
Recent Developments in Tibet and Xinjiang: Implications for India

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Abstract

The current conflicts in Europe and the Middle East have led to an urgent review by nations globally, with respect to their military preparedness and security strategies. These conflicts have once again re-established the probability of conventional conflict, especially where there are festering issues of dissonance between neighbouring nation states. Therefore, the increased belligerence of an assertive China, manifesting in hegemonistic actions in its extended neighbourhood, is a matter of concern for India. It is necessary for India to be aware of the socio-economic and infrastructure changes in China's bordering autonomous regions of Xinjiang and Tibet, which have an impact on its war-waging capabilities. This article studies the transformational changes underway in these two bordering regions, that impinge directly on India's security.

Introduction

China's developmental activities on India's western frontiers are not a result of only the recent standoff in the Ladakh region, but a consequence

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of its long-term security and economic interests in South and Central Asia and internal security concerns in Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The two regions account for approximately 30 per cent of China's land mass and border eleven different nation-states, making them vulnerable to events in China. To safeguard its security interests and insulate the population of Xinjiang, from instability and the negative influence of the ethnic diaspora in the Central Asian Republics (CAR), China is pursuing a robust economic policy and periodic military engagement, with these countries. Similarly, its endeavour to sinicize Tibet has an impact on the state of affairs in greater Tibet.

India needs to be aware of the pervasive socio-cultural-demographic changes and their impact on the demography of these neighbouring provinces. It also needs to be aware of the implications of the massive infrastructure development cum militarisation in these regions. It needs to evaluate the long-term effect of China's policies of subjugation in Xinjiang and on Tibetan religious practices, the succession of the Dalai Lama, the future role of the 'Tibetan government in exile' and other unforeseen challenges. This is essential to identify vulnerabilities and fissures that can be exploited subsequently as leverages.

Impact of China's Socio-Economic Policies— Xinjiang & Tibet

China took control of its peripheral regions of Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, with a multitude of ethno-religious communities, to carve the territorial boundaries of the modern PRC. The initial policy was aimed at integration with developmental initiatives. But in the mid-1980s there was a shift from cultural accommodation to an overt policy of assertive assimilation. This change has increased the feeling of ethno-nationalism and a simmering disgruntlement against the State and has imparted an impetus to separatist movements. The cumulative impact of these socio-

economic policies on society and demography is looked at separately in these regions below.

Xinjiang. Xinjiang called the ‘Pivot of Asia’ by Owen Latimore, is China’s strategic frontier and gateway to ‘Eurasia and Europe. Apropos, it became China’s hub for trans-Asian trade, with the provincial capital Urumqi, being the start point of the road-rail link to Europe. It is now a key element of Xi Jinping’s flagship BRI project. The region is also important for China’s energy security, as it provides an alternative route for transportation of oil and gas, through an extensive network of pipelines from the oil-rich regions of CAR. It is assessed to be mineral rich and the vast open terrain is being exploited for military training, space launch sites, silos for nuclear weapons and forward deployment of combat units towards the LAC with India.

Xinjiang, has a multitude of indigenous Turkic Muslim ethnic groups,¹ with Uyghurs in the majority and concentrated in southern Xinjiang. In contrast, the Hans are in majority in the urban centres of the North and East. There is a pronounced visible divide between the two due to differences in their language, culture and customs. The initial ‘policy of appeasement’ for integrating the region, was in deference to the legacy Soviet influence and impact of the November 1944, ‘Revolution of the three Districts’ of Xinjiang (Ili, Tarbagatai & Altai).² The breakdown of Sino-Soviet relations in 1962, led to China targeting the indigenous intelligentsia, relocating locals and promoting a policy of ‘Hanisation’ of the region. This precipitated an exodus of the indigenous Uyghur population, to the neighbouring regions of the then-Soviet Union, and sowed the seeds of separatist movements. The weakening of China’s central authority, post the cultural revolution in 1966, led to the rise of Uyghur demands for independence and subsequently movements like the East Turkistan Islamic movement (ETIM),³ in 1990s. The Urumqi riots of July 2009, impelled harsher policies of suppression by the State

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and relocation of rural Turkic Muslim ethnic groups into multi-ethnic urban centers, for effective population control. China's 2nd generation of Minority Policy in 2010, instituted measures to address the mind space of the future generations of the indigenous population. To give these measures overt sanctity, it promulgated these under its Counter Terrorist Laws 2007,

which were later updated in 2014 and 2015.

