

China – India Military Balance

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Why Conflict ?

- Major issues defining India – China relations are geopolitical factors and *Chinese leadership's perception of India's rise*. Basic determination is when and under what circumstances can this “competition” turn into “conflict”.
- China is not a *“status quo”* power; will react should it feel itself politically and militarily threatened or in the face of inimical strategic shifts.
- India too is a civilizational power with Indian identity too deeply ingrained to accede to Chinese coercion beyond limits of tolerance.
- Whereas India looks upon Tibet as a cultural buffer (although this position is not officially subscribed) Chinese sees it from perspective of strategic depth to its vulnerable periphery.
- Consequently tensions are likely to prevail on Tibet which is likely to remain intractable. Similarly boundary issue will always remain in the shadows. *Under- currents of hostility will remain in short to medium term.*

Why Conflict ?

- **Three possible future scenarios of India – China Relations**
 - Current status quo continues with two countries *'muddling through'* without major improvement in bilateral relations.
 - Second; China uses the boundary question or Tibet to up the ante to force India on to strategic back foot - seek tangible political concessions or on the boundary issue.
 - Third in case strategic and conventional military balance begin to weigh heavily in Chinese favour; it could leverage growing asymmetry to seek extensive territorial or non territorial concessions . These could include expulsion of Tibetan government in exile, or curtailment on their activities, seek trade concessions in the NE etc - continue to *'shake the tree'* till India submits.
- **Above perceptions are underscored by perceived Indian political mindset which it sees as uncomfortable with military option.**

Why Conflict ?

- Above perspectives in a sense convey a mix of actual or perceived Chinese anxieties with regard to growing Indian military potential including growing Indian maritime strength in IOR.
- These carry with them a potential for *judgmental miscalculations*, which could get heightened by conflicts and challenges within the CCP/CMC.
- At another level they convey *general unwillingness of a rising power to countenance any strategic competition or strategic uncertainty*, particularly along its vulnerable periphery.
- Above in a sense reinforce possible Chinese ‘judgment’ that the absence of firm demarcation of boundary is preferable to a hard-and-fast agreement with India, *which could be interpreted as a sign of weakness*.

Trends Shaping Chinese Judgment

- These include;
 - Growth of Indian CNP particularly its economic growth and defence modernization and their impact on favourable shaping of strategic configuration of power.
 - Changing Indian Military power status, from so called *“expansionist and hegemonic”* policy, to one striving to *“protect its strategic superiority”* in the South Asia and IOR.
 - Attempts at power projection in the Asia-Pacific region, with the aim of becoming major geo strategic player on Asia-Pacific and the Eurasian political chessboard.

Trends Shaping Chinese Judgment

- **Current Chinese discourse on Indian strategic thinking hinges on three broad parameters;**
 - **low intensity conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir can trigger a large scale conflict, including the risk of a nuclear confrontation.**
 - **Old passive Indian defence thinking has been replaced by *'Active defence'* concept, within which the basic *'regional deterrence'* principle is being replaced by *'punishment deterrence'* concept.**
 - **Chinese see above as Indian pro active approach, to conduct a hi-tech *'limited conventional war'* 'under conditions of nuclear deterrence.**

Trends Shaping Chinese Judgment

- In emerging strategic balance issues of concern include Indo – US and Indo – Japanese relations, and growth of Indian influence in SE and Central Asia among others.
- Regional scenario? Developments in Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh and India's shaping of its regional policies.
- Developments in Afghanistan and shaping of US Greater Central Asian policy. Emergence of possible India – US – Russian triangle seen as inimical to Chinese interest. Will react
- Chinese perception of developments in IOR and its impact on SLOC security. China sees IOR as a strategic waterway crucial for its development strategy.
- Resource security and India's role either stand alone or in concert with others a matter of concern.
- Developments in periphery particularly Tibet and Xinjiang. Current leadership appears to be obsessed by it – will fifth generation leadership be as obsessed? Their relative priorities will be a factor?

