



Navigating China's Military Modernization

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Abstract

Nepal has repeatedly experienced the lurching effects of the increased tension between China and India. Consequently, both countries have engaged in rigorous military modernization and securitization techniques. The emerging context has posed a question of how Nepal can adopt a military strategy. The capacity of a small power to curtail the reeling effect of the tension between the great power depends on its security preparedness policy. Historical military strategists require any country (powerful or weak) to conduct meticulous research about the opponent or the potential opponents' military strength before devising any military defense or offense. Acknowledging India's dominant position in the region and its overwhelming military engagement with the small powers in South Asia, the scholarly discourse on India's military capacity is voluminous. However, only a few studies have examined China's military modernization in the new era under President Xi Jinping and what it connotes to the small powers in the south. In this regard, the paper conducted a detailed analysis of China's military transformation under President Xi Jinping. The findings show that China's military organization has adopted a centralized reform mechanism, and its armed forces have been equipped with advanced technological ammunition to build a "World Class Army." Such a powerful buildup in the northern front makes it imperative for Nepal to rethink its security preparedness policy to deter the spillover effect of the conflict between the great powers in the region or beyond.

Keywords: security dilemma, military transformation, degree of competition, technological advancement, national security interest

Introduction

Each country acts to secure its national interest. Beyond this interest, the externalities and the consequences that follow seldom matter. In safeguarding the national interest, the great power possesses a higher potential to implement offensive deterrence compared to a small power. The security and power maximization techniques adopted by a great power align with the 'self-help' argument, and in this process, the survival of a small power becomes highly vulnerable.

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According to Kjelle Goldmann, “the higher the tension between the great powers, the weaker the power of the small ones” (Goldmann, 1979, p. 123). In this situation, the security dilemma incites a great power to seek influence over a small power. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war explains Russia’s heightened security dilemma via NATO and the United States that instigated the former to inject a military offense in Ukraine.

Likewise, the skirmishes between China and India recurrently challenge the security of the small powers in the region. Despite cooperation efforts, ‘conflict’ dominates this relationship. Both countries have engaged in rigorous military modernization and securitization techniques (SIPRI, 2022). Both have transformed their military from conventional to combat forces embedded with advanced technologies. Unfortunately, the enhanced security dilemma has equipped Nepal's only two neighbors with arms, ammunition, and technologies that effortlessly threaten its existence. Under these circumstances, if either power identified Nepal as a potential threat to its national security Nepal's status as a buffering state could be endangered. “Friends of today can be enemies tomorrow”; the United States and the Soviet Union shared a warm relationship during World War II. Shortly after the end of the war, they became enemies. Therefore, the unpredictable nature of the international system makes the small power wary of their capacity to defend their national security interest.

Based on this discourse, the paper seeks to answer the following research question: In an external environment with a high level of tension between the great powers, what is the prerequisite to determining a security preparedness policy for the small powers? Accordingly, the first section of the research paper applies the realist view to make a systematic analysis of the scholarly debates on foreign and security policy behavior of small power. Predominant studies on small power recognize the external environment: the nature of interaction among the great powers as the most influencing factor in determining their foreign and security policy behavior. The research paper, drawing from the above findings, identifies the nature of the interaction between China and India as the most influencing external factor in determining the foreign or security policy behavior of the small powers in South Asia. The following section applies Professor K.L. Holsti’s objective measurement framework to acknowledge the conflictual relationship between China and India. Under such a circumstance, the security maximization techniques adopted by these countries make it imperative for a small country like Nepal to build an effective security preparedness policy to garner its national interest.

Historical military strategists require any country to conduct meticulous research about the opponent or the potential opponents’ military strength before devising any security strategy. Finally, building on this argument, the research paper makes a detailed assessment of China's military transformation. Despite the closer proximity and contentious relationship with India, the research paper screens the secondary sources on China’s military modernization. Historically, Nepal’s political or military confrontation with China has been marginal compared to its southern neighbor. Likewise, the perception of China as a benign neighboring regional power culminates in the possibility of identifying China as a potential threat. Therefore, only a few studies have examined China's military modernization in the new era under President Xi Jinping and its effect on Nepal's security policy. However, the global environment is erratic, and the flaring tension between the United States and China over Taiwan exaggerates it. Under

such circumstances, how long can China uphold its benign nature? Against this background, a detailed assessment of China's military modernization can support the security strategists and policymakers in devising a plausible security preparedness policy for Nepal vis-à-vis its northern neighbor. Lastly, the paper discusses the implications of the findings and concludes .

Small powers and the international environment

Among multiple domestic and international structural barriers that restrict the objective and behavior of the small powers, the degree of competition between the great powers accounts for one. Scholars like Waltz (2010) propose that under the anarchic structure, small states' security and foreign policy will rest on structural constraints like the level of competition between the great powers (pp. 184-185). Therefore, small states need to be cautious of these external constraints due to their narrower margin of error (Waltz, 2010). Likewise, Rosenau agrees that the environment is a much more important variable for small powers than for the great power, and hence any reasoning about its roles should probably start with an identification of the type of international system in which it has to operate (Erling, 1971, pp. 32-40). Similarly, Paul's recent account of small-state military strategy suggests that their strategic choices are primarily a reflection of external constraints and opportunities rather than internal pushes and pulls (Paul, 1994, p. 176). Although the above discourses show that the international environment restricts the security and foreign policy behavior of small power, it also provides opportunities to maneuver their interests. Handel (1990) writes that different types of international systems enhance or weaken the small powers' bargaining position or leverage, encourage, or discourage them from seeking aid from other states, or isolate them from other states within the system (p. 171). The arguments of Rosenau and Handel suggest that the type of international environment in which the small powers operate helps to redefine their national goals and security strategies.

During the height of the Franco-German war, Belgium presented itself as a buffer state and devised a neutrality policy to secure its security objectives (Malia, 1986). However, the post-World War II era witnessed the emergence of the new European order shaped by the waning Franco-German conflict. Thus, Belgium's status as a buffer state was no longer of similar importance as during the conflict between the great powers. Accordingly, Belgium's foreign and security policy evolved with the new international structure shaped by the limited competition between the great powers (Malia, 1986, p. 30). Scheweller's argument further clarifies Belgium's position by exaggerating the extreme systematic constraints in manipulating the foreign policy and military behavior of the weak states (Schweller, 1992, p. 267). During the Cuban missile crisis, Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union was a function of the nature of the international system in which it was operating (Handel, 1990, p. 171). Scholars like Mouritzen also elaborate on the Cold War incidents that had enforced small power (Sweden) to devise multiple security strategies to maximize its interests (Mouritzen, 1991, pp. 219-224).

The international environment (global or regional) can be of the type where the power concentration is vested in a state with the highest material preponderance, sometimes labelled as a hegemonic structure. The proponents of the hegemonic stability theory, Charles Kindleberger, Stephen Karsner and Robert Gilpin, assert that the hegemonic power structure contributes to a stable world system. However, Keohane cites that within the hegemonic structure, the small powers would have little space for maneuvering, forcing them to bandwagon (Keohane, 2005, p.

45). The other kind of international system experiences polarity caused by the changing power distribution among the units. The bipolar (Wagner, 1993, pp. 80-83), multipolar (Acharya, 2017; Zakaria, 2008, pp. 76-86), and “multinodal” (Womack, 2014, p. 266) are a few of the emerging identities of the existing system. Within these structures, the uneven distribution of power creates tension between the great powers encouraging the small powers to devise suitable foreign and security policy options (Goldmann, 1979, p. 127). Therefore, the external environment in which the small power operates predominantly influences their security policy, where the domestic determinant will be less salient.

Nature of the external environment in South Asia: Exploring the Sino-India relationship

The places I have occupied are mine, and so are those I intend to occupy. Since I was able to occupy an inch of your territory yesterday, I certainly can occupy a yard of your territory today. (Ribao, 1962, p. 12)

Amongst multiple toolkits, this section uses K.J. Holsti's objective criteria for the measurement of international tension to determine the nature of the relationship between China and India. According to the author, there exists tension between the states when they exhibit certain kinds of behavior aimed at the country of interest (Holsti, 1963, p. 77). These behaviors have been categorized under three sources of tension: foreign policy objectives, foreign policy instruments and domestic sources. Each source of tension has been defined with definitive empirical references, which acts as a base for conflict between the two countries. In this regard, the paper analyses the events where China and India exhibit behaviors outlined in Holsti's objective tension measurement framework.

The objective of foreign policy as a source of tension

On 21 November 1962, China declared a unilateral ceasefire by agreeing to withdraw its military troops 20 km away from the Line of Actual Control. Nevertheless, for India, it was yet another chapter of humiliation as an outcome of its failed diplomacy. In the view of the experts, India's limited understanding of China's sensitivity towards Tibet, failure to resort to wider agreements on the frontiers that were sparsely delimited, its assumption of China's intention in the Himalayan frontier and the necessity to address the mounting domestic pressure for political goodwill, enticed India to take steps that could have otherwise prevented the war (Bhasin, 2021; Maxwell, 1999a, 1999b; Singh, 2014). Shortly, in 1967, China and India witnessed a standoff at Cho La Pass and Nathu La pass in Sikkim. The New York Times reported that a scuffle broke out when Indian troops began laying barbed wire along what they recognized as the border (Goldman, 2020). Before the hostilities broke out, the Chinese Foreign Ministry handed a letter to New Delhi that quoted, “The Chinese Government sternly warns the Indian government along the China-Sikkim boundary and should the Indian troops continue to make provocative intrusion, the Indian government must be held responsible for all the grave consequences” (Patranobis, 2017). Unfortunately, more than 150 Indians and 340 Chinese soldiers were killed (Goldman, 2020).

After the Sino-India conflict of 1962 and 1967, China had become the major threat after Pakistan to the Indian Territory (Krishnan, 2017; Maxwell, 1970; Pardesi, 2019; Pringsheim, 1963; Verma, 2016). Twenty years after the previous conflict, the Indian Army and the People's

Liberation Army (PLA) met with the third encounter at Somdurong Chu Valley in 1987. Indian security accused China of invading and establishing a military post south of the McMahon Line (Pardesi, 2019, pp. 534-551). China defended by reporting the action as a response to India's effort to incorporate Sikkim as a union territory of India in 1975. After Indira Gandhi came to power in 1980, she approved plans to enhance the sporadic deployment of the forces in the Sino-India territory to defend the Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh (Dabas, 2016). Subsequently, India built a temporary observation post in the bank of the Somdurong Chu in 1984 (Dabas, 2016). However, in mid-1986, the Assam Regiment raised concerns about the construction of permanent structures by China (Dabas, 2016; Singh, 2013). China confirmed that the area belonged to them, and there was no question about Chinese aggression in the Indian Territory (Sali, 1998, pp. 109-112).

Once again in 2013, China and India met with another incident at the Line of Actual Control. According to several interviewees at the Institute of South and Southeast Asian and Oceania Studies, China's encampment was in response to India's continued military preparedness in the Ladakh sector that included building road projects in the Chumar sector, constructing concrete post and road linking Daulat Beg Oldi with Leh and moving high-performance fighter aircraft to bases proximate to Tibet (Joshi, 2013; Saint-Mézard, 2013, pp. 132-149). In another incident, two countries were face-off for 72 days over Doklam in 2017 (Mitra, 2018). The Indian military quickly deployed troops in the tri-junction area to counter the Chinese presence (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017). In addition to the deployment, the Government of India alleged China of violating the 1988 and 1998 agreements between Bhutan and China; overlooking the 2012 agreement on tri-junction boundary points between India, China and third countries and urged China to return to existing conditions (Ministry of External Affairs, 2017). On the other hand, the statement by the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang in a Press Conference was contradictory to India's claim in Doklam (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2017, July 5). Observing the publications on the Doklam border dispute, the animosity between China and India cannot be overlooked.

In the summer of 2020, the Galwan valley incident questioned the future of the Sino-India relationship. Wu Qian, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of National Defense, stated- "the Indian border troops trespassed into China's territory, built fortification and barricades and impeded the patrol of Chinese border troops in an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo of border control and management. In response, the Chinese border troops took decisive countermeasures in self-defense, resolutely fought back against the violent acts of the Indian side, and effectively safeguarded China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Huaxia, 2020). Refuting the allegation, Anuraga Shrivastava, spokesperson for the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, argued- "Indian troops were familiar with the alignment at the LAC in all sectors of the India-China areas, including Galwan valley. All infrastructure built by the Indian side is naturally on its side of LAC" (Parashar, 2020). Although most of these bitter advents found a solution by either agreeing to maintain the status quo, removing troops from the conflict area or signing new agreements, it largely contributed towards creating a pessimistic environment.

Foreign policy instrument as a source of tension

After the death of Stalin in 1953, the 1960s saw a decade of great polemics between the two Asian giants. The Sino-Soviet alliance was highly rigid and hierarchically structured, ultimately fracturing the 'eternal' relationship only to benefit the external actors, particularly the United States and India. China became dubious of the Soviet Union when Khrushchev adopted the policy of neutrality in the Sino-India skirmishes. It astounded China since it projected an act of betrayal of the allied obligations (Radchenko, 2019, p. 281). The Soviets took a neutral stance in the Sino-India war to serve its interest of agitating China. It did not want India to confront the united front of the Communist bloc, forcing it to turn towards the U.S. (Record of Conversation of Comrade Krushchev with CCP Chairman Mao Zedong and Politburo Members, 1959). The outcome was a change India-Soviet foreign policy.

Upon the death of Stalin in 1953, and thereafter, the Indian Ambassador to Moscow, K.P.S Menon, established strong diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union (Mastny, 2010, p. 52). India's anti-imperialist attitude towards the U.S., the bonding between the U.S. and Pakistan, and the border dispute with China furthered the India-Soviet ties. The diplomatic visits between Khrushchev and Nehru in 1955 got profound attention for the goodwill they committed to deepening the India-Soviet relationship. Indian military scholar Srinath Raghavan commented, "The effect of Nehru's visit is clear. India grew closer to the Soviet Union, and, during the 1962 war, the U.S.S.R. didn't back its old comrade China against India" (Haidar, 2015). In a close discussion between the leaders of the Soviet Union and China, the Soviets didn't hesitate to blame China for worsening the relationship with India. In a similar instance, in the aftermath of the 1959 Kongka La incident, India enjoyed accelerated military aid from the Soviet Union (Chaowu, 1963).

India's insecurity from China had made it desperate to strengthen its military power to spur on the morale of its security forces. In this regard, the Government of India signed protocols with the Soviet Union for the first supply of 12 MiG-21 combat aircraft fighters and the SA-2 (*Dvina*) surface-to-air missiles to equip the Indian Air Force (1962 OPS Conflict with China, n.d.; Childs & Kidron, 1973, pp. 1724-1725). In 1963, it was followed by purchasing of AH-12 airplanes and twenty MU-4 helicopters (Chaowu, 1963). On the other hand, to prove allegiance to India, the Soviets' rejected the supply of equipment for making MiG-21 aircraft to China (Chaowu, 1963). Despite the Chinese government's disagreement over the Soviet's support to India, the Sumdorong Chu crisis observed Soviet-made heavy-lift MI-26 helicopters in the military operation against China (Joshi, 2017). The India-Soviet ties not only flourished in the military sector but also helped India to build heavy industries and provided loans with the promise of increasing aid (Hilger, 1996).

Irrespective of India's claim to have retained the policy of nonalignment, its foreign policy during this era was skewed toward the Soviet Union and the U.S. to serve its geopolitical needs of containing China. The flickering Sino-US relationship was an opportunity for India to build closer ties with the United States. Aftermath the 1962 war in October, the U.S. State Department expressed that it was shocked at the violent and aggressive action of the Chinese communists against India. Thus, any Indian request for aid would be considered sympathetically (Brecher, 1979, pp. 612-630). On matters of India's request for assistance during the Sino-India

war, amidst the continuing debate within the U.S. State Department, it secured a large sum of military aid during the 1962 fight against China (Ganguly, 1972, pp. 220-221). Besides, the government of India also permitted the American military delegation to command the Indian military force to meet the Chinese threat in the future (Devereux, 2009, p. 83). In the book “JFK’s Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, the CIA and the Sino-Indian War” the author mentions that the Kennedy government poured profound support into the Indian government by agreeing to assist in creating and equipping six new mountain divisions to work with the Indian Army to guard the Himalayas, help India increase its production facilities, and prepare for a US-UK air defense program for India (Riedel, 2016, p. 95). The historical accords demonstrate India's commitment to using U.S.-sponsored weapons strictly against China upon any offensive attack and acknowledge the futility of neutralism by joining the Western-sponsored military alliance (Ganguly, 1972, pp. 220-221). Prime Minister Shastri even permitted the American submarines armed with Polaris missiles and nuclear heads—aimed at dissuading China—to operate in the Asian water (Stein, 1967, p. 167).

Recalling the post-Cold War era, Stein writes that India expected support from the United States and the Soviet Union in any future Sino-India clash (Stein, 1967, 167). The war-induced alliances on the Indian front depict the existence of dispute between the two countries. Likewise, China and Pakistan's strategic collusion and the transformation of Pakistan's military coincides with Kautilya's philosophy of Mandala aimed at India (Pande, 2018, p. 31). Apart from these war-induced quasi-alliances, the maritime alliances in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) have become a challenge to the Sino-India relationship. Driven by alternative objectives, the Sino-India war sets a precedent for the deliberate disruption scenario in the IOR.

China's bleak grasp over maritime energy import security has made this ocean imperative for China's national security interest (Wang, 2015, pp. 572-576). Furthermore, given India's remarkable claim over the region, it perceives China's presence in the IOR as an intrusion (Upadhyaya, 2020). At the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, the Indian Prime Minister promoted an inclusive vision and called for closer ties among the nations sharing a maritime boundary (IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2018, 2019). Many scholarly debates apply an offensive lens (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 232-385) to reimagine China's presence in the IOR which reassures the alliance to deter its presence (Pu & Wang, 2018, pp. 1029-1030). India showed an active willingness to support the G7 leaders in the summit designed to discuss the future of China in the IOR (Haberman, 2020). The other widely known security alliance is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue under the Free and Open Indian Pacific (FOIP) strategy aimed at navigating and containing China's presence in the Indo-Pacific region (Koga, 2020, pp. 49-73). In 2017, the Quad countries, Japan, the U.S., Australia and India, participated in the first Joint navy exercise aimed at China (Smith, 2017). Jagannath P. Panda, an Indian scholar, argues that India finds strategic consonance as a local power with the other Quad countries to restrict China's influence in the IOR (Panda, 2018, p. 84). Similarly, India's Act East Policy aspires to strengthen its ties with the ASEAN community in response to China's growing ties with the littorals in the IOR (India's Act East Policy Balancing China in the Region: Expert, 2018).

Careful observation of India's historical and present foreign policy instruments against China speaks of the degree of competition and the heightened tension between the two countries.

Domestic policy as a source of tension: Retaliation Measures

Amid the tension at the border, in 2020, India announced a restriction on nearly 200 smartphone apps of Chinese origin, including the most popular TikTok, WeChat, Baidu, and Weibo and gaming applications like PUBG (Krishnan, 2020). Although New Delhi used the threat card for its national security, integrity and sovereignty, its action was in response to the Galwan incident. The Chinese Embassy in New Delhi confronted the move by firmly opposing the Indian side's repeated use of national security as an excuse to prohibit some mobile apps with Chinese backgrounds (Krishnan, 2020). The border conflict witnessed a trickle-down effect in other areas of bilateral cooperation, signaling resolve and communicating the costs of escalation. In 2020 China toppled UAE to become India's second-largest export partner and the top destination for India's imports (Banerji, 2021; Suneja, 2021). As of 2020, the initial month of the year after the turmoil in Sino-India relations, recorded decreased trade volume to \$87.65 billion (India-China Trade and Economic Relations, 2021). Concurrently, India's ranking as a trading partner of China also slipped down to 16th, communicating resentment between the two Asian giants. Aftermath the Galwan valley crisis, domestic pressure-induced India to adopt anti-China policies to maintain a balance between its domestic and international preferences. A survey conducted by Local Circles in 2020 found that 43% of Indians boycotted China-made products after the border clash in early March 2020. And 60% of those who bought 'Made in China' products bought only 1-2 items (Mathew, 2021). In addition, India raised the import barrier on roughly 300 products from China (Petersen, 2020). As a response, the People's Bank of China hiked its stake from 0.8 percent to 1.01 percent in Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) Limited, India's largest mortgage lender (Mishra, 2021). In response, the Indian Ministry of Commerce tightened foreign direct investment by requiring investment from a country that shares a land border with India to go through a government approval process (Sarma & Panth, 2020). Undeniably when security issues prevail, countries sharing interdependent relations can adopt nonmilitary measures like economic means to discourage military escalation.

Observing the nature of the interaction between China and India, the South Asian external environment is highly competitive and conflictual. Despite having elements of cooperation, conflict dominates this relationship. In the view of T.V Paul, since both are rising powers with great ambitions, a certain amount of conflict and rivalry exists among them, and they frequently engage in disputes, even when they have many avenues for institutionalized cooperation (Paul, 2019, p. 59). Likewise, Professor Jean-François Huchet writes that despite the growth of economic cooperation, the normalization of ties between Beijing and Delhi is yet dubious, given the tensions that pit them against each other (Huchet, 2008, p. 55). Also, many Chinese scholars view that despite growing trade and security exchanges, China-India relations are dominated by myriad perceptions of threat and mistrust (Yuan, 2016, pp 31-35; Zhu, 2011, pp. 1-6).

The above discourses show that given the historical analogies, alliance formations and perception building of each other, there exists a high level of tension between China and India. Subsequently, it has enhanced the security dilemma and accelerated the power and security maximization techniques in these countries.

Enhanced security dilemma and China's military transformation

From a theoretical perspective, the conflict between the units is rooted in the classical realists' view of human nature- being extremely individualistic, egoistic, untrustworthy and power-hungry (Hertz, 1951, p. 157; Kautilya, 1992, p. 39; Morgenthau, 1971, 27). Realists envision the world of states as anarchic and position survival and security as central issues. In this struggle, each state tries to increase its power and engage in power-balancing to deter potential aggressors. In doing so, the security dilemma, rooted in a state's uncertainty about its neighbor's intentions, causes it to be anxious about the other harming its sovereignty and national interests (Hertz 1951, p. 157; Jervis 1978, p. 168; Booth and Wheeler 2008; Jervis 1982, pp. 6-7; Holslag 2009, p. 814). Moreover, it becomes hard to understand the purpose of power accumulation by a state. Art and Jervis (2017), Snyder (1984) and Mearsheimer (2014) argue that each state will suppose that any security maximization techniques adopted by the other state are intended to attack and accumulate more power. Driven by this viewpoint, the international system has witnessed rapid military modernization in China and India.

The threat to China's national interest mainly originates from India's perception of China as an offensive strategic competitor and its current military stature in the global index. However, China's concern is directed more toward the growing engagement or quasi-alliance between the United States and India. Given the abrasive relationship, China shares with the U.S., India's partnership with the latter reflects China's apprehension. It has been further exaggerated after the signing of the U.S-India Defense Relationship Bilateral Exchange Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020 (Rej, 2020). The agreement permits the U.S. to share satellite and other sensor data with the Indian military to strengthen its targeting and navigation capabilities (ibid). Likewise, the IOR, critical to China's energy economy, is heavily monitored by the U.S. navy. Each year, the U.S. conducts 90 military exercises with its allies and partners to provide security in the IOR and the Strait of Malacca (Belokrenitsky, 2007. p. 85; The U.S. Department of Defense, 2019). Political scientist Lokhande writes that in any advent of conflict between China and India or the U.S., the U.S. has a higher possibility to support India and cut off energy imports critical for China's economic development and military transformation (Lokhande, 2017). Consequently, this might push Taiwan to the centre of the conflicting goals, threatening China's national interest. Reckoning these potential advents that could challenge China's current position in the international world order has encouraged the Xi Jinping government to adapt military reformation to meet the emerging traditional and non-traditional threats. Xi noted:

To realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must adhere to combining the building of a prosperous country with that of a strong military.... We must ensure that our troops are ready when called upon, that they are fully capable of fighting and that they must win every war.

After President Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, the People's Liberation Army has undergone a dramatic transformation. Internationally, the increased threat to China's national security and the growing application of modern warfare techniques has encouraged China to restructure its military organization, upgrade arms and ammunition with modern technologies and revise its military doctrine. While, domestically, the

limited influence of the political system over the military, the commission of the PLA to rein in prolific corruption charges, and the disintegrated military units required serious reform to meet President Xi's vision of China's PLA (Wuthnow, 2020).

Reforming the Military Structure: New PLA Command and Control Structure

In the most sweeping military reshuffle since the 1950s, the most notable was the decoration of President Xi with a new title-Commander-in-Chief of the Joint Operations Command Center. Already the Chairman of the Central Military Command (CMC), the title to many scholars and experts was directed to consolidate his control over the Chinese military (A. Panda, 2016; Zhiyue, 2016). However, it accommodates his vision of transforming the PLA into a “World-Class” military by 2050 (Xi Focus: Reshaping China’s Armed Forces, 2022). By transformation, it suggests equipping the PLA with the knowledge of modern capabilities of cyberspace, electronic and information warfare (China’s Xi Restructures Military Consolidates Control, 2016). Therefore, to marshal China's Dream of developing Strong Armed Forces, President Xi established a joint operational command structure, reorganized existing military regions, and reshuffled troop numbers, particularly in non-combat-facing roles.

In 2017, President Xi announced to reform of the People’s Liberation Army into a leaner fighting unit with improved and efficient joint operational command capabilities. Firstly, the four general departments (staff, politics, logistics and armaments) responsible for exercising command over the seven military regions have been renamed and reorganized into 15 functional departments directly under the CMC (Zhiyue, 2016). Downgrading these general military departments has delegated the CMC with higher authority over military issues. The commentary in PLA Daily, published after the CMC reform meeting, noted that the current command system combines decision-making, enforcement, and oversight functions into one. The four general headquarters’ excessive concentration of power has allowed it to become an independent leadership hierarchy overshadowing many of the functions of the Central Military Commission (Chan, 2015). Second, the previous seven theatre commands have been regrouped into five military regions: the Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central theatre commands (Xi Focus: Reshaping China’s Armed Forces, 2022). The other remarkable reform is the introduction of three new military institutions (PLA Army General Command, PLA Strategic Support force, and PLA Rocket Force) on equal footing with the PLA Army, Navy, and Air Force (Zhang, 2016). The PLA Rocket Force, an upgradation of the PLA Second Artillery Force, is tasked with amplifying China’s medium and long-range precision strikes on land, air and sea (Chaudhury, 2019). The growing emphasis on equipping the armed forces with technical abilities has resulted in downsizing the non-combat land forces by 30 percent while the combat forces are growing (Chaudhury, 2019)) As an outcome, the PLA has condensed to only 84 new units, combined at the corps level, representing less than 50 percent of the total number of PLA troops (Zhen, 2019). More than 50 percent of the PLA army is now composed of the PLAN, PLARF and PLAAF armed forces.

The purpose of this new structure, according to President Xi, “is to ensure absolute loyalty, promote resourceful fighting and efficient commanding and enhance the capability of winning wars of the joint battle command system” (Tiezzi, 2016). With the emergence of the modern form of challenges, China’s conventional military strategy, designed to safeguard its

national interest during World War II and Cold War, can no longer be of strategic advantage to Beijing. According to Ni Lexiong, a Shanghai-based military analyst, “the strategic shift from homeland-based defensive forces to one with technical capacities like the navy, air force and missile units will allow Beijing to fight its enemy forces and secure its national interest beyond China’s borders” (Zhen, 2019).

Building a technically sound military force

Xinhua news reported that ‘Science and Technology innovation is the “key to military upgrading” (China’s Xi Pushes Advanced Technology for Military, 2017). After the huge success of the U.S. military operation in Iraq via “Operation Desert Storm” in 1991, the Chinese strategists realized the importance of high-technology force over less technologically-advanced adversaries (Campbell, 2021, p. 58). Subsequently, China revised its military strategy between 2004-2014 by introducing the concept of “informatization” and applying advanced information technology across all aspects of military operations, particularly in support of command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities (Campbell, 2021, p. 58). The recent developments in China’s C4SIR infrastructure reflect that PLA is targeting to become a sophisticated global military possessing similar electronic warfare capabilities to the U.S. forces.

The PLA is building its competitive advantage over modern warfare by multiplying the electronic warfare produce that includes Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAV), Unmanned Surface Vehicles (USV), Unmanned Undersea Vehicles (UUV), reconnaissance/intelligence satellites, and construction of sophisticated ground-based infrastructures. The DF-17 missile, DF-21D “carrier-killer” anti-ship ballistic missile, Y-20 long-range transport aircraft, Type 15 tank, J-20 stealth fighter, H-6K bomber that can launch LJ-1 drones, FH-95 drone, FH-97 high-speed stealth drone and the recent addition of AR-500CJ, a lightweight shipborne helicopter reflect China’s development of modern warfare strength (Dangwal, 2022; Honrada, 2022; Huang, 2022; Liu, 2022). U.S.-based intelligence analyst Shane Bilsborough writes that “the PLAAF’s Airborne Early Warning Command and Control (AEWC&C) system, the KJ-2000-capable of tracking targets at a distance up to four hundred and seventy kilometers, is a generation advanced than the U.S. E-3 AWACS and E-2 Hawkeye aircraft (Bilsborough, 2013). Likewise, the Y-8J AEW system can detect objects as minuscule as a submarine periscope within its range of up to one hundred eighty-five kilometers” (Dangwal, 2022; Honrada, 2022; Huang, 2022; Liu, 2022). Developing its space reconnaissance capabilities, China has launched a series of military satellites by the generic name Yaogan Weixing and the latest Yaogan-36 electro-optical satellite is said to be equipped with remote sensing (*CGTN*, 2022). In 2021, China launched 22 reconnaissance satellites, including 18 electronic listening devices and four observation satellites (Pons, 2022). Other than collecting data via reconnaissance satellites, China has made significant progress in artificial intelligence and quantum computing (Wuthnow, 2020).

China’s Eastern and Southern theatre commands have gained more attention with the increasing pressure of securing China’s interest in Taiwan, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean Region. Accordingly, the PLAN C4SIR expansion and upgrading amplify China’s focus on maritime. It has the world’s largest maritime force with an inventory of about 355 vessels

and plans to expand it to 460 by 2030 (Axe, 2021). Besides, the navy possesses 85 patrol combatants and carriers equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) (Shelbourne, 2021). Moreover, China recently launched the most advanced aircraft carrier Fujian equipped with an electromagnetic catapult that can send off shipboard in rapid succession (Stevenson, 2022; Wang, X., 2022). The development of advanced electronic warfare techniques, counter-space capabilities, and cyber operations by the PLA shows that President Xi is nearing his most ambitious reform and reorganization plan announced in the White Defense Paper. The Study by RAND cooperation highlights two objectives of the reform: (i) enabling joint operations by reforming and configuring the PLA's command and control structure and (ii) ensuring the PLA is loyal to the Chinese Communist Party and the General Secretary (Campbell, 202, p. 58).

The analysis of China's military reform shows that Beijing is rapidly closing its military gap with the world's most powerful military, the U.S. Its increasing defense spending complemented by its growing economy opens greater avenues for investment in science and technology. All of this is directed to champion the PLA's 'Active Defense' strategy to secure its national interest within and beyond China.

Implication and the security preparedness policy of small power

The ongoing tension between the established power (U.S.) and the rising power (China) and between the latter and the South Asian regional power (India) has stimulated Nepal's neighbors to enhance their internal and external security capabilities. Irrespective of the negotiation on disengagement along their land border, both countries will be jockeying for tactical advantage. Both sides have amassed heavily armed troops and ammunition in the contested areas. In early 2021, following the Pulawama and Balakot encounters, India announced to redirect Pakistan-facing strike corps towards the China front (Maskey, 2021). On the other hand, following the standoffs and skirmishes in 2017 and 2020, China has accelerated the construction and upgraded airports and heliports (37) for military and commercial use in the western regions of Tibet and Xinjiang (How Is China Expanding Its Infrastructure to Project Power Along Its Western Borders? 2022). Likewise, the PLA Tibet Military Command has deployed plateau-operable Type 15 tanks to boost China's rapid reaction capabilities in high-altitude regions (Wang, 2021).

The unresolved border dispute complemented by the internal unrest and separatist activities in China has made Nepal's Tibetan front vulnerable to the use of force by China. The current restructuring and repositioning of Chinese military force reflect that the use of conventional force is unable to secure Nepal's northern frontier from a breach. The construction of new ground structures in remote areas, the reason for the Doklam crisis, has allowed China to secure the power positioning of traditional and non-traditional combat forces and equipment during war. Acknowledging the nature of historical interaction and the triad dynamics, the future design of the regional dispute between China and India is unknown. Supposedly, if the India-China status quo overtures falter, Nepal will be forced to make a strategic choice to defend its national security interest. Irrespective of the international cooperative mechanism, the great powers will prioritize their respective national and security interest over Nepal. Under such circumstances, like in Ukraine, Nepal could become the victim of a proxy war. Unlike Ukraine, Nepal's option for external support is and will be limited. Moreover, Nepal's

conventional forces lack the technical expertise or mechanism to counter the Chinese and Indian military intelligence. Ultimately, this could press Nepal to bargain security over autonomy. The existence of such a disruptive scenario could put unnecessary pressure on Nepal's economy demanding higher defense spending. However, a budget spike by a small power like Nepal can rarely address the external military threat.

Although a small power does not possess the internal ability to confront the threat, it can pursue a meaningful security strategy to curtail the possible loss. And this is only achievable if a small power is well acquainted with the strength of the great power in action. Sun Tzu once noted:

Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant, both your enemy and you are certain in every battle to be in peril.

Simple yet eloquent, this philosophy, if applied wisely, can allow the state to make a sound decision to go to war and, if affirmative, decide on strategic and tactical planning. Sun Tzu, a prominent Chinese military strategist, repetitively advised knowing the military capability of one's adversary to ensure victory (McNeilly, 2015, pp. 29-30). Similar to Sun Tzu's principle to "know thy enemy," a French General and historian, Baron de Antoine-Henri Jomini, was also encouraged to acquire the military intelligence of the opponent. In the view of Jomini, "to craft a sustainable military strategy the passions of the nation to be fought, their military system, their immediate means and their reserves, their financial resources, the attachment they bear to their government or their institutions, the character of the executive, the characters and military abilities of the commanders of their armies, the influence of cabinet councils or councils of war at the capital upon their operations, the system of war in favor with their staff, the established force of the state and its armament, the military geography and statistics of the state which is to be invaded, and finally, the resources and obstacles of every kind likely to be met with, all of which are included neither in diplomacy or strategy should be known" (Jomini, 2004, pp. 40-43). Another military theorist Carl von Clausewitz focused on knowing a piece of peculiar information about the opponent and the opponent's will to attain the purpose of the war (Clausewitz, 1989, pp. 90-95). At the operation level, the objective of the opponent and the means the opponent could use to achieve it are equally important.

Conducting the opponent's reconnaissance supports a commander in developing and choosing information-based security options compatible with the physical and moral capabilities of his forces. It makes us ponder whether Russia and Ukraine had conducted a meticulous study of each other's internal and external strengths and weaknesses or not. Had it been done, by now the war would have reached a stalemate. If not, then either side would have guaranteed a lopsided victory. Nevertheless, the small ones always suffer. Therefore, Nepal should be aware of China's military transformation and modernization to minimize the potential loss in a future conflict.

Conclusion

Triggered by the growing power struggle among the great powers, the current international structure is becoming a threat to the existence of the small powers. Given the internal ability of the great powers, the military industry has witnessed rapid technological modernization. Are the small powers prepared to confront the situation? Observing Nepal's military structure and reliance on conventional military force, how does Nepal's security apparatus plan to secure itself against the spillover effects of the great power conflict? Acknowledging the stride of China's technological transformation in its military sector and the change of its warfare tactics to 'Active Defense', the research underlines the significance of developing a sound security preparedness policy for Nepal. In conclusion, the paper offers further avenues to examine possibilities of securing national interest should any conflict escalate in the region.

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