After President Xi Jinping came to power in November 2012, the policies became harsher. The 'Strike Hard campaign', launched in May 2014, led to imprisonment of about one million, Uyghurs and Kazakhs in detention camps for political education and ideological training. Learning Mandarin and other Chinese cultural practices were made compulsory. Population profiling through biometric data, voice samples and DNA was enforced. There were curbs on religious practices, and a new procedure was promulgated for undertaking 'Haj', in October 2020.⁴ Doctored textbooks were issued to change the understanding of the history and reality of the region, with strict monitoring of the internet and social media platforms, to stop any online religious/cultural discourse.

The appointment in 2016, of Mr Cheng Quanguo, architect of Tibetan suppression, as leader of the Communist Party in Xinjiang, led to the establishment of vocational education and training centres (internment camps) and the use of advanced surveillance technology for 'public monitoring'. 'Becoming Family' campaign was started in October 2016, for the Han cadres. It required compulsory homestay with local Xinjiang residents in the rural areas (five days in two months), to socialise with the Uyghurs and Kazakh families. They also started the 'Pair up

and Become Family’ programme to promote inter-ethnic harmony and social stability.⁵ In 2017, a concerted campaign started to subjugate the religious identity of the Uyghurs, resulting in damage to 65 per cent of the 16,000 mosques, with 50 per cent being destroyed/demolished.⁶ It is apparent that the implementation of such regressive measures in Xinjiang, had the support of President Xi Jinping, for while addressing officials at a meeting on September 25-26, 2020, he conveyed his appreciation, by stating that the current policies are totally correct and successful. This progressive curtailment has undoubtedly reinforced Uyghur nationalism and incentivised separatist movements in the smaller ethnic communities of the region.

Tibet. Tibet/Xizang situated on the pristine Tibetan Plateau of East Asia, has a unique identity. It has had a fascinating history as an independent nation, with its own form of government, a functional administration, including an army. Its geographical location, physical environment and abundant natural resources endow it with immense geo-strategic significance. It is important to be aware of the territorial segmentation of Tibet to TAR, when we look at the militarisation of the region.

Tibet originally comprised of three traditional sub-regions of Kham in the east, Ü-Tsang in the west and central Tibet and Amdo in the north east. It was subsumed in the newly formed Peoples Republic of China, with a formal ‘17 Point Agreement’, signed under duress by the young 14th Dalai Lama, in 1951. Post the annexation of Tibet, the eastern areas of Amdo and Kham were merged with the Chinese Provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan as ‘ethnic autonomous prefectures’. In 1965 the remainder portion of western and central Tibet was reconfigured as ‘Tibet Autonomous Region’ (TAR) and replaced ‘Tibet Area’, established after annexation by the PRC (refer Map 1). The systematic renegeing on the terms of the ‘17 Point Agreement’ by the Chinese State led to widespread protests in 1959. The brutal response by China led to the

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Dalai Lama fleeing to India and the subsequent formation of the ‘Tibetan Government in Exile’, in Dharamshala.

The State softened its approach towards Tibet after the death of Mao Tse Tung and started a period of engagement from 1979 to 2002, for the Dalai Lama to return to China. Along with favourable socio-economic policies, President Jiang Zemin launched the ‘Developing West’

campaign, under the 10th Five Year Plan (2000-2005). This strategic initiative was aimed to facilitate Tibet’s integration, improve incomes and arrest migration⁷ and resulted in the construction of 35,000 km of roads, 4,000 km of railways, and dozens of new factories along with oil

Map 1: Administrative Redistribution of Tibet



Source: IO, CTA 1979 (Reproduced from Tibet 2000)

and gas pipelines.⁸ In the run-up to 2009 Beijing Olympics, TAR like Xinjiang, witnessed a surge in local uprisings, including immolation by some monks. Resulting in harsher ‘public control policies’ in Xinjiang, with political re-education in Tibet. The Chinese ‘White Paper’ of 2015, legislated mandatory learning of the Chinese language and culture, for Tibetan youth, seeking jobs and financial incentives. ‘Formative Chinese education’, became a prerequisite, for youth seeking to pursue theological studies for monkhood. In prefectures like ‘Ngati’ with extreme anti-establishment sentiment, many were moved into ‘Vocational Training Centers’ or Reeducation Camps. Inter marriages between the ‘Han’ and the locals were promoted and the sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism commenced. It also foreclosed any conciliatory options with the Tibetan rebels outside the country and rejected the ‘Middle Way’ advocated by the Dalai Lama, till his public acknowledgement, of Tibet being an integral part of China.

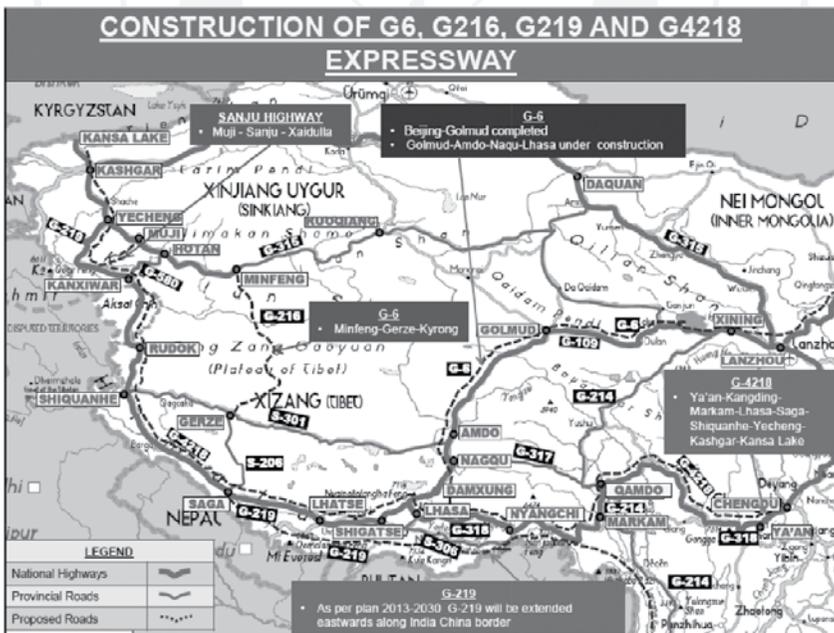
Xi Jinping speaking at a conference on religions in 2016, stated that the government ‘would guide religions practiced in China to be compatible with socialism.’ At the meeting of the 7th Tibet Work Forum (the main policy organisation for Tibet), convened by the CCP in Beijing in August 2020, it was decided to restart re-education for Tibetan youth. China’s White Paper of 2021 laid down the guidelines ‘for governing Tibet in the new era’, and espouses ‘Xi Jinping’s strategy on governing the frontiers and ensuring the stability of Tibet.’ It emphasises the need to ‘strengthen ethnic unity,’ build a prosperous Tibet, protect the environment, take into account the international and domestic situation, and ‘develop religions in a Chinese context.’⁹

Infrastructure Development

The PRC’s perceived internal and external security threats in these far-flung bordering regions have always been the reason for the large military presence and construction of ‘dual use’ infrastructure facilities.

