

PLA Deployment in the Tibetan Plateau: Assessing the impact on India-China Relations

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ABSTRACT

China and India share a border of more than three thousand five hundred kilometres from the time when China forcefully occupied Tibet in the early 1950's. Since then Indo-China relations have been hostile towards each other. Dalai Lama exiled to India in the late 1950's. He got asylum in India. After this incident, China's policy towards India became more belligerent. To India's surprise, it was made known that China has built a motorable highway from Xinjiang to Tibet through Aksai Chin, that are comes under Indian Territory. Then things escalated into a bloody war in 1962. China has several military bases and Air Force bases in the Tibet region which is basically to keep an eye on India. Because of all this, India-China relations have been deteriorating, though there have been some developments during the 1980's and 1990's in the bilateral relationships between India and China. There were agreements signed in 1993 to maintain peace and tranquillity along the line of actual control (LAC). There were developments in terms of bilateral trade and business. While patrolling the LAC, Chinese PLA transgresses into Indian side of the territory and they engage in scuffles and fist-fights with Indian troops at the disputed border because there is no demarcated border. That leads to border skirmishes and standoffs.

Keywords: Military Bases, Tibet, Air Force, LAC, PLA, India, China

INTRODUCTION

China has been undertaking a thorough restructuring of its military, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping since his ascendance to power in 2012. Major changes in the operational structure of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), with the modernisation and optimisation of the military to bring about better jointness and overall efficiency. This paper examines the PLA structure related to equipment, bases and preparedness in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Sino-Indian border areas. The paper further examines the frequency of military exercises as well as the military infrastructure being undertaken in these areas that are situated along the Sino-Indian border infrastructure, illustrating the significant deficiencies on India's side. The paper concludes with implications for India.

(Rajgopalan, 2020).

The PLA has advantages over India in terms of operational capacity. First is PLA's doctrine of 'minimum nuclear deterrence' has changed to 'limited nuclear deterrence' suggesting a nuclear war fighting capability. The limited deterrence would involve capabilities to deter conventional, theatre and strategic conflicts as well as conflict control. China has changed its 'no-first-use of nuclear weapons' policy narrowing to member states who have signed the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty and nuclear-weapon-free zones (Sawhney and Ghazala, 2019). PLA guidelines consist of tactical nuclear missiles parallels capability similar to air force and the navy, although the use of missiles should be under tighter central control. Among these, Chinese nuclear arsenal of about 500 warheads, it has been determined that approx. 200 numbers are strategic other are tactical in nature.

How to cite this Article: Sahoo, Somanath and Sahu, Sumanta Kumar (2026). PLA Deployment in the Tibetan Plateau: Assessing the impact on India-China Relations. *Internat. J. Appl. Soc. Sci.*, **13** (5 & 6) : 695-703.

According to, (Sawhney and Ghazala, 2019) the “Tactical nuclear weapons are deployed at about twenty places in China including Tibet (*Xizang*) and have been integrated in support of operations to be conducted by their Group Armies (GA). The types of tactical nuclear warheads include low yield medium artillery fission rounds, enhanced radiation weapons of low yield, and low-yield fission tactical warheads”.

China’s western theatre command is looking towards the Indian border. It is divided into two military districts; one is Tibet military district and the other is Xinjiang military district. In total, China has stationed more than 2,00,000 to 2,30,000 soldiers in that command. In a possible military confrontation with China, India has to prepare both continental and maritime contingencies. China’s military capabilities have been in the process of major transformation as initially outlined during Den Xiaoping’s reign in 1979, to last till 2020. The upgradation of the PLA military profile has been proceeding in a phased manner in line with the building of infrastructure in Tibet. Due to massive roads, railways and infrastructure from hinterland, central region of China to Tibet’s border with India, this has resulted in PLA’s capability to swiftly deploy substantial military power against India’s northern borders. The military responsibility of TAR (Tibetan Autonomous

Region) divided between Chengdu and Lanzhou military regions. The simplification of command and control was due to the placement of the entire northern sectors under Ali Military Districts and the remaining within the Tibet military districts.

