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China's Maritime Challenge in the Indian Ocean

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Introduction

Every Indian of my generation has some abiding childhood memories relating to China. I can recall, from my school own days, inspiring phrases about "Panchsheel" and the "Non-Aligned Movement" which regularly peppered headlines and radio news in the 1950s. One often saw photographs of smiling Premiers Jawaharlal Nehru and Chou En Lai in newsreels and papers; and the famous slogan: "*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*" was enthusiastically adopted by a gullible Indian public. No one realised that India's acceptance of Chinese suzeranity over Tibet in 1951 would eliminate a huge buffer state and have such serious consequences for India.

I was a cadet in the National Defence Academy when we were woken up one night in November 1962, to bid ceremonial farewell to the Deputy Commandant Brigadier Hoshiar Singh. He was flying to North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) to take command of 62 Infantry Brigade as they deployed to combat the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army. I vividly remember 1500 cadets lining the central

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avenue of the Academy, at midnight, and cheering this admired soldier as he drove past in a jeep. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh never returned; posthumously earning the Maha Vir Chakra for gallantry in action at Se La pass.

India's humiliating military defeat at China's hands in 1962, proved a historical watershed in many ways. It shook the political leadership out of its Utopian daydream wherein they believed that an India which professed non-violence could not possibly have enemies, and therefore the armed forces were to be tolerated only as a necessary evil.

It is now obvious that a naïve and idealistic Indian leadership, which grossly misread the intentions of China's newly triumphant Communist regime in 1949, also ignored the few pragmatic voices which tried to raise an alarm. Home Minister Sardar Patel's detailed letter of November 1950, on Tibet, to Pandit Nehru contains this warning:

> *"The Chinese Government has tried to delude us by professions of peaceful intention . . . at a crucial period they managed to instill into our Ambassador a false sense of confidence in their so-called desire to settle the Tibetan problem by peaceful means . . . during the intervening period the Chinese must have been concentrating for an onslaught on Tibet."*

The Ambassador that Patel refers to is Sardar K.M. Panikkar. Interestingly, Panikkar, in his book, *India and the Indian Ocean*, written in 1945, had this remarkable prediction to make:

> *"That China does intend to embark on a policy of large-scale naval expansion is clear enough from the attitude of both the Nationalists and the Communist . . . the latter have demanded that the Japanese Navy should be handed over to them after the war. The significant demography of southern China will demand a southern movement by the navy of resurgent China in the years to come."*

Six decades later, there continues to be considerable ambivalence and even confusion, in our political and diplomatic circles, about how India should frame its policies as well as strategic stance towards China. This is partly attributable to a deep-rooted apprehension that, both economically and militarily, China is so far ahead that we

may not be able to stand up to this rising giant. The issue is further obfuscated by the fact that bilateral trade has been steadily rising, and the two booming Asian economies have even led woolly-headed economists to talk of concepts like "Chindia".

A second reason for ambivalence towards China lies in our abysmal ignorance about this huge neighbour. We have hardly any Mandarin speakers, and very few people who have dedicated themselves to research into China's history, culture, economy, industry, and strategic thought. Consequently our data banks about Chinese military, economic, and technological capabilities remain sparse. All these lacunae have kept us in the dark about their strategic thought-processes or long-term intentions. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that our response to recent Chinese actions and utterances has been lacking, both in clarity and resolve.

A relatively new factor that has entered the Sino-Indian strategic equation is the maritime dimension. The rapid growth of both economies has led to increasing reliance on energy and raw materials, sourced from distant parts of the world and transported by sea. Globalisation is merely another word for international trade; most of which travels via container ships. This has focused sharp attention on the criticality, for both economies, of uninterrupted seaborne trade which is dependent on secure sea lanes. Amongst other factors, India's dominant geographical location in the context of Indian Ocean sea lanes is possibly a ground for China's sense of unease, and marked emphasis on the creation of a strong blue-water navy.