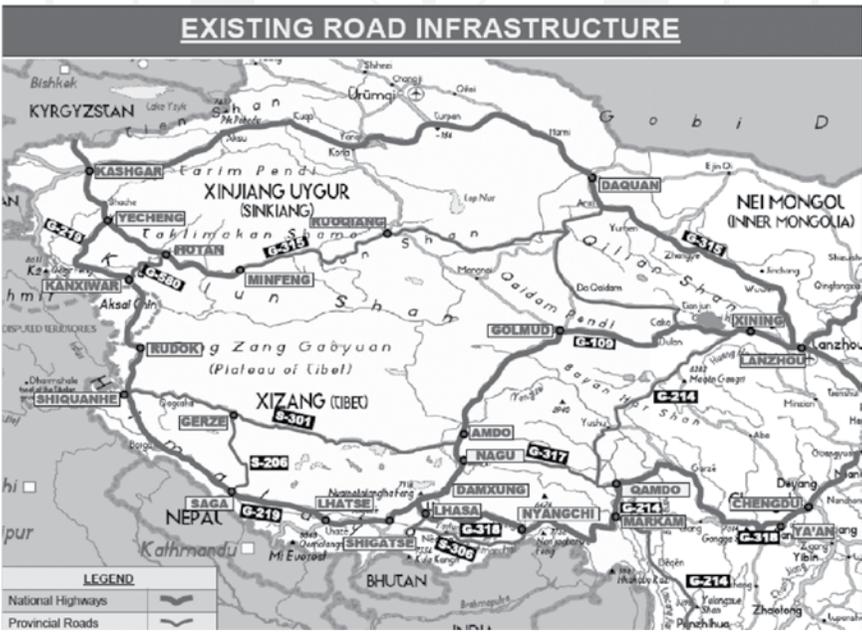
The developmental activities had a renewed focus, after the India- China standoff in eastern Ladakh, in 2020. Primacy continues to be to enhance road, rail, air and digital connectivity. China has set targets and objectives for the next five years under the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025),¹⁰ and laid down long-term objectives for 2035, that were passed by the National People’s Congress in Mar 2021.¹¹ The plan highlights a number of key strategic initiatives and these are looked at in subsequent paragraphs.

Construction/Upgradation of Highways. China during this Plan period, proposes to enhance the existing road network within the two regions and strengthen the “strategic backbone corridors”, between Xinjiang and Tibet. The priorities are the upgradation of NH G219, G318 Sichuan-Tibet Highway and extending G331 along India’s border. These connectivity projects, while facilitating PLAs strategic mobility, will closely enmesh these regions and promote security. Focus on connectivity projects under Xi Jinping in these regions, has witnessed 51 per cent increase in the Highway systems, between 2015 and 2020.



In XUAR, the focus is to connect major regional hubs to remote areas on China's borders. In western Xinjiang, China has constructed at least eight roads emanating from NH G219 towards the LAC, primarily for military expediency. Similar efforts of road connectivity are there in the eastern sector of TAR, opposite Arunachal Pradesh, India. A new road and tunnel system was completed in 2021, connecting Nyingchi to Medog County, in close proximity to the LAC, shortening the travel time by eight hours and distance from 346 to 180 km. There is also a proposal to construct 'five centres, three bases and one corridor' in Xinjiang, to enhance the state of its road, air, logistics, health and energy infrastructure. The five centres are the regional hubs for transport, commerce, trade & logistics, financial

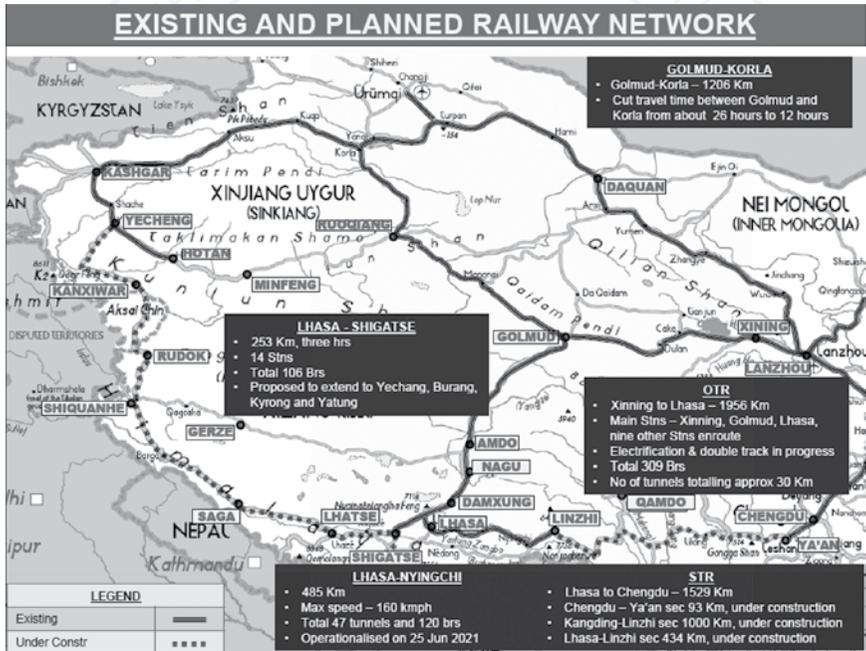
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services, culture & education and health & medical. Three bases and one corridor are to exploit the energy and resource advantage of the region. Also, it is proposed to construct new expressways and upgrade the quality of existing road links, in TAR. Currently, 94 per cent of towns and 76 per cent of administrative villages are connected by black top roads. By the end of 2020, all first and second-tier border villages had access to roads oblique highways and by 2025, the total mileage of highways in Tibet will exceed 1,20,000 km and that of expressways exceed 1300 km. A second four-lane highway G9, between Chengdu and Lhasa, is a work in progress.¹²