Logistics

The location of the main logistics centre of Tibetan Military region lies in Nagqu Township, which has the capacity of managing approximately 3 million tonnes of cargo. It is roughly 300 kms north-east of Lhasa where construction of oil and gas pipelines is taking place, along with this the main QTR, road highways and airfields have disbursal terminals. It provides the logistical support for any military campaign south of Kunlun Mountains. There has been a further development of civilian and military infrastructure for maintenance of up to ten group armies in the region of Tibet. As per the PLA’s general logistics department, their capacity has reached the level of transporting five to six million tonnes annually into Tibet. This would help them in civilian development projects with possibility of military actions against India.

Deployment ability of PLA army has improved with infrastructure they have built. To connect Lhasa with Chengdu, they have constructed a long highway of 2,413 Kms, with many off-shoots running towards the border along India. They have also constructed a railway network from Golmund to the Tibet Capital Lhasa. This newly built railway line to enhance the capacity of PLA to deploy up to thirty regiments in Tibet. Currently, the Chinese have the ability to insert up to twelve divisions within one month. The troops are practicing from several years to take control of mountains with elevation of more than 5000 metres using armoured vehicles and Air Borne forces in military drills. This extreme point of heightened assault deploying a vertically launched joint attack rocket and missile system, firing around 250plus km range laser and other pinpoint attack system equipped with terminal guidance sensors. The PLA are now has the capability to launch special operation detachment surrounding the enemy while covered by the army aerial forces and air missiles. This military drill also involves troops parachuting from a helicopter hovering at a height of half km. The limitation of Chinese government control over Tibet exposed during the 2008 ethnics riots, the military response took three days and the troops stationed were unable to handle the unrest. After modernisation of the PLA has significant impact of China’s control over



Source: Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, “The PLA’s New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1)”, *China Brief* Volume: 16 Issue: 3, February 4, 2016

Fig. 1 : PLA Theatre Commands

Tibet.

It can be observed that the Western Station Command has only two enhanced group armies after the rearrangement. Further, the Central Theatre Command has been reimagined as a strategic reserve force for the eastern coast and this role might also be in conjunction with the Western Theatre Command. Its triple group army will function in such a manner that its forces will support the ones previously indulged, the crucial feature of this distribution is such that the central military commission will exercise control on the assets and only based on their strategic decisions will the Group Armies be released. Such an arrangement ensures less rigidity and enables CMC to balance. This proposition has certain advantages but on the other hand, its effect is committing resources prematurely as well. Frontline PLA troop concentration in Tibet, in place like Ruthok, Giamuk, Drompa, Saga, Drangso, Gampa-La, Dromo, Tsona (Cana), Jayul etc. These bases are strategically connected by the major highways and roads, for instance Ruthok and Giamuk, are both counties of Ngari prefecture of Tibet, which shares border with Xinjiang in the north and Ladakh in the West. They both lie in G-219 of the Western highway. Drangso lies close to the Indian border on the extension of G-318.

PLA commissioned special operation battalions in the mid-90s, and they went through rigorous parachute training in order to further specialise in fighting behind enemy lines, practicing in sabotage, reconnaissance and other unconventional operations (S.S Kumar, March 18, 2005). These include the fifteenth Air Borne Corps set up by the PLA Air Force which is proficient in undertaking strategic missions such as disabling the enemy supply chains. It functions underneath the Central Military Commission and is headquartered in the Henan Province. It could be a precious asset when faced with tough terrain and limited deep strike capability in Tibet. Its current standard can sustain shipping a division worth of troops anywhere on China's periphery in hardly ten hours duration. The Air Borne Corps aims at placing 50000 personnel at any given time. In the mid of 2015, the first airdrop of heavy load was successfully completed at 6000m. This helps China to use this capacity in controlling the high altitude constraints imposed on their forces earlier. Ten major exercises have witnessed participations including mission operations and air borne sword to gain combat experience (Tao, 2017). However, it must be noticed that the air operations

are likely to be limited to summer months due to seasonal limitations.

PLA armoured Division

Armoured division has mainly three types of battle vehicles. Two types of tanks and one armoured personnel carrier. Light tanks PLA uses mainly for mountain warfare which enables it to fight in the high altitudes of Tibet along with main battle tanks and other personnel carriers. Ministry of National Defence (MND) of China, on 27 December 2018, unveiled a new "Type 15 Lightweight Tank", inducted into PLA Ground Forces (Yang, 2018). The significance of the addition of new armoured fighting vehicle in China's combat missions are its key triple properties:

- (1) Type 15 is lighter in comparison to PLA's main battle tanks such as Type 99 and Type 96, with about 32 to 35-t weight. Furthermore, its engine generates 1000 HP driving force, about double that of the Type 62 predecessor tank (Episkopos, 2019).
- (2) firepower capacity of Type 15 is based on a new 105 mm tank gun, which is better than Type 88A tank and Type 59D tank equipped 105 mm tank gun. Regarding this, Wei Dongxu, a Chinese military expert stated that "the Type 15 is comes with a 105-mm main gun capable of firing armour-piercing rounds and gun launched missiles, making its firepower not much inferior to a heavier main battle tank (Liu, 2018)".
- (3) The Type 15 tank is suitable for both rugged and mountainous land form of the Himalayan region. The most important feature, as per the Chinese analysts argument is that this lightweight tank can "outperform" other Chinese tanks in combat operations in high terrains like Tibet. It has been noted by experts that the Type 15 can be fast in getting across terrains of Tibet "if border dispute reoccurs" (Liu, 2018). This intends to increase the extensive manoeuvrability of Type 15 to proceed in the combat operations in Tibet, if there is a border clash between India and China armed forces. Equipped with powerful engines, it can manoeuvre with greater agility and run on Tibet's terrain. Type 15 tank is the only lightweight tank in service in the world. Through its technically advanced sensors, it can decimate enemy

armoured vehicles in high altitudes

Third-generation Type 99 series has been supplied with the ZTZ Type 99 A2, which is an advanced variant over the second-generation Type 99 series. It is equipped with a 1,500 HP power pack, armed with a 125 mm bore gun. It also includes the capacity of AT-11 Sniper anti-tank missile, a 12.7 mm anti-aircraft gun and Explosive Reactive Armour (ERA). In all the above features, it is equivalent to the MIAI Abram or the Leopard 2 (Singh, 2013). Another special feature within this variant is an auto loader, which can fire eight rounds a minute and penetrate 950 mm of steel at 2,000 metres. The missile can take down enemy armoured division tank at 5 km. This tank is equipped with a very accurate fire power system, also includes laser range finder, ballistic computer, muzzle reference and wind sensor. This tank equipped with both HF and VHF communication along with fitted GPS, The tank should be in service in large numbers in 2020 including with formations on the Tibetan Plateau (Singh, 2013).

PLA ground forces in Tibet were equipped with modern vehicle-mounted howitzers in early 2019, as Chinese experts revealed was PLC-181 vehicle mounted howitzer (Zhuo, 2019). To replace the old PL-66 152mm guns and type 59-1 130mm towed cannons. The new howitzer artillery filled gun comes with a 150mm calibre cannon. These howitzers artillery guns were delivered to the Eastern Military Command in a phased manner. PLA also deployed these artilleries during 2017 India-China standoff in Doklam. According to Chinese state media, the PLA's ground force in the Tibet military command had been equipped with these new howitzers in Army's 71, 73, and 77 group armies. It will increase mountainous fighting capability of PLA in Tibetan plateau. The howitzer comes with a 52-calibre cannon and a range of about 50 km that has laser-guided mechanism and satellite-guided projectiles. The modern features arguably augment the mountain warfare capability of the PLA in Tibet. The PCL-181 comes with a capacity of automatic fire control system (AFCS). The vehicle contains digitalised control panels with the button pressing feature of artillery gun deployment, autonomous weapon handling and semi-automatic ammunitions reload. The weapon can be shot in reduced time thereby increasing the artillery's firing range.

Following the contribution of the objective azimuth information, the Army truck-mounted fire control PC can automatically control the firing components also

consequently modify the azimuth and stature of the gunnery. In any case, such component alterations of the PL-66 depend totally on cooperation of activity. Weighing just 25 tons, the howitzer allegedly gives longer continuance than heavier partners that utilize crawler tracks. "This information implies the PCL-181 has high portability, however it can likewise be moved by transport aircraft like the locally made Y-20, which has a freight limit in excess of 60 tons," according to defence expert's statement to Global Times on April 30. A solitary Y-20 can almost certainly convey two PCL-181s, or a mix of one PCL-181 and one 30 ton-class Type 15 lightweight primary battle tank, the two of which are decisions that offer bleeding edge troops enormous capability, the expert included. The impenetrable vehicle on which the howitzer is mounted, has a huge driver's chamber that can oblige each of the six big guns crew individuals (Kay, 2020).

Infantry

In Tibet, PLA can mobilize 30 divisions of soldiers in one month, as per senior Indian Army officer. What he doesn't include is that the PLA has a capacity to dispatch a full-scale theatre assault in greater sense with large scale fight – concurrent commitment of a given assault front in its whole depth, sidelong scope and enclosure from all boundaries. The assault requirement of a capacity to move quickly, acquire dependable knowledge data, work significant long-range telecommunication systems, co-ordinate artillery and ballistic rocket backing, and lead carrier and ambush are capable. As indicated by sources, PLA's four to five improved Group Armed forces (almost equivalent of India's corps development) of reasonable composition attacking on the same moment might be incredibly difficult to keep in control by the nine mountain divisions and one infantry division (3 Infantry division in Ladakh) of India. This scenario shows that the potential could be gained in the Indian Infantry division rearrangement, along with the liberation from crippling interior strength activities. Also, entrusting jobs in Jammu and Kashmir can be managed well in ideal opportunities for acclimatization over the 10,000ft form line. Further the rearrangement could include autonomous unit estimated 'divisions', one each in Himachal Pradesh in the Shipki La region and the other one in Uttaranchal, along with one free mountain detachment would require a quick replication of gains (Singh, 2013).

Equipped with latest weapons and practiced with multidimensional strategy with the goal of destroying enemy armed forces incoming threat on the integrity of Chinese territory. This exercise conducted by the one of the large-scale exercises in the recent time in the jurisdiction of Tibetan 'Military Command of Chinese People's Liberation Army' (PLA). According to the Chinese state media the mountainous snowy region witnessed the Snowfield Duty 2021 more than 8000 soldiers participated of different regiments and battalions at very high altitude of Tibetan plateau.

During the multidimensional war exercise PLA troops simulated different elements war fighting conducted like different time periods, live ammunition and terrain fighting inserting Special Forces in to the enemy territory. According to the CCTV state media this war exercise demonstrated the combat capabilities and war preparedness of the PLA in the high mountains, as artillery forces rained down munitions on hostile reconnaissance and early warning facilities using howitzers and multiple rocket launcher systems, before destroying hostile communication centres and helicopter pads. The war exercises were combination of manoeuvred to the mission area under the cover of darkness and launch the first surprise attack at the midnight same other forces like tank columns and special operations commandos also clandestinely attacking enemy out posts and destroying their logistics nodes, communication centre and arms depot so that enemy troops can't fight for long sustained war due lack of coordination and other supporting arms back up in the time of rapid short border war in the high mountains (Liu, 2021).

As per (Liu, 2021), this exercise demonstrated,

"Anti-aircraft batteries deployed by a defence brigade launched missiles to intercept hostile aircraft, clearing the sky of enemy threats, and that was when the main forces - tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and assault vehicles - pushed forward to capture hostile positions. Amid the heated combat, an intelligence reconnaissance brigade started electromagnetic disruption of hostile communications facilities, giving the troops other advantage. Attack helicopters of an army aviation brigade took off for additional multidimensional fire support, as the artillery positions were exposed and the self-propelled howitzers and multiple rocket launcher systems had to be relocated. Supporting the march, sappers

cleared vital lanes of obstacles with explosives, and transport helicopters carried scouts who landed deep behind enemy defence lines for infiltration missions." The sophistication of the exercise displays the level of preparedness by the Chinese PLA combining the various elements for a successful attack that are exhibited in the western theatre command also.

PLA Ground Force Air Defence Forces

Chinese army's deployment of a formidable amount of air defence forces in the Tibetan Plateau is to keep surveillance on India's air assets or threats from Indian side. When the 2017 Doklam standoff happened, PLA initiated a massive combat exercise in Tibet. As witnessed in leaked videos online, there was PLAGF deployment of HQ-16 and HQ-17 Surface to Air Missiles (SAM) units to Tibetan military district by railway mode. While in Doklam, Chinese army and Indian army were standing face to face. Chinese ground force undertook live-fire combat drill in the Chinghai-Tibet Plateau. PLA Tibet regional command's Ground Combat Brigade undertook the drill. Further exercises involving rapid deployment, multi-unit joint strike and anti-aircraft defence were carried out wherein the AD units used twin-barrel anti-aircraft guns to shoot down incoming missiles and military planes. Later it came to be publicised in 2018, within the details of the 651st AD brigade. The good old 651st Anti-aircraft artillery regiment was the brigade in new form only, its reorganisation and enlargement have completed few years back with the SAM units joining its command.

The other AD systems within the brigade include PG-59 57mm AAA guns, HQ7A SAM HQ-16 and the MH-6 Manpads. After restructuring, every PLAGF Group Army (GA) is made up of six joined auxiliary Brigade, the auxiliary Brigades comprises of one AD brigade, WTC has Tibet as a part with currently having the 76th, 77th GA thus two AD brigades. The 651st independent AD brigade still is a part of CMD. The significant fact is that the PLA GF does not command the strategic air defence assets as the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has its control. The most sophisticated air defence system in the Chinese army is S-400 Air defence system, originally designed in Russia. It is also controlled by PLAAF. Most medium to long-range AD assets, besides the regular in units, PLA has anti-cruise missile units equipped with vehicle-mounted chaff and decoy launching system; one of which is deployed in Tibet.

This unit is attached to a regiment of the PLAAF under the WTC (Singh, 2020).

It was China's assertion in 2017 that its modernisation goals had been achieved with PLAAF mechanisation completed. However, the situation at the practical level is ideal with a major part of the PLA currently weapons platforms are still equipped with obsolescent equipment. Only about one third of Air Defence systems is modernised with more than half including obsolescent materials. While facing targets ahead to be achieved, a realistically balanced assessment could be to fully modernise Air Défense systems before 2021. Notwithstanding, the PLA cannot be denied to have a unique and strong AD capability. In conjunction with the air defence by the PLA in strategic manner, the Air Defence of China might not be taken as trivial.

Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs) in Tibet

Chinese UAV progress has been a constant witness of innovation in making and flying from a range of genre. The designs tested and experimented include annular wing Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) UAVs, micro-UAVs, unmanned airships, flying wings, modified light aircraft and sailplanes, UFO-style flying discs and even ornithopters (utilising flapping wings). The enthusiasm for developing UAVs was amply generated among professionals as much as debutants who had no previous experience. They were allowed a free run over the military aspects of defining the models of UAVs. Two other features also prominent in Chinese UAVs genesis, for example, equipping of the UAVs and attaching sensor payloads. China may keep in view a logical process in arming its UAVs by manifesting existing air-to-surface weapons with adaptations and further providing custom-built armed munitions. In any way, either adaptation of existing weapons with UAV structures or the new arms, Weapon-vehicle matching has proved insightful. Some examples are Wing-Loong series, CASIC UAV (Saxena, 2020).

Strategic Rocket Force

From 2015, China's reorganised its military force and they have restructured the Second Artillery into Rocket Force. China has been giving attention to the development of its rocket arsenal during the last few years. PLA has progressed in order to reinforce the lethality of nuclear deterrence and nuclear retaliation abilities, increase the number of medium and long

distance accurately attack power. Chinese President Xi, during inauguration had claimed that the new Rocket Force could be a major player in bridging national security and deterrence, a strategic support to the country's place in international power arena. The essence of the Rocket Force making was to improve nuclear deterrence. In 2018, China's current nuclear warheads increased to a total of 280, a jump of 40 from previous 240. Thus, annually production rate was 6-7 warheads every year from 2012 to 2018.

Delivery Capabilities

Addition of advanced medium range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) like Dung Feng-21 (CSS-5), name given by the Mod 6 of US defence is called India specific deployment because experts opine that this missile has been planted at Delingha pointed towards Indian major cities. The range of the missile is more than 2000 KMs, and it is solid fuel, road mobile, dual stage primary regional missile. According to estimates Chinese PLA might have deployed more than twenty-five nuclear tipped medium range ballistic missile in the Tibetan Plateau, also possibly have kept short range tactical nuclear missiles in that area. Other developments include: a new IRBM with a range about 4,000 kms known as the DF-26. There is also a new ICBM launcher can hit about 7000 KMs, the DF-31AG. China is focussed on developing the road-mobile DF-41 capable of carrying several warheads. It has a range of 12000 kms (TOI, June 31, 2018).

By comparison of recent launcher numbers in few years, we find that highest change is for ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs), which became double, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) have increased 200%. The corresponding changes in launchers of medium range ballistic (MRBMs) and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) have increased by the Chinese PLA. This is also with the short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) unchanging launcher numbers. Similarly, there is more diversity in the number of missiles, which include a five-time expansion in IRBMs and a comparative dwindling number in MRBMs and SRBMs. It is instructive to explain the diversity in numbers in missiles and launchers (May 2019, Henry Boyd) (Table 1).

PLAAF in Tibet

One estimate claims that there are 14 major airbases in the Tibetan Plateau. This is in addition to PLA's access

Table 1 : Chinese ballistic and cruise missile launchers and missiles by category, 2018 and 2019 US Department of Defence estimates

	Launchers		Missiles	
	2018 Report	2019 Report	2018 Report	2019 Report
Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles	50-75	90	75-100	90
Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles	16-30	80	16-30	80-160
Medium Range Ballistic Missiles	100-125	150	200-300	150-450
Short-Range Ballistic Missiles	250-300	250	1000-1200	750-1500
Ground-launched Cruise Missiles	40-55	90	200-300	270-540

(Source: US Department of Defense, 'Military and Security Developments in People's Republic of China', 2018 and 2019, DOD Annual Reports on Chinese Military developments, 2018 and 2019, FAS, 2019, Pentagon's 2019 China's Report)

to 20 small airstrips from which it could conduct air strikes against India. PLA has built bases at many places including Hoping, Pangta, Shiquane, Payixincun in Central Tibet in proximity to Arunachal Pradesh. PLAAF and Civil Aviation Administration of China had announced in 2015 the integration that will take into consideration the joint maintenance of airport related issues such as safety, support and facility management. The main point of this joint decision is to integrate aviation safety and combat support facilities in an effective manner. Gongkar is named often as the airborne gateway into Tibet and its weather resistant airfield is situated at a height of 1600ft adjacent to the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. The number of flying missions into Tibet has jumped enormously from the airport. It is usually difficult to operate flights and other missions within the Tibet because of the tough weather conditions and extremely high elevation. Because of high altitudes in the Tibet severe limitations to the aircraft on the fuel and the weapon payload flown from the airfield bases in the Tibet region (November 2017, AK Sachdev).

Currently, the main Hotan airbase facing eastern Ladakh has around 35-40 J-11, J-8 and other fighters, along with a few AEW&C (airborne early-warning and control) aircraft and armed drones (Pandit, 2020). Kashgar, in turn, has six to eight Xian H-6K bombers, with a sprinkling of fighters deployed in other airbases. PLAAF also suffers from a "terrain disadvantage" of high-altitude and rarefied air at its airbases facing India, which severely limits the weapon and fuel-carrying capacity of its fighters (TOI, June 2020, Rajat Pandit).

Tibet has less airfields and it's a weakness that these did not possess the bomb-proof covers for safe aircraft enclosure. China's threat being more in general towards Taiwan, Japan, North Korea and South China Sea. The recent rise in undercurrent of hostility between China and India is leading to the Chinese thinking a need to

increase military capabilities in Tibet with greater deployment capacity against India. Tibet is high-altitude plateau, this leads to PLAAF considerable limits of just 10 aircraft of H-6 class and three IL-78s. Newly made in China is the heavy-lift transport aircraft, Y-20, which is suitable for the Tibet altitude. The aircraft can be roped to play the tanker role. The remodelling of the air supplies with the tankers can enable in improvement of sufficient numbers in aerial refuelling capability (November 2019, Ravinder Chatwal).

Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has organised itself according to modern technology and poses a great threat to the safety of India's airspace, along with the population centres. The PLAAF had in its command 5000 fighters two decades ago, of which more than 60 per cent were obsolete, whereas the current PLAAF is a smaller and more up to date force. Consisting of about 1,500 fighter jets, among which there are 600 advanced J-10 fighters and Su-27/30 fighters, the total Indian Air Force is similar in strength. The high-end constituents of the PLAAF becoming more than the total of its Indian opposition, shows a sign of danger for the Indian maintaining airpower superiority as compared to traditional Indian superiority.

China maintains a large party of bombers, auxiliary aircraft, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for all kinds of espionage and fatal missions. Although the strength of Chinese bomber force is not a match against the capability of Indian air defences, but the same cannot be estimated about the strength of the air-launched cruise missiles of China's PLA. India did not regain a new stock of bomber contingent after retiring the Canberra's as it began to focus on airpower for the tactical impact of theatre counter air operations. The emphasis PLAAF is giving more priority on Air attack at tactical and as well as strategic level. This shows that it endorsed for multirole fighter aircraft due to cost effectiveness in the

strategic role of missions (Tellis, 2016).

China's air force is in hold of a variety of Stealth Fighters, S-8. Along with S-8, J-20 and J-31 other two high profile stealth projects of PLAAF. In recent years, China has built a powerful air defence system with nationwide integrated air defence system (IADS), a large number of advanced long-range S-300 SAMs, and home grown AWACS KJ-2000 and AEW KJ-200. IAF will have to invest heavily in advanced SEAD/DEAD systems to penetrate PLAAF's air defence system. Along with IADS PLAAF also possess H-6K bombers. Which carries Chinese air launched cruise missiles YJ-63, range 200km.

The ultimate goal of China is to build as many military bases feasible in the Tibet to control and secure its mineral resources rich territory for its strategic interest. China has been greatly militarizing the Tibetan Plateau since occupying it by force. Construction of military airfields has been on the rise to accommodate its newly developed fifth generation aircraft and other supporting transport aircraft, there have been also rise in logistics nodes for quick supply of weapons and other necessary military supplies to the PLA soldiers equip them in case of war like situation with neighboring India. To augment smooth transport of troops and supplies to the border, many small airfields, additional runway and helipads have been constructed.

Due to the heavy construction of infrastructure the ecology of Tibet has been severely compromised, China has been dumping its nuclear waste for last few decades. Many nuclear tests have been conducted by China in the Tibetan Plateau. So the intention of PRC goes beyond building only military infrastructure in the erstwhile independent country to defend it but rather than it has more ambition expanding further its territory into India controlled territory. India's has few ballistic and cruise missile that can hit the depth areas of Chinese military infrastructures like air bases, logistic nodes, weapons and fuel dumps and troop concentrations.

Conclusion

The Sino-Indian border is characterised by several imbalances. The most important of these are in border infrastructure and weapons platforms, where India's inadequacies have worked in favour of China. There are only a few areas along the border where India has the advantage of being on higher ground. Rajagopalan and Mohan (2020) asserted that, "China has already developed a 96,000-km-long road network in Tibet and

a 2,000-km railway line from Xining, Qinghai province to Lhasa in Tibet. The latter was extended to the city of Shigatse, close to the Indian border, in August 2014. Further, China is developing a railway line from Lhasa to Nyingchi in the East in close proximity to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which is to be completed by 2021". On the other hand, China has built and also still rapidly building modern border infrastructure to augment its smooth and quick transit of its troops, and war machines to the Indian border in case there is any conflict takes place (ibid).

Chinese PLAAF bases in Tibet from not that important, we have incredible proliferation of bases which they don't have in the Tibet. PLAAF important bases are out of the range of Indian Air Force at the tactical level. In the Indian side the proximity of proximity of Indian Air force bases close compare to the Chinese, to take out Indian air bases PLAAF and PLARF has to fire

- Three new airports that can operate civilian flights and military are coming up close to India.
- Lhuntse airport is opposite Arunachal Pradesh.
- Ngari Burangi is 20 km from the Nepal border.
- Xigaze is directly opposite Sikkim and Bhutan.

Chinese PLAAF has more than 800 plus 4+ generation Fighter plane that's a significant number.

China has 120 H-6 Bomber that carry long range cruise missile compare to Indian Air Force don't have single dedicated large size bomber.

PLAAF is going to induct stealth bomber and stealth Drones in their arsenal soon.

China has around 11 airfields in the Tibet Xinxiang region. China has the capacity to generate 100 sortie per day compare to India Air Force can generate around 250 -300 sortie per day that's very significant edge we have over Chinese PLAAF (Chopra, 2018). China has the plan to induct around 200 J-20 stealth fighters by 2027 now PLAAF have inducted around 40 of them in the inventory and in Tibet also they have stationed J-20s, Compare to Indian Air Force's Rafale Omni role fighter plane the Chinese J-20 is double in size but the weapon payload capacity of J-20 is less compared to Indian Air Forces.

So here my argument is in the coming future China will launch attack on India in the northern border though it will be limited border skirmish just to assert its superiority over India. But the time line couldn't be said

when China going to attack it could happen in coming years or 5 to 10 years down the line, that China will decide when the time and situation suits the best Chinese top political and military leaders and after doing all the calculation.

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