This is a theme worthy of exploration, but before embarking on an exploration of China's maritime challenge, let us briefly compare the superficial similarities and distinctions that have shaped the national outlook, as well as the policies and conduct of our two neighbouring nations.

Similarities and Distinctions

Historically both China and India have certain common threads running through their past and this helps rationalise their contemporary behaviour as nation-states. Both are ancient civilisational entities with a strong religious-cum-cultural underpinning which explains the enduring nature of their mores and traditions. One often hears, nowadays, that 500 years ago, these two nations were so prosperous that between them they are said to have contributed over 50% of the world's gross domestic product

(GDP). Less quoted is the fact that the per capita GDP of both countries must have been pretty low even then.

Both have experienced invasions: mostly from Central Asia, but from the 15th century onwards increasingly across their shores, by European sea powers. While the overland invaders became assimilated into the two resilient cultures, it was the Western interlopers, coming by sea, who inflicted subjugation and humiliation on both nations. This has created a deep national urge never to allow a repeat of history, and to regain past glory at the earliest possible. Both emerged, from a long and tumultuous struggle, as independent nation-states around the middle of the 20th century.

So much for historical common ground. Central China has a homogenous population of ethnic Hans and a long-standing tradition of vassal states on its periphery which the Communist regime has tried to sustain and consolidate over six decades. Chairman Mao blended the economic principles of public ownership, through state control of the economy with an emphasis on repeated revolutions in all spheres of society to strive for the goals of Marxism–Leninism. However, in 1978, after 30 years of experimentation with collectivisation and a centrally planned economy, the system was abandoned in favour of a market-driven reform strategy. Deng Xiaoping's bold experiment of combining socialism with a market economy, open to foreign investment, has proved an outstanding success. China's authoritarian system has enabled rapid change, and resolute progress. Consequently, China's economy has been growing at double digit rate for 30 years now.

India, on the other hand, except for brief spells, was rarely an imperial power. Far more diverse and heterogeneous, a perpetual endeavour was necessary by the central authority to keep outlying territories from breaking away. Military conquests and empire-building, even for strategic reasons, were obviously alien to Indian culture and tradition. The deep Hindu imprint on South East Asia, still in evidence, is the legacy of India's "soft power" projected, not by armies, but by intrepid mariners, merchants, and missionaries across the seas over a period of 1500 years.

Two centuries of British rule sapped India economically and left her technologically handicapped. The adoption of Western liberal democracy after Independence, requiring a consensual approach to all issues, coupled with a socialistic pattern of society has permitted only slow and halting economic progress. Nevertheless, there is tremendous potential in the nation and the past decade has witnessed excellent, even though uneven, economic growth.

The Emergence of China

Against this backdrop, let me start by drawing attention to the sustained increase in China's economic and military capabilities, combined with her ambitions in the spheres of maritime, space, and information technology. These are not only going to re-define her own strategic interests, but will certainly impinge on those of powers like the USA and India. The rise of China is, therefore, going to constitute one the most significant challenges facing her neighbours in the next few decades. As far as India is concerned, we need to take specific note and remain focused on a number of significant issues.

Firstly, there is competition between China and India in the economic and military spheres. No matter how far we lag behind, since both are Asian powers, it is historically inevitable that the two will have to compete for the same strategic space. China provides support to Pakistan's nuclear weapon and missile programmes, and supplies her conventional weapons; the countries are currently in dispute over Aksai Chin, and China stakes serious claims on Arunachal Pradesh, its attempted to stall a waiver from the Nuclear Supplier's Group, and mounts determined opposition to our entry into the UN Security Council. These are abundant indications of China's well-considered and deep-rooted hostility to India. I would, therefore, not rule out the possibility of conflict.

Secondly, with Sino-Indian bilateral trade having crossed the US$60 billion mark, China is already our largest trading partner. But trade could become a Trojan horse if it lulls us into complacency. We must not forget that, historically, trade has never prevented nations from pursuing their national interest or even waging war.

Thirdly, China has made a conscious effort to encircle India, by providing military and economic aid to countries all round us. In this context, Gwadar, situated at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and Hambantota, on the south-eastern tip of Sri Lanka, are the first two in a chain of ports that China is helping our neighbours to develop.

At US$70 billion, China's 2010 declared defence budget is more than twice of our own, and next only to that of the United States. An equal amount is known to be spent secretly on strategic forces and special projects. China's military expansion and modernisation is marked by total opacity of purpose, and there is no sincere attempt on its part to rationalise the huge expenditure or to reassure its neighbours.

And finally, there is no precedent for the manner in which China has indulged in nuclear and missile proliferation in our neighbourhood. It is known to have handed over not just the designs and expertise, but also actual nuclear warheads and a whole family of ballistic missiles to Pakistan. By these actions, China has completely skewed the natural balance of power on the sub-continent and put India on the back foot. These actions could not have been motivated by anything but a deeply malevolent motivation to harm India in the long term.

Comprehensive National Power

Before proceeding further, I would like to briefly dwell on the term Comprehensive National Power or CNP; as much for its own significance, as for the glimpse it provides into the Chinese strategic thought-process.

CNP is a Chinese concept which represents the totality of the power or strengths of a country in terms of its economy, military capability, science and technology, education, human and natural resources, and its diplomatic influence. On a more abstract plane, it refers to the combination of all the powers possessed by a country for the survival and development of a sovereign state, including material and philosophical ethos and international influence.

Chinese political thinkers believe that CNP can be calculated numerically by combining various quantitative indices to create a single number held to measure the power of a nation-state. These indices take into account both military factors, or hard power and economic and cultural factors, or soft power. CNP is notable for being an original and contemporary Chinese political concept with no roots in Western political theory, Communist dogma or classical Chinese thinking.

As a matter of interest, on a scale of 100, the United States is graded first at 90 points, China comes behind United Kingdom, Russia, France, and Germany at sixth with 60 points, and India finds tenth place with 50 points.

China's Past

A clear comprehension of the motivations and rationale that have underpinned China's rise is a vital pre-requisite to formulation of an effective response to this phenomenon. A brief glimpse into China's past throws up three dominant factors which provide us with a possible insight into this nation's present postures.

Firstly, China has an imperial tradition going back many centuries, in which a well-defined heartland overwhelmingly populated by ethnic Hans, exercised military dominance over the surrounding peripheral states. Thus China has historically had a ''great-power'' self-image, underpinned by the abundance of resources, economic self-sufficiency and vastness of the imperial state and its population.

Secondly; in tandem with the cultivation of a ''great power'' persona, the Chinese people have also nurtured a deep seated ''victim mentality'' as a result of China's defeat, subjugation, and humiliation by foreign powers. During the 19th century, China's inability to resist Western military pressures led to the Opium Wars and signing of the ''Unequal Treaties'' with the United States, Russia, United Kingdom and other European powers. These treaties violated China's sovereignty by granting trading, judicial, and other extra-territorial rights on Chinese soil to foreigners.

In 1937 Japan invaded China, and in the intense eight year war that followed, China suffered at least 20 million casualties and many atrocities at the hands of the ruthless Imperial Japanese troops.

This ''victim syndrome'' has served to intensify a strong urge to emphasise foreign threats and justify the creation of a powerful Chinese nation which not only commands international deference, but can redress past wrongs.

Thirdly, maintenance of domestic order and well-being is considered the *sin qua non* of China's national security, and in this arena the country faces a number of challenges. These include:

- the great poverty, discontent and disillusionment inflicted upon the people by Chairman Mao's highly repressive and dogmatic political system; his other legacy being a self-serving and corrupt Communist bureaucracy;
- the enormous pressure on the present regime to sustain high levels of economic growth, in order to cope with a rising population, and sharp emerging economic disparities; and
- the potential for ethnic strife in non-Han majority areas like Tibet, Sinkiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria, incorporated into China in the last century represents an additional source of insecurity for the state.

The Chinese populace suffered chaos, disruption, and deprivation caused, in succession, by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution of the 1950s

and 1960s. For them, Deng Xiaoping's bold display of pragmatism, in which he cast off the Communist central planning system to adopt a market driven economy, must have come as a breath of fresh air in 1978.

The Calculative Strategy

In order to effectively protect her security interests, the People's Republic of China (PRC) today requires high levels of unrestricted growth in economic and technological terms. This can take place only in a tranquil geo-political environment accompanied by domestic stability. Such unimpeded growth will provide the vast economic resources necessary to acquire the military attributes of a great power within the next few decades.

Till very recently, it was said that in her desire to attain this objective, the PRC has evolved what has been termed as a ''Calculative Strategy''. This strategy was described as a pragmatic combination of market led economic growth, and maintenance of amicable relations with neighbours as well as major powers; emphasising restraint in the use of force, while focusing on expansion of military capabilities. The endeavour was overlaid by an expanding regional and global engagement, seeking asymmetric gains for China wherever possible.

The following advice rendered by Deng Xiaoping, perhaps summed up the spirit behind this strategy: ''Observe with serenity; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capabilities and bide our time; maintain a low profile, and never claim leadership.''

This thesis assumed that for the duration that she pursued a Calculative Strategy, the PRC would remain a relatively benign power. By the same token, once she had achieved her self-assigned indices of ''comprehensive national power'', we could expect her to resume the pre-Deng muscular posture, with significant implications for the neighbourhood as well as the international community. The only imponderable was: how much time will this strategy take to fructify?

As an integral part of this Calculative Strategy, the PRC sought to develop her military capabilities, in order to underwrite a range of political and strategic objectives. With the reduction of one million men in the PLA in the mid-1980s the focus of modernisation shifted to improving the quality of the armed forces. In this matrix, the

Chinese leadership accorded priority to the PLA Navy (PLAN), Air Force and the Second Artillery Corps; in that order.

China's Maritime Vision

Admiral Liu Huaquing was the third commander of the PLAN and headed it throughout the 1980s. A former army officer, he was very influential in the Central Military Commission and rose to be a senior Vice-Chairman. Liu proved himself a forward thinking maritime strategist, who took guidance from Admiral Mahan, and laid the foundations for rapid expansion and modernisation of the PLAN.

Currently in its 64th anniversary year, it is largely Admiral Liu Huaqing's vision that has transformed the PLA Navy over the past two decades from a relatively inconsequential coastal force to a substantive blue-water navy. The progress made by this navy has been very significant, and its further qualitative enhancement will have far reaching geo-political impact.

The modernisation of China's national defence capabilities has been undertaken in three phases aimed at laying a solid foundation by 2010, achieving major progress by 2020, and becoming capable of winning ''informationised wars'' by 2050. It can be assumed that the PLA Navy will progressively seek to build-up capabilities in consonance with these three phases. It seeks to influence events; initially in the first island chain, then up to the second island chain, and finally in the whole Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions. The term ''informationised'' refers to C4I2S encompassing digital networked systems.

Reading between the lines one could note, till quite recently, an underlying sense of insecurity amongst the PRC establishment in the maritime context. It seemed to arise from a nagging fear that the PLA Navy had lagged behind the navies of developed, and even some developing, countries in exploiting the fruits of the Revolution in Military Affairs.

Till recently this diffidence was apparent in the great reluctance exhibited by the PLA Navy to venture out of home waters or to participate in multi-national activities, including humanitarian assistance like the 2004 tsunami relief. Whether the diffidence arose from shortcomings in human or material resources, or in doctrine is something that was not clear.

However, all this seems to have changed with the dispatch, in December 2008, of a task force for an extended anti-piracy patrol to Somali waters. This was followed by a second deployment in April 2009, and since then, there has been a continuous PLA Navy task force on station off the Horn of Africa. While the primary objective of these deployments has been to protect merchant traffic passing through the Gulf of Aden against piracy, their success has boosted China's confidence and resolve to use maritime power to protect its overseas interests. A secondary motive has been to improve China's international image by contributing to international security, and integrating with the international system.

Contours of the PLA Navy

The six main maritime tasks or ''campaigns'' allocated to the PLA Navy are sea blockade, trade warfare, surface strike, convoy protection, land attack, and naval base defence. To these must be added the important strategic task of nuclear deterrence.

In order to discharge its assigned roles and missions, the PLA Navy has embarked on an ambitious acquisition programme which is a mix of indigenous production and imported platforms. Recent ship and submarine acquisitions include:

- Russian *Sovremenniy* class guided missile destroyers armed with the Sunburn SSM;
- Chinese built advanced *Luzhou*, *Luyang* and *Jiankai* guided missile frigates;
- diesel-powered Russian Kilo class boats armed with anti-ship as well as land-attack Klub missile and the Shkval torpedo;
- *Song* and *Yuan* class diesel boats;
- Shang class SSNs; and
- the second generation Jin class SSBNs armed with the 8000 km ranges *Ju Long-2* sub-launched ballistic missile (SLBM).

As for the future, Chinese scholars have predicted a dramatic maritime rise in PLAN capability over the next decade, indicating:

- a progressive increase in the size of the PLA Navy's principal combatants (destroyers and frigates), and a consequent shift in emphasis to blue-water

capabilities. An aircraft carrier (the modernised Soviet era ship *Varyag*) is said to have made its maiden appearance very recently;
- the huge rise in submarine tonnage is a pointer to a greater number of larger SSNs and SSBNs; and
- the availability of amphibious shipping is obviously poised to take a quantum jump.

Currently, in the context of Taiwan, the PLA Navy faces a set of severe constraints including lack of anti-submarine warfare and anti-air warfare capabilities, if faced with superior US forces. These lacunae would preclude PLA Navy operations in Pacific waters east of Taiwan, and limit its options to bombardments, blockade or amphibious demonstrations.

In order to overcome this lacuna, the PLA Navy has been engaged in developing what the Americans have termed an ''anti-access'' or ''area denial'' strategy. The aim of this strategy is to essentially deny access to the US Navy's aircraft carrier battle groups to waters of the South China Sea, including the Taiwan Straits. Amongst other measures, China is said to have developed a version of the Dong Feng-21 ballistic missile which can, theoretically, engage a fast moving carrier group as far as 900 miles away from China's coast.

The Quest for an Aircraft Carrier

In the context of long-range blue-water operations, the PLA Navy obviously suffers from an intense feeling of vulnerability, due to the lack of integral air power. The acquisition of an aircraft carrier has been on its wish-list for many years, as much for its combat capability as for the ''big power'' status it bestows. If and when such a ship enters the Chinese order of battle, it would not just alter the strategic balance in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, but also impact on the Asia-Pacific region as a whole

In 1985 the Chinese purchased the hulk of the former Australian carrier HMAS *Melbourne* as scrap, and then went on to acquire two more ex-Soviet Navy carriers: the *Minsk*, and the *Kiev*. This was part of an obvious effort to closely study and reverse engineer such a ship. The seriousness of their endeavours can be gauged from

the fact that they sought carrier blueprints as well as consultancy from M/S Bazan in Spain and the Nevskoye Design Bureau in Russia. In 2001 the half-built Russian carrier *Varyag* was towed from the Black Sea to Dalian, where persistent reports say that work is in hand to make it operational.

With China's periodic acquisition of derelict carrier hulls, a lot of attention has remained focused on the ship design aspect. However, little thought has been given to the fact that the Chinese must first of all identify a suitable aircraft. Only when a specific aircraft is selected can a new carrier be designed and built, or an old carrier suitably modified. Earlier there was talk about an offer of 50 Sukhoi-33 carrier-borne fighters to China, but the Russians seemed to have had a change of heart. Apart from the Su-33 and MiG-29K, there are just two or three Western-origin carrier-borne aircraft available on the market, and these are unlikely to be available.

From India's experience of carrier operations one can say that unless the Chinese can manage to develop a ship-borne fighter, the prospects of the PLA Navy putting an operational aircraft-carrier to sea, in the near future, look rather bleak. There are, however, rumours that the Ukrainians may have provided a carrier version of the Su-27 for the Chinese to reverse-engineer.

The Nuclear Submarine Force

The PLA Navy sent its first *Han* nuclear propelled attack submarine (or SSN) to sea in 1974, but it is understood that reactor and other problems have prevented boats of this class from attaining operational effectiveness, and venturing too far, too frequently. The *Han* has been followed by the more successful *Shang* SSN, and apart from providing protection to their SSBNs these units represent a major Chinese sea denial capability, currently in the Pacific and in the near future in the Indian Ocean.

The single *Xia* class nuclear propelled ballistic missile submarine (or SSBN) has been superseded by the brand new *Jin* recently sighted near a major underground submarine base in Hainan. Armed with a battery of 12 JL-2 SLBMs missiles, which can target both San Francisco and New Delhi from the South China Sea, this new class of five–six boats will represent a quantum jump for the Chinese nuclear deterrent.

Although the Chinese attack submarines are technologically inferior and perhaps noisier than their Western counterparts, they could pose a significant impediment to USN carrier battle group operations. The new *Jin* class SSBN endows China with greater coercive power, as far as the region is concerned, and perhaps a better deterrent against a US first strike.

China's Energy Strategy

The burgeoning demand from China's energy-hungry economy has led to increasing dependence on overseas imports. China has acquired energy assets abroad, mostly in Africa and the Persian Gulf, and most of it comes home by sea. This is perceived as a strategic vulnerability, because about 60% of China's exports and 90% of her oil imports are shipped via the Indian Ocean, and have to transit across extended sea lanes via the Hormuz and Malacca Straits.

This sense of vulnerability has led China to build huge strategic oil reserves, and to fashion two strategic corridors through which it could safely transfer Persian Gulf and African oil home by reducing its exposure in sea lanes. One of these runs from Gwadar port at the entrance of Persian Gulf across the Karakorams to western China. The other energy corridor will run from a Myanmarese port across the heart of Myanmar to Kunming in Yunan.

China's fears that in the event of a confrontation its economy could be held hostage through the threat of interdiction at sea have also prompted it to try and secure footholds in the Indian Ocean where its naval forces could find sustenance and support for extended deployments away from home.

With this as the ultimate objective, the PRC has evolved the ''string of pearls strategy''. This term is used to define a set of initiatives aimed at acquiring access and bases along more than 10,000 km of sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean. Anchored at one end, in the Pakistani port of Gwadar, this string notionally runs through Iran, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar; terminating in Bangladesh. It is hardly a coincidence that most of these nations are recipients of Chinese arms or economic aid.

Quite clearly, a complementary aim of this strategy is the encirclement of India, which has vital security interests in the Indian Ocean. PLA Navy presence in these waters would no doubt pose a threat of serious magnitude to these interests.

China's Opacity and Unpredictability

The area of greatest concern in the context of China's military rise is the cultivated lack of transparency about her expansion plans. Former US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, summed up universal concerns when he said: ''Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment? Why these continuing large and expensive arms purchases?''

China has always defied predictions about her conduct; the use of deception and stratagem to keep the adversary off-balance is obviously an important component of the Chinese strategic tradition. We must, therefore, draw our own conclusions based on past experience, and in this context I would like to re-iterate three points that I made earlier.

- India having become independent two years before the end of the Chinese civil war, Nehru espoused the fledgling PRC's cause in international forums, including a seat in the UNSC. The ''*Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai*'' paradigm was a product of India's wishful thinking that the two nations could form a grand Asian *entente cordiale*. The treacherous Chinese attack of October 1962, therefore dealt not just a physical blow at India's security, but also left our national psyche traumatised by the humiliation of military defeat: exactly the result desired by China. We seem to have come full circle now, with China repeatedly and aggressively reiterating her claims on Indian territory, which hark back to the 1962 conflict.
- Commencing in the late 1970s, China deliberately and in cynical disregard of sub-continental stability, as well India's security interests, undertook to render assistance to Pakistan in acquiring nuclear weapons. The decision to hand over designs, materials, and expertise for manufacture of nuclear weapons to Pakistan was a Machiavellian manoeuvre without precedent. The PRC not merely trumped India strategically, and forced her to nuclearise, but also helped A.Q. Khan set off an international chain-reaction of nuclear proliferation, with which the world is still struggling to cope.
- Currently the PRC makes great capital out of the burgeoning Sino-Indian bilateral trade which has recently crossed the US$60 billion mark, and is the cause of great euphoria amongst Indian politicians and diplomats. However,

> we seem to have lowered our guard on this front too, on a number of counts. Not only do we have an adverse balance of trade with China, but while we export scarce raw material to them, they are flooding our markets with finished products. Even worse, the Chinese are making steady inroads into our infrastructure sector with services, people and goods; in fact our telecommunications sector stands compromised because we have allowed the import of Chinese components in vital locations.

While Beijing's official stance remains outwardly non-confrontational, it is significant that during his recent visit Premier Wen Jiabao treaded a very correct and cautious line between India and Pakistan, and made no conciliatory gestures whatsoever on any issue.

On the other hand, influential Chinese strategists have been publically discussing a ''partial war'' with India. In an article published by the China International Institute of Strategic Studies in January 2009, such a limited conflict was considered necessary to recover ''Southern Tibet'' as they term Arunachal Pradesh. According to this logic, the Chinese withdrawal north of the ''illegal McMahon Line'', post-1962 was a mistake because it allowed Indian troops to re-occupy ''Southern Tibet''. The ''partial war'' solution is expected to achieve multiple aims of recovering ''Chinese territory'', liberating Sikkim and rejuvenating Pakistan and Nepal.

Conclusion

After the 15th-century Chinese Admiral Cheng Ho's legendary voyages across the Indian Ocean, the PLA Navy's deployment to the Horn of Africa is the first time Chinese warships have operated outside the Asia-Pacific region for a military operation. The PLA has been reforming its organisational structure, doctrine, education and training, and personnel policies in order to fulfil its initiative of ''fighting and winning a local war under the informationised condition''.

In setting out priorities for the ongoing military modernisation process, China has paid close attention to the performance of the US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, and is learning from the success of the US military in areas like information-centric warfare, joint operations, C4ISR, and hi-tech weaponry. The PLAN is gradually

building up its power projection capabilities, which will allow it to deploy forces transnationally.

This seaward re-orientation marks a watershed in Chinese thinking and strategy. The PLA Navy is yet nowhere close to its ambition of becoming a world class force. The point for us to ponder is whether China feels that she nearing her goals of comprehensive national power, and if so; when will she cast off her Calculative Strategy and assume a hegemonistic stance?

How far away will China reach out to extend hegemony? And what levels of coercion would she be willing to use in the process? These are two of the obvious questions that beg an answer. They are especially relevant in the context of China's maritime rise, since navies have the greatest reach and influence. China's increasingly truculent posture poses an existential dilemma for India that demands a response from the political leadership. Our options to counter threats or coercion are stark; either we accelerate our economic growth and boost military muscle to stand up on our own, or we strike alliances with willing partners. In the interim our diplomats must do everything they can to avoid a serious confrontation with China and gain a breathing spell.