Rail Connectivity. Along with improving its road network, China has embarked on a major effort to improve its rail network in the regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. The railways in Xinjiang have increased from 5,900 km of track in 2015 to 7,800 km in 2020. These links have connected many of the major military centres and airports which can be used both by the civil and the military. Whereas till 2020, TAR only had about 800 km of railways, due to the difficulty of construction in the mountainous terrain, it was only in 2006 that the first outward link from TAR was operationalised, the Qinghai-Lhasa rail link. This 1,432 km rail link, constructed on permafrost at 4,000 m, is an engineering landmark and has since been extended to Shigatse. On June 25, 2021, the second 435 km segment from Nyingchi to Lhasa, of the Sichuan—Tibet high elevated rail link (STR) between Chengdu (Sichuan) and Lhasa, was commissioned. It has a bridge-to-tunnel ratio of 75 per cent—47 tunnels and 120 bridges.¹³ Its SE alignment has increased mobility capacities towards the LAC, opposite Arunachal Pradesh. The plan focuses on the completion of the last segment of STR, the Ya'an-Nyingci segment, by 2030. This will reduce the travel time between Chengdu and Lhasa to twelve hours from 36 hours. In the ongoing effort of sinicization of Tibet, the names of stations on this segment of the rail link are all in Chinese, instead of Tibetan.¹⁴ The “medium to long term railway plan” released

by the TAR Development and Reform Commission, in early February 2023, aims to expand the rail network to 4,000 km by 2025, including new routes that will run up to China's borders with India and Nepal. It proposes a Xinjiang-Tibet rail link along the existing road alignment of G219, through the disputed Aksai Chin region. It will start from Shigatse and run NW along the Nepal border, before cutting north through Aksai Chin to Hotan in Xinjiang. The planned route will pass through Rutog and around Pangong Lake on the Chinese side of the LAC. The first section, from Shigatse to Pakhuktso, will be completed by 2025 and the rest to Hotan, by 2035.



Air Infrastructure.¹⁵ Based on OSINT China has 37 newly constructed or upgraded airports and heliports in these two regions, since the 2017 Doklam standoff. Twenty-two of the 37 are assessed to be military or dual-use facilities, enhancing PLAs' capability to speedily move/deploy combat resources. A large number of the recent projects

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have been to mitigate operational voids noticed in the Ladakh skirmish in 2020. In Tibet, the existing five dual-use airports, have been upgraded with new terminals, hangars, aprons, and runways. In addition, there are four new

airports coming up across the vast regional expanse. The three airports at Lhunntse, Ngari-Burang and Shigatse-Tingri, are less than 60 km from the Indian borders and will give China multiple choices to project air power. Also, five new heliports and the upgradation of two, have given a fillip to helicopter-based operations in this rugged mountainous terrain. In addition, there are exclusive PLAA (PLA Army) operated heliports, extending from Rutog County in the west to Nyingchi city in the East. Similar developments are taking place in Xinjiang. At least 15 airports have been upgraded since 2017, with seven of these being military or



dual-use facilities. Airports like Hotan, in depth from the LAC, has now an additional runway, tarmac, hangars, and other ancillary facilities, including an Air Defence SAM complex in its proximity. Three new airports are under construction in proximity of its western borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, of which the ‘Tashkurgan Khunjerab’¹⁶ airport, is a key element of CPEC and was operationalised in December 2022. In its proximity, to the north is a newly commissioned military heliport.

A notable change in the upgradation of airports is to ensure their resilience from air attacks. This was noticeable in the innovative construction of the 2nd runway, at an oblique angle from the end of the first runway, at Shigatse Airport. This now requires multiple precision strikes to make it inoperable. Also, adjoining the new airports are the terminals for roads and rail networks, with underground shelters and military air defence units, in proximity. This infrastructure at Shigatse Airport, 155 km from the LAC and close to the Doklam plateau, confirms its strategic significance. It can host fighter jets, helicopters (Z 15 Med utility helicopters) and UAVs (WZ-7 Xianglong/Soaring Dragon, HALE recce drone) for air and reconnaissance missions. Towards its west is the new rail terminal and large underground facility (UGF) for military assets. In addition, there is a second SAM base under construction to its North. Approximately, 490 km to its east, is the Nyingchi—Mainling airfield, 15 km from the LAC. This substantially increases China’s ability to project military power, as Nyingchi is the permanent location of PLA’s 52 & 53 Combined Light Infantry Brigades.¹⁷

Communication Infrastructure. The 14th Five Year Plan has accelerated large scale deployment of 5G networks¹⁸ in Tibet/TAR, increased user penetration, upgraded the existing optical fibre and put in place the necessary spadework for deployment of future 6G technology. A 5G signal base has been set up at an altitude of 5,374 m, at Kangbalo, in 2020. The world’s highest manually operated radar station.¹⁹ In the case of XUAR, an advanced 5G network has been built in major urban

centres up to prefecture-level cities, by deploying more than 10,000 x 5G base stations, along with necessary infrastructure and facilities. Urumqi was one of China's first cities to be 5G enabled in October 2019. With an investment of US\$ 261 million in 2021-22, the architectural framework for 5G high-speed communication and data connectivity, has been put in place. It now enables 5G communication capability to not only most towns and villages but also to spatially separated military units-formations-bases-weapon platforms, deployed at the LAC.

Hydropower Projects. China had approved eight dams in the upper and middle reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo, out of which Zangmu dam was operationalised in 2014 and the remaining three dams—Dagu (640 MW), Jiacha (320 MW) and Jeixu, are at different stages of completion. The location of the remaining four in TAR is currently not confirmed, but likely to be in the lower reaches of the river, in proximity to the great bend, where the world's largest dam, has been recently completed in Medog County, bordering Arunachal Pradesh. These actions by an upper riparian state are of concern to India for its water security and weaponisation in times of conflict.

Well Off (Xiaokang) Border Villages. The Plan has approved the construction of 628 model Xiaokang border defence villages, in 21 border counties of TAR, from Ngari (Ali) district, across the Indian UT of Ladakh to Nyingchi (Linzhih), opposite eastern Arunachal Pradesh. Most of the 428 villages in the 1st tier have been completed and around 200 villages in the 2nd tier are under construction.²⁰ These villages will create physical footprints, in uninhabited/low-density areas, with loyalist inhabitants, as the 'eyes and ears' for the CCP, across extended frontiers and also interdict any infiltration from India of pro Dalai Lama Tibetans. The construction of these villages with all modern amenities/facilities of education, and health with financial largess are in stark contrast to what exists within India and indirectly attacks the mind space of the Indian local residents and troops, deployed in that region.

Specific Infrastructure for Armed Forces. Military-specific infrastructure has been a priority to improve China's combat operational profile against India and project power westwards. In Xinjiang, military bases, with billeting and supporting logistics, for two Infantry Divisions plus, within 6 to 12 hours of travel time from the LAC²¹ has been constructed. In the adjoining Ngari prefecture of TAR, there is intense activity for military barracks and fortifications for long-range artillery.

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PLAAF has upgraded existing facilities at 22 of the military/dual-use airfields in the two regions, with hardened shelters and extended/additional runways. These have been specifically observed at Hotan, Gar Gunsa, Kashghar, Hopping, Dkonka Dzung, Linzhi and Pangat airbases in the two regions.²² Thus increasing the deployment of modern fighter and strategic bombers, duly protected with Air Defence assets of the PLA Air Force and Army. Two heliports with facilities for air maintenance have come up north of 'hot springs' and 155 km east of 'Pangong Tso Lake' opposite eastern Ladakh. Also, a network of helipads has been made in close proximity to the troop deployments on the LAC. In SE Xinjiang, operating facilities have been created for the operations of bomber assets like the JH-7A and H-6K platforms at a new air base 'Keriya', 170 km from Hotan air base.

The confluence of air, rail and road terminals has increased mobility and facilitated seamless handling of cargo and freight, including combat men and material. The integration of underground facilities at these multi-modal terminals has ensured the protected storage of

sensitive conventional/nuclear munitions and logistics. At places, these underground facilities are used for Command-and-Control centres by Western Theatre Command (WTC).

Logistic nodes for stocking ammunition and POL (petroleum, oil & lubricants), have been established at six locations in TAR—Linzhi, Ngari, Qiama, Rutog, Seni Nagqu and Yaophu. In XUAR the two nodes are at Urumqi and Kasghar with forward dumps at Moldo, Spanggur Tso, Tianshuihai and Demchok. Combined arms training bases and field firing ranges at Xiadullah, Kangxiwar, TWD, Chiakang and Shiquanhe have improved facilities for the firing of modern weapon systems and state of art monitoring equipment.²³ Another major connectivity project for the PLA is the road bridge across the narrowest portion of the 135 km Pangong Lake/Pangong Tso, operationalised in early 2023. The new bridge has significantly reduced travel time between PLA garrison at Khurnak Fort, to the south side, from 12 to 3 hours.²⁴

It is important to note that although this analysis focuses on Tibet and Xinjiang, there are also developments underway in the other five regions, that have significant implications for China's military capabilities on its western frontier. Tibet and Xinjiang are just two of the seven regions comprising the PLA's WTC, which oversees combat operations and joint training of Chinese military forces throughout China's western expanse.²⁵ In Qinghai Province, for example, China has been making heavy investments in upgrading dual-use facilities in the city of Golmud, including the rail link Qinghai-Korla.

Implications

The implications can be addressed under three heads as given below:

Cumulative Impact of Population Control Policies. The suppressive and assimilative State policies, have been successful in establishing peace and apparent stability in China's bordering autonomous regions. But in a digitally connected world, the local indigenous population would be

aware of the contrasting lifestyle of freedom and dignity of their diaspora in CAR and elsewhere. This in addition to the suppressive policies of the State, will plant the seeds of dissent, which though dormant, are a vulnerability that can be exploited

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at an opportune time. The systematic human rights violation of the Uyghurs is another available leverage. In the case of Tibet, India's trump card remains the Dalai Lama and its capability to influence the Tibetan mind space, as Indian civilisational democratic culture cum democratic values, are in stark contrast to China's autocratic and restrictive nature of governance. Currently, Xi Jinping's centralised control has capped individual aspirations and dissent, like a dormant volcano, which when it erupts will be devastating.

The major cause for concern for India is the long-term impact of the current policies of forced 'reeducation', targeting the cognitive domain of an individual/the mind space, in the formative years of the Tibetans, Uyghurs and the other indigenous ethnic communities. The concerted effort to develop/influence religious practices in the Chinese context may achieve its long-term desire for the sinicization of these multi-ethnic populations. It is therefore imperative that India and like-minded countries, continue support to the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan 'government in exile' in India. Thus, ensuring their influence on the Tibetan diaspora in China and retention of the existing leverage for India. Towards this end the recent 'Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act'²⁶ of June 2020, authorising the imposition of US sanctions against Chinese government officials responsible for the detention of Uyghur Muslims in special camps and the 'Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020' supporting the succession of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama, as the final authority on his own reincarnation are

important. India on its part will have to continue support for the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration and its 'Sikyong' (Prime Minister). This will ensure the continuity of Tibetan traditional cultural and religious practices and ensure empowered future generations.

Border Infrastructure. In addition to the deployment of additional resources closer to the border, the aspect of connectivity to and along the Sino-Indian Border, with its future projects and the role and impact of the newly established Xiaokang villages, has enhanced China's capabilities to manifest combat power fastest and as desired. China plans to boost border security by closely integrating border areas and augmenting its mobilisation capability, with new rail links towards the border in Tibet and also by linking it to other Provinces, by the end of the 14th Plan. Towards this, it is extending Tibet's existing railway link to an outside Province Qinghai, to three other neighbouring provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu. In addition to the Xinjiang Lhasa rail link alongside the G 219, plans are there for new railway lines to Gyirong, the land port on the Nepal-Tibet border, and Yadong county in the Chumbi valley, which borders Sikkim and Bhutan.

The security implications of the 'Xiaokang' villages in intelligence gathering and becoming the 'eyes and ears' of the State as their footprint enlarges is a very strong likelihood. It facilitates one of the elements of the Chinese three-pronged strategy of establishing legal rights in claimed areas. It also has a psychological dimension, as the facilities and affluence of the infrastructure in these Chinese villages will be a stark contrast to those living in border villages in India and other Himalayan nations. It is playing with the minds of the population residing in close proximity to the LAC. This is also part of the 'three war strategy' of China, of which psychological ascendancy on the adversarial population is a key component. It is for the same reason, that it is renaming places in Arunachal Pradesh with Chinese names, to subsequently claim that these areas were always a part of China.

Another aspect that needs to be addressed is the issue of ‘water security’. There is a growing probability of ‘water wars’ in the foreseeable future, as a result of global warming. The numerous large and small hydro projects on the Yarlung Tsangpo (R Brahmaputra)

Therefore, the weaponisation of water is another security imperative that may influence the final outcome of any future Sino-India border resolution.

and the source of all major rivers flowing into South Asia being from the Tibetan plateau, will in the long term have an impact on India’s ‘water security’, as it is a lower riparian State to China. Therefore, the weaponisation of water is another security imperative that may influence the final outcome of any future Sino-India border resolution.

Military Capabilities and Capacities. The continuous upgradation and accretion in the road and rail network with dual-use facilities in proximity of the 4,000 km long LAC has enhanced the capability of PLA to not only conduct combat operations but to be able to project combat power from Western Theatre Command. The augmentation and modernisation of airfields and heliports in proximity of the external frontiers have made it possible for the employment of modern aerial assets for both ISR, mobility and offensive action in any future kinetic confrontation. The inter and intra movement of combat resources and military logistics within WTC has been very positively impacted. The speed and quantum of application of combat forces to the LAC, from the newly established military bases with supporting infrastructure, operationalised since 2020, especially in Xinjiang towards Ladakh, is a game changer. Corresponding activity in the other five regions of WTC and the rest of China with respect to military infrastructure has supplemented these operational changes. There is a need for India to factor in this time asymmetry in resource reallocation, in its military planning and fast-track suitable connectivity projects. The rapid deployment of extensive

mobile and data connectivity, including a 5G architectural framework, empowers the PLA to employ innovative and ‘state of the art’ weapon and surveillance platforms from ‘swarm drones’ to ‘loiter munitions’ etc. Also, it gives shape to its INEW (Integrated Network and Electronic Warfare) operational strategy, including hitting the adversary’s cognitive domain.

Conclusion

India needs to have a comprehensive strategy to meet the imminent threat of a hegemonistic China. Firstly, it needs to have an encompassing developmental strategy that addresses the critical infrastructure and combat voids in the short term while increasing its deterrence. Secondly, it must develop leverages that can be operationalised when required and create task-specific partnerships to address existing asymmetry. For example, forging arrangements with the ‘Five Eyes’ grouping to acquire real-time intelligence. Thirdly, focus on strengthening its socio-economic conditions and technological threshold. The ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ strategy for making India self-reliant in critical areas and increasing its manufacturing base, to follow the mantra of manufacturing ‘local for global’ is the way ahead. Lastly, in the near term, the Armed Forces must adopt passive protection capabilities and adopt realistic counter measures against China’s technological advantage in waging ‘non-contact warfare’.

Notes

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