Conflict Scenarios

- Conflict aimed at 'territorial gains' in areas of Chinese interest or bargaining. Post conflict territorial swap could become difficult due rising nationalist sentiment.
- "Teaching India a lesson" - A rapid defeat of India - i.e. getting rapidly to a point where India suffers visible losses of military capability - diminished stature would seem consistent with long term Chinese aim.
- Recent Chinese rhetoric has taken familiar tack of detecting Indian "arrogance" as primary problem; setting India – china dispute as a moral transgression requiring remedy ?
- A demonstration that China is able to defend its SLOCs all the way into the Indian Ocean against Indian interdiction. Also linked to manifestation of Chinese power projection.
- A demonstration that China is able to protect its allies in South Asia. In short run Chinese intervention in India-Pakistan conflict in near term a distinct possibility. Aim to divert rather than degrade military capability.
- Chinese intervention in Nepal or Myanmar too cannot be ruled out.

Understanding Chinese Conflict Aims

- **Factors that will decide when and why China can start conflict with India;**
 - China may perceive both force comparison and geo strategic trends either favourable for strategic coercion or alternatively shifting regional strategic balance emerging in India's favour.
 - It could heighten tensions to counter internal insecurity – may be more subjective than objective- short term or tactical insecurity. In civilizational history- central govt weakens- rogue local actors tend to take unilateral action.
 - *Chinese penchant against surprise might push them to launch a first strike (War is the error term- Gartzke). Chinese believe that decisive action is required in dangerous situations. In the context of current strategic discourse Chinese hysteria about threat from India could precipitate action?*
 - PLA is seen to be increasingly dominating the regional foreign policy discourse creating an ample scope for miscalculation. Further growing insecurity about Tibet and perhaps Xinjiang could animate things.

Understanding Chinese Conflict Aims

- Interestingly in any ***“teach India lesson”*** or other conflict scenarios, China could be expected to shape post crisis narrative to focus blame on India and ***posit its actions as self defence***. “ To maintain benign and peaceful image”.
- Another perspective could be ‘China stirs up dust’, provokes India (to consider and worry) then backs off. This could be akin to Confucian model of ***“moral intervention”***.
- Important to note there is growing insecurity vis a vis India. China once disregarded India, but no more. China is using Tibet/border question as means to keep India off-balance.
- This however cannot be taken in isolation but will be a subset of wider geostrategic construct.

Threat Perspective

Levels of Conflict

- For the purpose of analysing various escalatory models the following levels of conflict can be considered:-
 - Basic Level Conflict. Proxy war/coercive muscle flexing.
 - Intermediate Level Conflict. Limited war of high intensity.
 - Major All Out Conflict. Full scale war.

Basic Perceptions about Conflict

- **Function of relative conventional and strategic balance. Perceived asymmetry is likely to embolden china.**
- **China will attempt to exercise escalation dominance in any future conflict scenario.**
- **State of strategic nuclear deterrence and political resolve of leadership. Vacillating, weak and fractious leadership could induce provocation.**
- **High altitude and difficult mountainous terrains together with IOR an intrinsic part conflict theatre.**
- **Air and naval dimension including amphibious operations likely to gain increasing salience.**

