airborne warning and control systems (AWACS) capability in the near future. The PLAAF has also increased its aerial footprint and Chinese fighters have been flying farther into the South China Sea.³⁵ However, the PLAAF still suffers from obsolescence, lack of adequate command and control capability and poor training standards, and has a long way to go before it can be called a truly modern air force with RMA capabilities.

CHINA'S NUCLEAR DOCTRINE

China's nuclear deterrence doctrine has been generally in congruence with its conventional war-fighting doctrine. It was initially based on self-defence during the era of "people's war". It gradually shifted to one of minimum nuclear deterrence during the 1960s and 1970s and has now stabilised at limited nuclear deterrence, which includes nuclear coercion. China's limited

deterrence may be defined as a concept of "having enough capabilities to deter conventional, theatre and strategic nuclear war, and control and suppress escalation during a nuclear war."³⁶ However, China's nuclear force structure reveals capabilities that go well beyond the requirements of minimum deterrence. For minimum deterrence, it would be sufficient for China to have long-range ballistic missiles that are capable of delivering effective nuclear strikes against the other four nuclear powers. China's shorter-range ballistic missiles such as the CSS-2s and CSS-5s (1,700-km range) can only be used against its immediate neighbours. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that China clearly has a more complex nuclear policy that does not rule out a nuclear first strike against

China's limited deterrence may be defined as a concept of "having enough capabilities to deter conventional, theatre and strategic nuclear war, and control and suppress escalation during a nuclear war."

35. Ann Scott Tyson, "Chinese Buildup Seen as Threat to Region," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2005.

36. Alastair Johnston, cited by Ehsan Ehrari, "China Eyes NATO's Nuclear Doctrine," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (London), April 1999.

its neighbours under certain circumstances.

China insists that it will abide by its doctrine of no first use of nuclear weapons. China's Director-General of Arms Control and Disarmament, Sha Zhukang, reiterated China's no first use policy in March 1999:

"Because of our own bitter experience of being blackmailed, we have declared to the world we would never be the first to use nuclear weapons."³⁷ China also observes a policy of "negative security assurances" implying that it will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries. However, China has lately added several caveats and qualifications to its professed doctrine. The most important of these is that China's military planners do not consider the use of nuclear weapons on their own territory as violative of their no first use doctrine.³⁸ Obviously, as China claims Taiwan as its own territory, it would be logical to assume that the Chinese may resort to the first use of nuclear weapons during a war over Taiwan. Similarly, China lays claim to the entire Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (approximately 90,000 sq km in area) and India would need to vector this factor into its strategic calculations. China is also yet to formally recognise the accession of Sikkim to India.

China's leaders have repeatedly emphasised that the fielding of a national missile defence (NMD) system by the US or the deployment of theatre missile defence (TMD) systems by Japan and Taiwan will be considered extremely detrimental to China's national security interests and China will take all steps that are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of its nuclear weapons. China's Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, has stated, "The development and research of NMD exerts a negative impact on the global and regional strategic balance and stability... I wish to point out emphatically that if some people want to include Taiwan in the TMD, then that would amount to an encroachment on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity."³⁹ Besides unilaterally abrogating

37. "China Denies Posing Threat to India, Calls for Dialogue," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), March 22, 1999.

38. Swaran Singh, "China's Nuclear Weapons and Doctrine," Jasjit Singh, ed. *Nuclear India* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, in association with Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 1998), p. 152.

39. Greg Seigle, "Russia and China Worried Over US Plans for NMD System," *Jane's Defence Weekly* (London), March 24, 1999.

some of its nuclear weapons-related treaty obligations, China can be expected to substantially increase the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in its nuclear armoury and also graduate to multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles (MIRVs) for increasing the number of targets that would be presented to NMD and TMD systems so that its nuclear warheads have a relatively better rate of survival after launch. China may even abandon its decades-old no first use commitment and adopt a more aggressive nuclear doctrine.

Recent developments in the field of modernisation of China's Strategic Forces hinge around the miniaturisation of warheads, progress towards developing MIRV capabilities and further improvement in the design of ballistic missiles using solid-fuel propellants. The development of the DF-31A ICBM that can target any city in the US from the Chinese mainland has been completed. China has also stepped up its plans for the development of an anti-ballistic missile system and is in the process of improving the accuracy of its land attack cruise missiles to about 5-10 metres.⁴⁰

Which way China will ultimately go is at present too close to call, but it is to China's credit that, besides India, it is the only other nuclear weapon state (NWS) that stands for no first use. In fact, China was the first NWS to pledge "no first use" of nuclear weapons. It joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1984 and pledged to refrain from further atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in 1986. China joined the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime in 1992 and supported its unconditional and indefinite extension in 1995. In 1992, China agreed to abide by the guidelines and parameters of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and reaffirmed this commitment in 1994. China signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 and is working actively to secure an international ban on the production and stockpiling of fissile material. It became a full member of the NPT Exporters (Zangger) Committee in 1997. In recent years, China has also strengthened its nuclear export control regime.

40. Kondapalli, n. 10, p. 45.

IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S EMERGING MILITARY DOCTRINE

The concepts of "people's war under modern conditions" and "RMA with Chinese characteristics" have been integrated into the Chinese approach to the evolving war-fighting doctrine and the military modernisation that is underway to give teeth to the new doctrine. The Chinese RMA emphasises simultaneous mechanisation and informationisation of the PLA. China is no longer merely reacting to the security environment prevailing in its neighbourhood; it is now actively engaged in attempting to shape its security environment. The PLA's clearly announced objectives of achieving "command of the sea" and "command of the air" need to be carefully noted and analysed as these clearly suggest incipient ambitions to gain strategic advantage away from the Chinese mainland.

China's Communist rulers are well versed in the art of *realpolitik* and understand quite well that the use of force to achieve political objectives is always a conceivable option. Beijing has often used force in the past, although primarily to counter perceived threats to territorial borders.⁴¹ This vital aspect cannot be ignored while carrying out a threat assessment for the first few decades of the 21st century. China's new strategy focusses on fighting limited, short duration conflicts along China's periphery, including economically important maritime areas. Such concerns call for a smaller, more versatile and mobile military, with a markedly improved yet limited capability to operate beyond China's territorial boundaries.⁴²

In the ultimate analysis, a pragmatic threat assessment must take note of 'capabilities' and not of 'intentions' as the latter are subject to change. China loses no opportunity to emphasise that its defence policy is defensive in nature; it will neither try to occupy an inch of foreign territory nor pose a threat to any

The PLA's clearly announced objectives of achieving "command of the sea" and "command of the air" need to be carefully noted and analysed.

41. Michael D. Swaine, "Don't Demonise China," *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1997.

42. *Ibid.*

country, it will never seek hegemony, its prosperity will only benefit world peace and stability, the threat from China to India is totally groundless, and that China is now fully engaged in its economic construction. It is with this aim in view, say Chinese officials, that China is attempting to consolidate its diplomatic ties with neighbouring countries, including India, and is also attempting to develop an understanding on the global plane, including with the US. All this seemingly points to a stable and peace loving China stepping gently into the 21st century as a responsible nation.

While India's economic relations with China are growing rapidly, India cannot ignore the fact that China continues to be in occupation of, and lays claims to, large areas of Indian territory in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. An undelineated Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the unresolved territorial and boundary

China's attempts at the strategic encirclement and containment of India are a potential source of competition and rivalry and, perhaps, even conflict.

dispute are long-term destabilising factors. The recurrence of Wangdung type incidents remains likely. A border conflict, though improbable, cannot be ruled out. The continuing China-Pakistan nexus in the nuclear, missiles and military hardware fields also poses a long-term military threat. China's attempts at the strategic encirclement and containment of India are a potential source of competition and rivalry and, perhaps, even conflict. China's growing power and influence in Asia is a strategic challenge for India as, eventually, Indian and Chinese political and economic interests are likely to clash. Under these circumstances, China's "active defence" doctrine that emphasises fighting a future conflict in enemy territory through proactive ground and air strikes combined with offensive information operations, presents a new challenge to the Indian armed forces. The Indian Army and Air Force need to develop a suitable joint operations doctrine that will ensure that a future conflict with China, if it occurs, is fought well away from the LAC. Keeping Indian strategic targets safe from the PLA Air Force will need to be given high priority while drawing up military objectives.

The PLA Army is still very largely a force that is rooted firmly in the "people's war" mindset of the past. Its weapons and equipment are still primitive by modern standards and it is decades away from becoming a truly capable force that can stand its ground against a modern military machine organised and equipped with genuine state-of-the-art RMA capabilities like the US Army. Integrated joint operations and amphibious warfare are still alien concepts that will take years of

painstaking effort to successfully absorb and implement. The mere acquisition of modern technology is never enough. It is much harder to develop and adapt the necessary doctrinal changes and implement new tactics, techniques and procedures for the optimum employment of technological advances in hardware.

At the same time, the PLA's exceptional interest in information warfare at the operational and tactical levels of war in recent years, as also its belief in electronic warfare as the fourth dimension of ground, naval and aerial combat is noteworthy. Though the West has a head start in new fields such as information warfare, it is certainly not light years ahead of the competition. Also, these fields are being increasingly dominated by software superiority rather than a hardware edge and software excellence is something that China can hope to attain fairly quickly since it is not dependent so much on imports. Hence, it can be predicted with a reasonable degree of assurance that China will soon catch up with the West in these new military technologies and close the overall gap. By about 2015-20, China may be expected to gain a formidable conventional military capability that will assume even greater significance when the nuclear warheads of the US and Russia are reduced under START III and perhaps other disarmament treaties to levels close to the Chinese warheads. China's much larger conventional forces will then give it a superpower status to rival that of the US.

Besides Sun Tzu and their other military thinkers, the Chinese are well-schooled in the teachings of Clausewitz who emphasised that a good commander must apply his maximum against the enemy's minimum where the enemy least expects it.

Though China does not have the technological capability and industrial capacity to translate many of its ambitions into reality at present, it is undeniable that there is a clear sense of purpose and confidence in its ability to gradually close the gap with the West. Besides Sun Tzu and their other military thinkers, the Chinese are well-schooled in the teachings of Clausewitz who emphasised that a good commander must apply his maximum against the enemy's minimum where the enemy least expects it. It is reasonable to assume that the Chinese would follow that course in waging asymmetric warfare against their adversaries to overcome their own technological shortcomings while they are still experimenting with new technologies. Chinese technological ambitions must be analysed and carefully evaluated to assess their impact on India's security. Professional assessments must be made to deduce realistic timeframes in which these ambitions may be turned into reality and suitable action must be taken to counter these advancements effectively.

Finally, analysis of China's military modernisation and emerging doctrine in the West is often based on stereotypical mindsets and is strongly refuted by the Chinese. For example, the US Department of Defence's (DoD's) annual report to Congress on the military power of China in 2005 was criticised by the government for making "unwarranted charges" and being "groundlessly critical".⁴³ Despite a double-digit growth in China's defence budget over the last few years and recent arms purchases, China's armed forces are still predominantly equipped to fight only early 20th century battles. China's military modernisation is essentially reactive in nature and is premised on what China sees as emerging threats from the US and its allies, particularly over the Taiwan issue. While China's growing military power poses a major challenge to its neighbours, China is unlikely to be in a position to pose a credible threat to the US for at least one to two decades up to 2020.

43. "China Refutes US Report on Chinese Military Power," *People's Daily*, July 21, 2005. Also see Philip P. Pan, "China Blasts Pentagon Report saying it is Military Threat," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2005.