



Special Report | Wen Jiabao Visit

The Great Game

On his Indian visit, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao spoke little, but implied a lot

PRAVIN SAWHNEY

BY UNILATERALLY CUTTING THE disputed border length by half, China has delivered the master stroke; it has reneged on 2,000km of its border with India and has indicated how it intends to settle the remaining 1,240km long disputed border on its own terms. This was possible because the disputed bor-

der is neither agreed on the maps nor on the ground. (The powerful British-India did not care to do it because with both a weak China and Tibet at each other's throat, London was free to pursue the Great Game against Russia). Beijing's assertiveness, in full display after the successful 2008 Olympics, that has worried the United States, Japan and ASEAN since China announced South China

Sea as its 'core national interest', a term reserved for Taiwan and Tibet, has assaulted India as well. It is another matter that New Delhi continues to have its blinkers on. Instead of challenging the Chinese fait accompli with means at its disposal, New Delhi has rewarded China by promising a USD100 billion bilateral trade in five years. These were two high-points of the recent visit (December 16 and 17) of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to India.

When asked how the 4,056km long disputed border become a mere 2,000km, the external affairs ministry

spokesman in New Delhi said that 'there are well established systems in place to address the boundary issue and it's an ongoing process.' He was referring to the Special Representatives talks for border resolution which started in 2003 with 14 meetings held so far. It was after the 13th meeting held in Beijing on 7 August 2009 (led by then National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan) that China showed its hand publicly. Against the backdrop of assertive claims on Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese official media reported for the first time that the border between the two countries was 2,000km long. This excludes the entire Jammu and Kashmir (held with both India and Pakistan), which is about 2,000km long. Of the remaining 2,000km length, there is no dispute on the 560km long Middle Sector (the Line of Actual Control has been bilaterally agreed here), and the 200km long Sikkim-Tibet border which

has been kept outside the purview of the border dispute by China. Dispute remains along the 1,240km length of the Eastern Sector which is an area of 85,000sqkm; for India it is the state of Arunachal Pradesh which China calls 'South Tibet' comprising Monyul, Loyul and Lower Zayul districts of Tibet. This area is so large that even a submissive India cannot barter so much land for peace. The seeds of a future conflict lie in the Eastern Sector. When will this happen? To answer this, it will be appropriate to flag highlights of the border dispute which provide insight into deft Chinese diplomacy and timid Indian response.

It started in 1959, when the visiting Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai offered a give-and-take border resolution package to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. It was Karakoram for China and Himayayas for India with the Tawang tract

STANDING TALL Prime Minister Wen Jiabao inspecting the guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan

in the Eastern Sector to go to China, as even British India had accepted that it belonged to Tibetan territory. Nehru rejected the offer and instead stuck to the McMahon Line, which was conceived by British Indian foreign secretary Sir Henry McMahon in 1914 and was never accepted by China, as the border. He was, however, willing to make a few tactical adjustments to the McMahon Line. Thus, the India approach was a sector-by-sector adjustment and no package deal. The die for the 1962 war had been cast. While the political asylum given to the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959 by India was another reason for the 1962 war, ironically his death will commence countdown for the second showdown between India and China. The Dalai



COLD HANDSHAKE Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and Wen Jiabao

Lama is India's deterrence against the rising and assertive China.

After the 1962 war, a Line of Actual Control (LAC) came up in the Western Sector as the Indian Army stood firm there; in the Eastern Sector, the PLA after routing the Indian Army did a unilateral withdrawal to its pre-war locations. The LAC was a 320km stretch from Daulat Beg Oldie to Demchok in Ladakh and had a 20km demilitarised zone on either side. After the 1962 war, ties remained snapped until 1976. However, impressed with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Chinese vice-president Deng Xiaoping once again offered the Zhou border resolution package in 1980. Both sides held eight rounds of border resolution talks from December

1981 until the visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to Beijing in December 1988. While the Chinese offer remained on the table, both Premiers Indira and Rajiv toed the failed Nehru line that no swaps of territories but only minor adjustments were feasible. This was an error of monumental proportions, especially coming from Mrs Gandhi who understood that diplomacy without credible military muscle gives tactical gains but never desired outcomes.

When Rajiv Gandhi visited Beijing after the 1986 Sumdorong Chu crisis and the grant of statehood to Sikkim on 20 February 1987, China had hardened its position. It concluded that India needed another lesson, but after China had built requisite infrastructure and military ca-

pability to rout India in the Himalayas once again. The Deng and Zhou border resolution package was withdrawn, and Beijing decided to devote itself to economic development; the four modernisation programmes were launched by Deng to build national power including military power. Deng told Gandhi that both countries needed economic development, hence if the border resolution appeared difficult, both sides should focus on ensuring that the border remained peaceful. Not only did Gandhi accept the wily Deng's suggestion, in a goodwill gesture he halted the 15-year military infrastructure build-up plan on the LAC initiated by the Army Chief K.V. Krishna Rao under his mother's watch in 1980. This was another inexcusable mistake. Both sides agreed to form the Joint Working Group comprising officials to ensure that the border remained incident-free. The JWG was to identify 'pockets of dispute' where both sides had differing perception of the border. The need for border resolution was abandoned to Beijing's advantage.

This convoluted thinking was formalised during the visit of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to China in September 1993. Under the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (BPTA), both sides agreed on three issues pertaining to the border dispute. One, the 3,500km long border comprising the Western, Middle and Eastern sectors starting from Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) in Ladakh and running east till Walong in Arunachal Pradesh was re-named the Line of Actual Control. Despite India's claim on the entire state of Kashmir being its integral part, nearly 500km stretch through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir between the tri-junction Afghanistan-Xinjiang-POK and DBO was, on Chinese insistence, kept outside the purview of the border between India and China. This was yet another mistake: India had shrunk its border with China from 4,056km to 3,500km. This is not all. Calling the entire border LAC in bilateral talks on the one hand meant that the term McMahon line had ceased to exist, implying that New Delhi accepted that British-India had drawn the traditional border with guile. On the other hand, the LAC by its very nature being a military held line could be altered by military force. Little wonder, the two sides during the eight round of JWG meeting held in August 1995 identified only eight 'pockets of dispute' on the LAC where both sides had differing perceptions. These were: Trig Heights and Demchok

in the Western Sector, Barahoti in the Middle Sector, and Namka Chu, Sumdorong Chu, Chantze, Asaphila, and Lonju in the Eastern Sector. By 1999, Pangong Tso was added as another major 'pocket of dispute', and since then the PLA has intruded at many places up to 14km inside Indian territories along the LAC.

The second highpoint of the 1993 BPTA was the sector-by-sector approach; while abandoning the Nehru approach on calling McMahon Line as the settled border, New Delhi accepted the need for tactical adjustment for border management rather than a give-and-take formula for border resolution. To Chinese glee, this made the border resolution further elusive. The lesson of the 1962 war that professional military advice should be incorporated when making border policies had not been learnt. This placed the Indian military in a difficult position, as unlike the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) which is a single theatre under an overall commander, the LAC for India involves co-ordination between four army commanders (the Western Sector is respon-

sibility of Northern and Western army commanders, the Middle Sector is with the Central army commander, and the Eastern army commander looks after the Eastern Sector. Then, there are two air force commands, the Western and Eastern air commands responsible for the LAC). The importance of a single commander for a swift and intense limited war needs no elaboration.

The third issue enshrined in the BPTA that works to the detriment of Indian forces is the concept of 'mutual and equal security' in Article 2 of the Agreement for keeping minimal troops on the LAC. The PLA has three operational advantages over the Indian Army: a growing capability to airlift troops, no need for acclimatisation of troops in TAR, and better means of gathering intelligence. Unlike India, China is not an open society. It is thus not surprising that PLA has been effective in hiding details of the numbers and types of surface-to-surface missiles in TAR. Furthermore, the PLA does not need to undertake periodic reconnaissance missions by aircraft and, unlike India it has high resolution satellites with low visitation periods in the

Polar Sun Synchronous orbit.

At the dawn of the new millennium, President K.R. Narayanan initiated some plain talking with the Chinese dragon. Having been the first Indian ambassador to China after diplomatic relations were restored in 1976, the first Chairman of the China Study Group formed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to monitor Chinese activities, and the junior minister in the external affairs ministry during the 1986 Sumdorong Chu crisis, Narayanan understood the growing Chinese threat. During his May 2000 visit to China, when his Chinese counterpart, President Jiang Zemin said that "time and patience are needed to overcome problems left over by history," he responded by saying, "it is true these are problems left over by history, these problems need to be resolved and not left over to history again." Taking cue, the Vajpayee government desired border resolution talks with China. During his June 2003 visit to China, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee sought bilateral border resolution talks by political Special Representatives, which was agreed, but unfortunately gave too much in return.



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WOMAN IN CHARGE Breaking protocol Wen Jiabao came to meet Mrs Sonia Gandhi at her residence

In the joint statement, India, for the first time, committed to 'One-China' policy, implying that Tibet is part of China without a similar formal Chinese endorsement that Sikkim is part of India. This was yet another example of pusillanimous Indian diplomacy. Sikkim, with a 200km border with Tibet has the largest concentration of troops anywhere in the world. An entire Indian 33 corps (36,000 troops) is responsible for the defence of this area and for ensuring that the strategic Siliguri corridor which links India with the North-Eastern states remains intact. Because China had accepted the delineation and demarcation of the Sikkim-Tibet border made by British-India under its 1890 convention, it cleverly, in the Sixties told New Delhi that Sikkim was excluded from the border dispute.

On another note, US President Bill Clinton, during his official visit to China in June 1998, sought a role for China in stability of South Asia. This remark left an indelible impression on Chinese leadership, which started debating not whether but when it should arrogate a role for itself in the India-Pakistan imbroglio. To do so, Beijing had to first announce its arrival on the world stage: 2008 Olympics was the chosen event. Meanwhile, it resolved to not give any political, diplomatic and military concessions to India. The case for little mili-

tary concessions was made by Chinese President Jiang Zemin during his November 1996 visit to India. Both sides signed the 'Agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the military field along the LAC'. This was elaboration of Article 2 of the 1993 agreement which dwelled upon 'mutual and equal security'. Despite the operational difficulties faced by the Indian armed forces, both sides agreed to limit major categories of armaments on the LAC including artillery guns and surface-to-surface missiles. What this means is that should India decide to increase its forces-in-being against TAR to meet the growing PLA threat, India could be labelled as the aggressor against which PLA would defend its motherland. This is the standard Chinese ploy to paint itself as the aggrieved party forced to fight. On the border issue, while little progress was made by the Special Representatives, intrusions referred to as 'aggressive patrolling' intensified. Clear signs of things to come were evident during the

A determined Beijing rather than a reluctant Washington will emerge as the mediator between India and Pakistan over Kashmir

1999 Kargil war between India and Pakistan. During the limited war, despite an urgent need to rush acclimatised troops to the war zone, the nearby 114 brigade at Dungti on the LAC in the Western Sector was not withdrawn. There were reports in the Chinese media that the Chengde and Lanzhou military regions responsible for Tibet and Xinjiang were asked in 1999 to prepare for a limited war with India.

Similarly, two visits by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in April 2005 and December 2010 to India are not important in the number of inane agreements signed, but in the interpretation in New Delhi of things he did not even say. In 2005, the then foreign secretary, Shyam Saran hailed the signing of the guiding principles for settlement of the boundary dispute and a protocol on modalities to implement CBMs on the LAC as 'historic agreements'. In reality, they were not even worth the paper they were written on for two reasons: One, it was not meant to help border resolution but to complicate it. A set of guiding principles are needed when it is evident that political agreement is not possible. For example, there were a total of thirteen rounds of talks between China and Russia from November 1989 to September 1994 and the contentious border issues were resolved. Regarding the protocol

on modalities to implement CBMs, it is plain knowledge that it would be meaningless unless both sides first define the LAC under the 1993 agreement. And two, by signing this agreement in 2005, New Delhi accepted the Chinese position that border resolution would not happen in foreseeable future. Both sides would then focus on building trade and areas of mutual interest. To be sure, Saran said that Wen had given a private assurance that China will back India's case for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council, something that Wen downplayed at his press conference. Probably, the biggest joke was India being satisfied by Wen giving an official Chinese map to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh showing Sikkim with India. In return, New Delhi downplayed the China-Pakistan strategic relationship where proliferation of restrictive entities to Islamabad is not a rarity, ignored Beijing's determination to not resolve the border issue, re-affirmed India's one-China policy, did not seek formal endorsement of Sikkim being a part of India, and asserted that the Dalai Lama would not be allowed political activities from India's soil. In-

dia's appeasement of China was in full view of the three nations, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which Wen visited during his regal tour of South Asia. China had given some form to what President Clinton had said in June 1998 on Chinese soil. The final shape was to come during the 2010 Wen visit to India. As Chinese diplomacy relies on symbolic as well as substantive pronouncements, Wen had sought the 2010 visit to India as he wanted it clubbed with his Pakistan tour, in a way saying that it had good relations with both countries, and hence a role in the sub-continent.

Two important Chinese pronouncements preceded the Wen 2010 visit to India. The Chinese ambassador in India, Zhang Yan said that 'India-China relations were fragile,' indicating that bilateral contentious issue will remain unresolved. The second was nothing short of a bombshell. Within hours of Wen leaving for India, Chinese assistant foreign minister, Hu Zhengyue informed the Beijing press corps that the Sino-Indian border was 2,000km long. Unperturbed, Indian officials as background briefing told the Indian media that this was pub-

lic knowledge in Chinese media since August 2009 at the conclusion of the 13th round of Special Representatives meetings. Intriguingly, this was not reported in India for over a year until Wen's visit. Suddenly, all Chinese moves starting 2009 on the Kashmir chessboard were clear. The issuing of stapled visas to Indian citizens from J&K, the refusal of visa to the Northern Army Commander, Lt Gen. B.S. Jaswal, the dramatic increase in Chinese activities in POK including the modernisation of the Karakoram highway, and plans to construct a new rail line and oil pipeline from Kashgar in Xinjiang to the Gwadar port on Pakistan's Makran coast. In India, Wen was careful not to even hint, much less say, that Kashmir was a part of India, or Pakistan was behind the 26/11 attacks. China, which occupies 38,000sqkm of Aksai Chin and 5,180sqkm of Shaks-gam valley in Ladakh, undoubtedly has positioned itself as a stakeholder in Kashmir with far reaching implications for India. New Delhi was so worried about getting embarrassed by uncomfortable queries that unlike in 2005, Wen and Manmohan Singh did not have a joint

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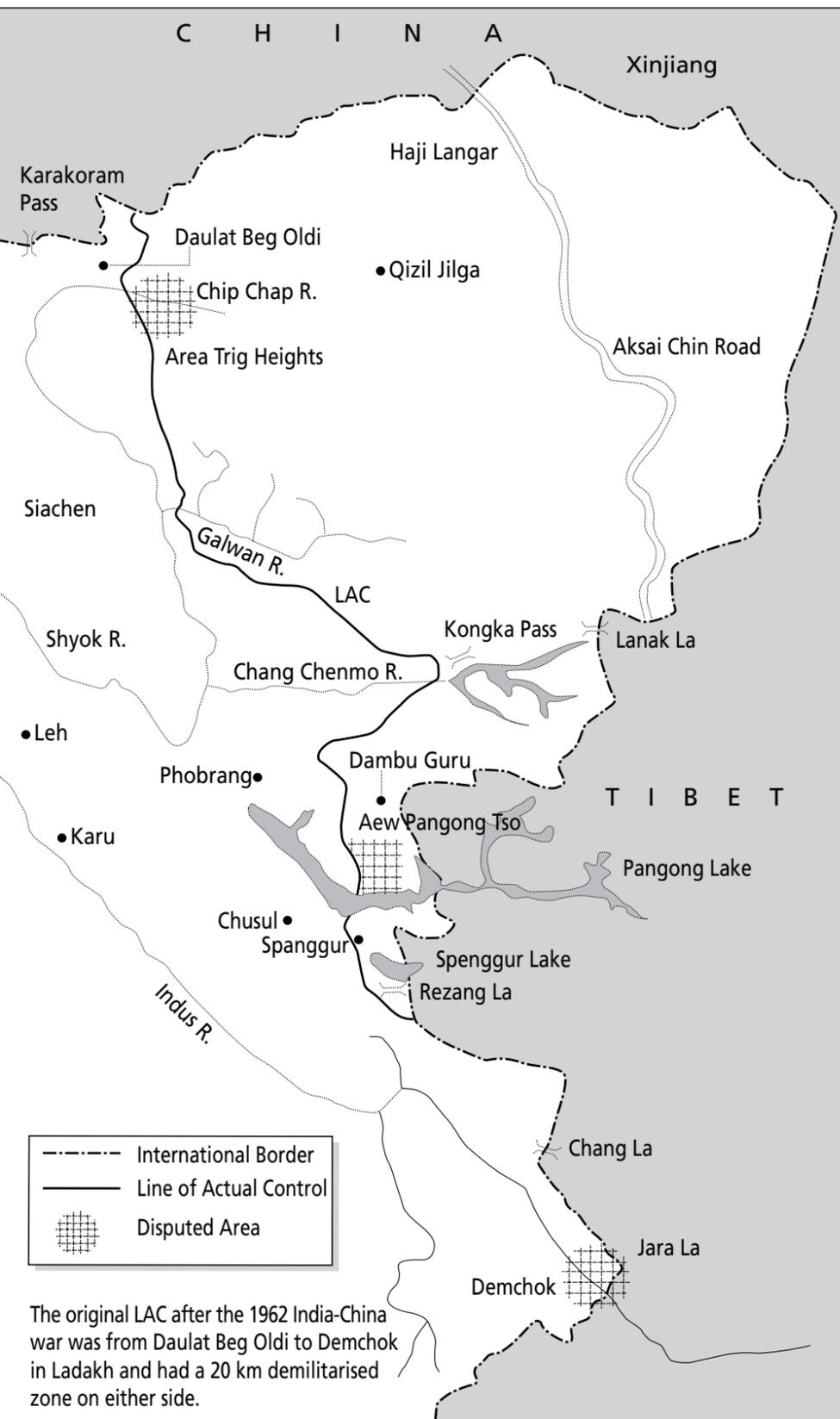
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press conference. When asked about these events and the fact that two recent Chinese ambassadors in India besides numerous officials in Beijing have said that Arunachal Pradesh is a part of China (Tibet), Indian foreign secretary Nirupama Rao said that: "The country needs a more informed debate on China." The truth is what India's former foreign, defence and finance minister, Jaswant Singh has written in his book, 'Defending India': 'From the early Fifties, when Indian policy helped an emerging China, to now when the century ends, a relationship of equals no longer obtains. Clearly, India's mismanagement of Sino-Indian relations has been a failure and the nation continues to pay the price.' Let's look at what price there may be to pay for India's sloppy China policy.

The Western Sector

By disclaiming its border with India in Jammu and Kashmir, China has announced its direct stakes in the troubled state. The disputed Western Sector of the LAC does not exist. Beijing now views POK as an integral part of Pakistan (demolishing Islamabad's pretence of calling it Azad Kashmir) where it is investing heavily in infrastructure. The portion of the state with India is disputed (making nonsense of the 24 February 1994 resolution passed in Indian Parliament calling for Pakistan to vacate Azad Kashmir). The tables have been turned on New Delhi; instead of India saying that China is in occupation of its territory in Ladakh, both Beijing and Islamabad have declared New Delhi as the illegal occupant. Pakistan, which has scant regard for the Simla Agreement, will, with Beijing's backing, soon officially repudiate bilateralism with India. This implies that during India-Pakistan crisis, Beijing's pressure on India will be more than Washington's to diffuse matters. A determined Beijing rather than a reluctant Washington will emerge as the mediator between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. New Delhi after all will worry more about the real scenario of a two-front war in J&K, rather than Washington's fanciful appreciation that a conventional war between India and Pakistan will result in nuclear exchange.

This is exactly what happened in the aftermath of 26/11 attack on Mumbai which were planned, directed and fully supported by the Pakistan Army. Within days of the Pakistan-sponsored Lashkar terrorists' strikes on Mumbai, the three service chiefs made it known to Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh that a blitzkrieg (the IAF in lead with the Indian Army ready for shallow penetrations) with capture of prime Pakistan's Punjab land, however little, without crossing the nuclear red lines was doable (FORCE, August 2010). The military assessed that with 30 per cent of Pakistan Army committed in Afghanistan, Pakistan Army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani will face three operational problems: he will need time to redirect his reserves to the Indian theatre, the troops would need time to re-orient from counter-terrorism to conventional war, and heavy equipment of these forces would have been mothballed as being unnecessary in CT missions. While the military appreciation appeared encouraging, the Prime Minister was worried about Chinese activity especially when Beijing's position on the LAC in Western Sector was becoming clear to New Delhi. Even during the 1999 Kargil war, when China has not yet come in open support of Pakistan on Kashmir, the PLA had supported Pakistan by increasing pressure on the LAC. For this reason, the defence ministry in beginning 2009 issued the written directive to the three defence services to prepare capabilities for a two-front war. Moreover, the government did what it had not done since 1983 when General K. Sundarji's military activism was at its peak. Two mountain divisions, 56 and 71, were raised by accretion of forces for the LAC by 31 March 2010. Equal numbers of raisings have been cleared for the next defence plan starting 2012.

By not recognising India's claims in J&K, China has decimated the Indian Army's (IA) advantage in the state. This is a tremendous relief for the Pakistan Army, which has constantly worried about large numbers of the IA in J&K. Since 1994, at the height of Pakistan-backed insurgency in the Valley, the IA raised over 70,000 Rashtriya Rifle forces, which is regular army by another name, for counter-insurgency role. As the IA has the capability for swift reprisal against continued Pakistan-supported infiltration along the LC, it was believed, with reason that a war between India and Pakistan would start in J&K. This mindset changed with the ceasefire on the LC since 26 November 2003, when it was felt that the side starting a war in J&K will not be viewed favourably by people of Kashmir. As backchannel peace talks between India and Pakistan made progress between 2004 and 2007, the Pakistan Army and ISI combine while regulating infiltration along the

LC, activated sleeper-cells across the country. Still, J&K remained the Achilles Heel of the Pakistan Army. With Chinese fait accompli, this is no longer so. Despite provocations by the Pakistan Army, New Delhi will find it impossible to start a war in the J&K theatre for two reasons. One, under guise of protecting Chinese working in POK, the PLA will open a second front in the theatre for the Indian military. And two, given the uncertainty of war escalation, New Delhi would dread a full blown two-front war. The nearly one-third strength of the IA in J&K which is on dual-roles of guarding the LC and counter-insurgency stands blunted.

The Eastern Sector

There are three misconceptions regarding the Eastern front. The Indian government and most analysts believe that Chinese claim over the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh is mere posturing. They will eventually settle for the Tawang Tract, which corresponds to Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The significance of this area lies in the fact that the sixth Dalai Lama was born in Tawang in the 17th century, and the Tawang Tract with Se La as the dividing line was the fiefdom of the Dzongpons (high officials) of the Tsona district in Tibet. This is no longer true. The Chinese are not known to give up territories which they claim as theirs, and a rising China certainly will not settle for less than it demands. It ought to be remembered that Communist China consolidated its hold

There is the need to acknowledge that the Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual leader of the Tibetans. He is the temporal head as well. After all, the Tibetan government-in-exile since 2001 has been ensconced in Dharamsala

over Xinjiang within a year of coming to power on 1 October 1949, and weeks before it entered the Korean War to challenge the mighty United States, the PLA attacked Tibet on 25 October 1950 to 'liberate the people of Tibet and complete unification of China.' Beijing would rather have the unresolved border than not settle for what it has publicly announced. However, the tempering fac-

tors that could impact Chinese policy will be the Dalai Lama, the resolution of the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan, and the relationship between India and the US.

The other misconception is the belief within the Indian armed forces that there will be no war with China until 2020. There is a fondness to extrapolate own risen capabilities till 2020 and then war-game with extant Chinese forces. The Border Road Organisation charged with strategic roads along the LAC also refers to 2020 as completion date. On the one hand, the armed forces talk of teaching Pakistan a lesson should New Delhi desires so. On the other hand, it is sanguinely assumed that China will remain a silent spectator for the next decade, especially after its blatant siding with Pakistan over Kashmir. While there is no real basis to such belief, it appears that 2020 is the year when the armed forces (the air force with 40 combat squadrons and the army with the raised strike corps) hope to successfully thwart the two-front war should it come about. This presupposes that infrastructure building and equipment acquisitions would happen as planned and on time and the adversaries' capabilities will increase at snail pace. The reality is to the contrary.

Even as China furtively builds its own military power and strengthens its strategic and militaries ties with Pakistan, it devotes special effort to neutralise India's defence advantages vis-a-vis Pakistan, many of which are grandiose announcements made by the DRDO. Case in point is the indigenous Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme. Called technology demonstrator, it is prime example of technology over-reach. Even if basic technologies are indeed put into place by 2020 (which is nigh impossible), the need for hot test for interceptor warhead will remain. After all, the interceptor missile employed to kill a nuclear armed ballistic missile will need to have a nuclear warhead as well. Similarly, the indigenous SLBM (Sagarika, K-15 and subsequent K-16 and K-17) meant to arm INS Arihant and follow-on vessels will require a high level of assurance that will not come without nuclear testing or an assured design.

How is China helping Pakistan cope with these DRDO's fanciful developments? According to the US Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Admiral Mike Mullen, Pakistan has the largest growing nuclear arsenal in the world. It is universally agreed that Pakistan leads



THE OTHER MAN President Hu Jintao at a ceremonial parade in Beijing

India in the variety and range of ballistic missiles. Pakistan's Babur cruise missile acquired from China has two distinct technological advantages over India's BrahMos: it has turbofan rocket which can reach strategic ranges of up to 2,500km, and it has better seeker technology. And to further nullify the proposed BMD, Pakistan is seeking evasive re-entry vehicle technology besides decoys to evade interception in space. There are reports of China leasing a SSBN to Pakistan. The next logical step will be to help arm it with nuclear-tipped missiles with assured designs. India's BMD and sea based deterrence will lead to an arms race by Pakistan.

Regarding conventional capabilities, as the bulk of Pakistani equipment is of Chinese origin, there will be compatibility leading on to interoperability between the two adversarial armed forces pitted against India. The operational utility of this requires little explanation. By itself, the PLA is strides ahead of India in nuclear weapons capability, cyber-network attack, defend and exploitation capabilities, space capabilities (it has laser on its satellites for kill capability), ballistic and cruise missiles, Special Operations forces, airlift capability, sea-based deterrence and sea-denial capability to name just a few. The biggest issue where both China and Pakistan score heavily over India is that their respective militaries either take strategic decisions of war and peace or are an intrinsic part of policy-making. Where does this leave India by 2020?

The third misconception is that the

next war with China will be over tactical gains. The Thag La ridge line in Tawang district was the trigger for both the 1962 war and the 1986 Sumdorong Chu crisis. It is appreciated by the IA that Tawang has to be defended at all costs as this could be the trigger for the next war. The IA estimates that the PLA could bring about 12 divisions opposite Tawang in one season. Thus the army's war-gaming is focussed on meeting this challenge, as well as the other ones including the defence of Siliguri corridor and the 'pockets of dispute' along the LAC. The Indian Air Force takes a broader view of the war. It feels that the PLA may well garner tactical gains but these will not be the purpose of war. The risen China will not wish to be equated with India in a slanging match for mountain heights. Teaching India the lesson in a swift campaign where it can showcase its cyber, space, Special Forces and ballistic missiles (the PLAAF does not differentiate between ballistic missiles with conventional warheads and air power except that the former requires tighter control) prowess could be the war purpose. While the IAF appreciation makes more sense, given the changed dynamics, even this may not come to pass.

The PLA has little need to join a full-fledged war with India. In case of an Indo-Pak war, the PLA will militarily activate the so-called Western Sector on the LAC, employ its cyberspace capability, its space potential to kill Indian communication satellites, assist Pakistan with weapons, equipment and ammu-

munition, undertake aggressive patrolling in the Eastern Sector, threaten to divert water going to the Brahmaputra river (there were reports that China has built 24 new projects along the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries on the Chinese side. There is no agreement between the countries to share projects information), incite trouble in the northern-eastern states, and then wait for India to escalate matters. Given New Delhi's track record, this will not happen.

To avoid such scenarios, India ought to do four things: One, there is the need to fully integrate the armed forces in the defence ministry. While having a Chief of Defence Staff or its equivalent is ideal, a positive step could be to have a service chief, who as part of the Chiefs of Staff Committee has exposure to nuclear aspects, as the National Security Advisor or his deputy. There are media reports that the present commandant of the National Defence College may after retirement in 2011 be accommodated as the Deputy NSA. This is good news. Two, there is the need for an early resolution of the Kashmir issue. Any further dithering will complicate matters no end. Three, as external defence and internal stability are two sides of the same coin, better coordination between the defence and home ministries is necessary. And most importantly, there is the need to acknowledge that the Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual leader of the Tibetans. He is the temporal head as well. After all, the Tibetan government-in-exile since 2001 has been ensconced in Dharamsala. ■



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Impressive Strides

PLA exercises illustrate the preparation for traditional and non-traditional missions

PRASUN K. SENGUPTA

UNTIL 2006, THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION Army's (PLA) traditional Group Army-based formations had operated as a single warfighting unit under a single chain of command of the concerned military region (MR), but four years ago the country's Central Military Commission (CMC) began moving the PLA's ground forces out of such an operational model by introducing the Basic Campaign Corps (BCC) standardisation plan, which allows for up to Division-size formations hailing from different MR-specific Group Armies and from different armed services (including those from the PLA Navy and Air Force) to be re-tasked and re-deployed under the operational command of a 'unified theatre commander'. Consequently, this has led to:

Evolution of the doctrinal basis for independent joint-service ground campaigns between 2000 and 2006 under the 'Science of Campaigns' (Zhanyi Xue) process, which in turn led to the conduct of three major joint training

exercises since 2007 (over a two-month period every year) under the auspices of a unified theatre commander, namely the Vanguard, Stride and Airborne Manoeuvres series of exercises, all of which serve as a good illustration of how long it can take the PLA to move from doctrinal guidance to actual implementation of tactical and operational concepts.

The raising of several Division-sized 'modular and multi-functional' fighting formations capable of engaging in combined arms operations within a wartime theatre. Such joint services formations, also known as rapid reaction forces (kuaisu fanyin budui) or 'Resolving Emergency Mobile Combat Forces (REMCF), have, since 2007, participated in the three above-mentioned field exercises under the operational control of a single unified theatre command, with the exercises — conducted at four regional combined arms training bases, or CATB — serving as the PLA's test-lab for fine-tuning its warfighting doctrine and reforms at the operational-level.

The acquisition of long-range force projection capability by the existing four REMCF formations, each of which now comprises 50,000 troops drawn from four infantry divisions located in four different MRs.

It is against this backdrop that the PLA on October 9 last year announced the start of a multi-region, joint air-land

exercise called 'Mission Action 2010' (shiming xingdong 2010), under which REMCF elements (numbering 30,000 in all) hailing from three of the PLA's seven existing MRs were deployed by road, rail and air across MR boundaries to four training areas in distant locations. The focus of this exercise was on the operational level of war (campaign), with a unified ground forces theatre command HQ being responsible for command-and-control, with oversight being provided by the PLA's General Staff Department. The exercise highlighted 'informationised operations', especially in command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR), and was divided into three components:

- ▶ Mission Action 2010A, under which the 27th Group Army's 188th Mechanised Infantry Brigade deployed from Zhurihe CATB in the Beijing MR to Taonan CATB in the Shenyang MR.
- ▶ Mission Action 2010B, under which the 47th Group Army's 139th Mechanised Infantry Brigade deployed from Qingtongxia CATB in the Lanzhou MR to Xichang CATB in Chengdu MR.
- ▶ Mission Action 2010C, for which the 13th Group Army's 37th Division deployed from the Chengdu MR to Qingtongxia CATB.