Basic Perceptions about Conflict

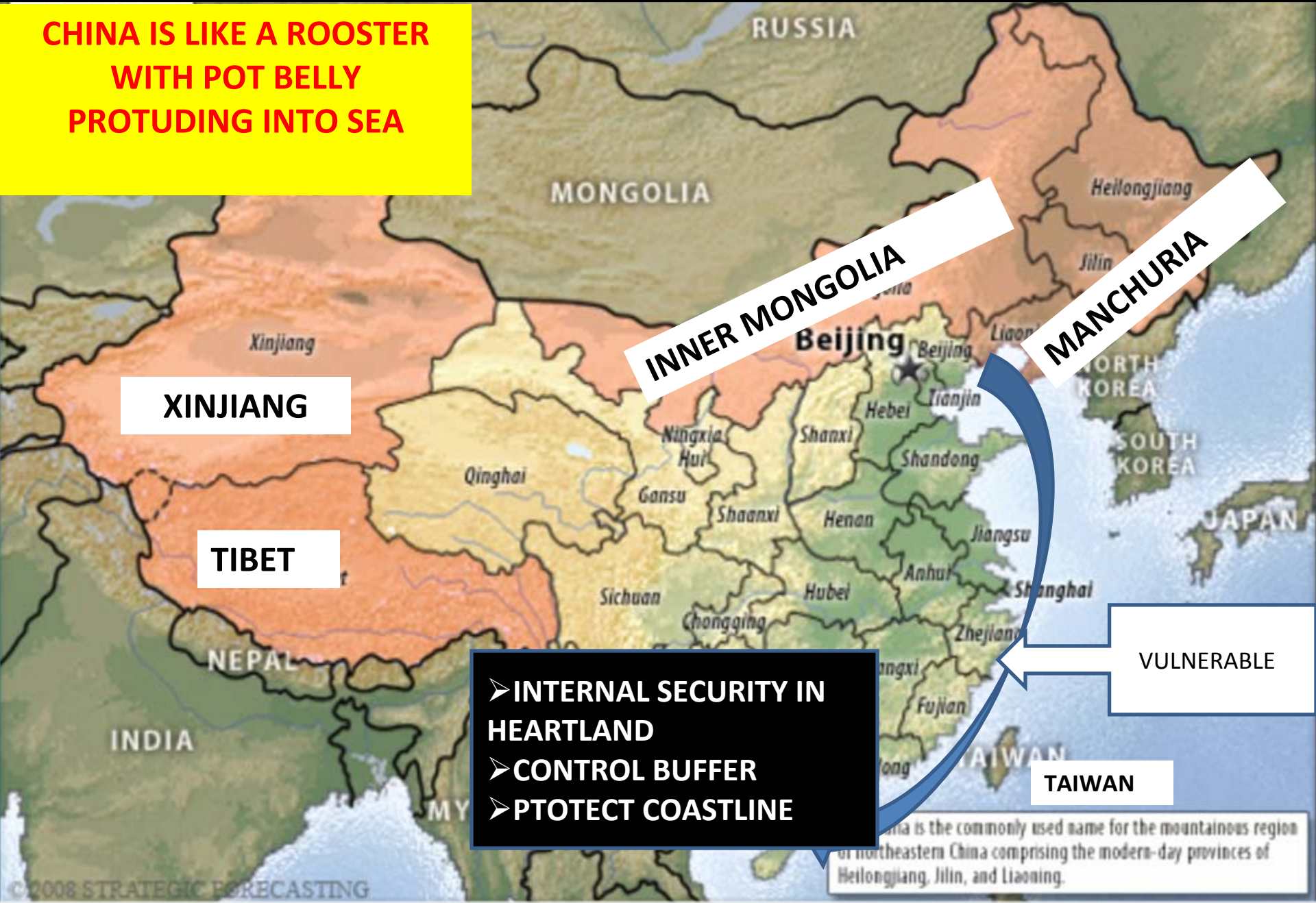
- **Military force application model will be guided by number of factors to include escalation dynamics, relative force and technological balance, internal situation, force mobilisation capacities, logistic infrastructure .**
- **Possible coalition/ alliances/partners and international pressures are other factors.**
- **National and military strategy of India and China in 2020 and beyond time frame.**
- **Status of India and China relative CNP and strategic configuration of power.**

China A Geo-Strategically Restrained Power

- Despite its growing economic and political influence remains 'geo-strategically restrained' power.
- Its maritime borders in the East surrounded by first and second Island chains are restrained by US military alliance system.
- Its Western and Southern borders are buffered by non Han minorities which form 9% of Chinese population but control nearly 60% of its geographical space. Beyond this lie inimical and competitive Asian players who themselves are seeking strategic space in Asia.
- In breaking the logjam of its geo-strategic restraint Chinese appear to have come to conclusion that *Southern push* is more viable than to the East and West.
- Southern push provides an added prize of access to IOR and ability to dominate its vulnerable SLOC's.

STRATEGIC SECURITY CONCERNS

CHINA IS LIKE A ROOSTER
WITH POT BELLY
PROTUDING INTO SEA



XINJIANG

TIBET

INNER MONGOLIA

MANCHURIA

VULNERABLE

TAIWAN

- INTERNAL SECURITY IN HEARTLAND
- CONTROL BUFFER
- PROTECT COASTLINE

Manchuria is the commonly used name for the mountainous region of northeastern China comprising the modern-day provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning.