

CHINA'S MAJOR MILITARY REFORMS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

JAYADEVA RANADE

Over the New Year, Chinese President Xi Jinping demonstrated his authority and grip over the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by commencing implementation of the crucial second phase of military reforms announced earlier on September 3, 2015. The reorganisation and restructuring of the 2.3 million-strong People's Liberation Army (PLA), described by Chinese analysts as the most "extensive" ever and which has been on the drawing board since well before 2011, is the most critical reform initiative taken by Xi Jinping since he took over in November 2012. It is only the second time in the history of the People's Republic of China (PRC) that the PLA – an intrinsic, vital part of Communist China's power structure – is being radically reformed. Designed to qualitatively upgrade the PLA's capabilities, the objective is to prepare the PLA to assist the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) realise the 'China Dream' and protect China's overseas national interests. There are clear implications for India as well.

While the reforms have yet to be fully implemented, an initial assessment of the difficulties in their implementation and scope would be useful. A blend of compromise, coercion and consultation preceded implementation of the reforms, clear contours of which are now visible.

Jayadeva Ranade is the President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy, New Delhi. He is also an Honorary Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi.

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visited colleges, went to the plateaus, visited the borders, sat in driving seats and cockpits, taking the pulse of reform with soldiers.”

Commentaries in both the official newspapers added that the “Small Leading Group for Deepening Reform of National Defense and the Military” collected opinions from more than 900 current and former senior officers and experts, issued questionnaires and received thousands of online suggestions. Between March and October 2015, there were more than 800 meetings about the reforms, covering almost 700 military bases and units. Both vice chairmen of the CMC, namely Gen Fan Changlong and Gen Xu Qiliang, travelled in September 2015, to all seven Military Regions (MRs) to explain the reforms to middle and lower ranking PLA officers. China analyst Peter Mattis quantified the efforts as entailing 860 seminars, 900 officer surveys, and several Party plenary conference work reports. The efforts sought to assuage the concerns of numerous PLA officers. They also confirmed that resistance in the PLA to downsizing the 2.3 million strong army has been considerable, including at senior levels where many of the approximately 1,144 serving PLA General Staff officers apprehend being rendered redundant, transferred to Beijing and deprived of functional posts. It would mean loss of authority and perquisites such as housing, which they currently enjoy. There has been institutional resistance too, with

Though the plans had been drafted in 2011, it took Xi Jinping and his predecessor, Hu Jintao, considerable time and effort to build the requisite consensus in the PLA to begin this phase of the reforms involving structural reorganisation and personnel downsizing. In addition to setting up the “Small Leading Group for Deepening Reform of National Defence and the Military” in March 2014, a lengthy front page commentary in the *People’s Liberation Army Daily* and *People’s Daily*, quite unusually, separately disclosed that “Chairman Xi went into offices and

different Services resisting downsizing of their personnel strengths and reduction in their share of the budget. This resistance has delayed implementation of the reforms and the PLA's downsizing is now expected to be completed only by 2017.

There was indication of this resistance in the official Chinese media. At least two signed articles in the *Liberation Army Daily (LAD)* on September 9, 2015, publicised this resistance. The first article cautioned that implementation of military reforms would be difficult and "would require an assault on fortified positions to change mindsets and root out vested interests, and that the difficulties would be unprecedented." Asserting that their implementation was essential, the article observed that "if these reforms failed, measures still to come would be nothing more than an empty sheet of paper". Reiterating the difficulties in implementing reforms, another article in the same paper said that as reforms begin to be implemented "there could be significant structural contradictions and an accumulation of institutional obstacles". Its author, Ma Depao, formerly associated with the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) is now probably with the *PLA Daily*.

Resistance was considerably neutralised by Xi Jinping's high-risk decision at the Third Plenum of the National People's Congress (NPC) to bring the PLA within the ambit of the Party's anti-corruption watchdog body, the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC). It was a deft move to get the PLA to fall in line with his reform plans. CDIC investigations were swift and thorough and, within weeks, China's official media reported that Maj Gen Gu Junshun was under investigation and that he was part of a network which included senior officers. Numerous PLA generals were soon listed by the CDIC's official website as either under detention or investigation. Many, like VAdm Ma Faxiang and RAdm Jiang Zhonghua, committed

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suicide to avoid shame and allow their families to receive post-retirement financial benefits. In a stunning move, in January and February 2015 alone, 30 generals were placed under detention for investigation on corruption charges. Considering that the PLA has 32 generals, 134 lieutenant generals and 978 major generals in service, the number is sizeable. A total of 4,300 officers, or 30 percent of the PLA's officer cadre, were under investigation by the end of 2015.

This effort was supplemented by the "education" campaigns of the PLA's General Political Department (GPD). In addition, the reforms were supported by Xi Jinping's fellow 'princelings' and loyalists in senior echelons of the PLA, as well as younger, more professional officers. Support was facilitated also by the 40 per cent hike in salaries and allowances awarded to PLA personnel in late 2014.

The troop reduction of 300,000 announced on September 3, 2015, is far less than the 800,000 envisaged in 2011. In April 2011, the Beijing-owned Hongkong-based *Wen Wei Po* publicised plans for reducing the PLA's size by 800,000 personnel. While the report was denied by China's Defence Ministry, Professor Han Xudong of China's National Defence University (NDU), commenting on the *Wen Wei Po* report to the *Global Times*, a subsidiary of the authoritative CCP newspaper *People's Daily*, disclosed that the *Wen Wei Po* report was the personal opinion of a retired PLA general formerly in charge of downsizing. He added, though, that the Defence Ministry's denial did not mean there would be no reductions in the future. Hinting at the extent of personnel cuts, he elaborated that since the US has a 1.4 million army and India a 1.2 million army, a 1.5 million strength for the PLA would be adequate.

Separately, Chinese military officers commenting on the *Wen Wei Po* report on the background to *Jane's*, said the central authorities were working out targets for future downsizing, but big cuts are unlikely. Reductions, they said, could be expected in 2-3 years. However, they would not affect the PLA's capabilities as it would extensively use information technology, and science and technology for advanced modern weaponry. PLA personnel would be better educated, better trained and more proficient. These

comments as well as the appearance of the report in *Wen Wei Po* together with excerpts from the “PLA’s Development Outline for Cultivating Armed Forces Talent before the Year 2020”, provided insights into the PLA’s restructuring plans.

Commenting on the personnel cuts announced in September 2015, retired Maj Gen Xu Guangyu, a senior consultant at the Chinese Military Disarmament Control Council and an expert on Chinese contemporary military affairs, justified the reforms and said “these reductions are an effort to stay on this path and increase quality, not numbers”. Col Yang Yujun, spokesman for China’s Ministry of National Defence (MND), clarified that the troops to be disbanded are those “equipped with outdated armaments and office staff and personnel of non-combat organizations”. Separately, the authoritative official news agency Xinhua said on September 3, 2015, that “non-combat units and administrative staff will be cut, and units with older weapons and equipment will reportedly be targeted for demobilization”.

After the release for internal circulation of the “PLA’s Development Outline for Cultivating Armed Forces Talent before the Year 2020” (referred to only as the ‘Outline’), which spelt out plans for restructuring the PLA, official documents described the five-year (2011-15) period as “crucial” in the PLA’s development. The plans received a substantive push when the Chinese Communist Party’s Third Plenum, which was held in November 2013, approved proposals for major organisational restructuring and technological upgradation of the PLA. Within days after the Third Plenum, CMC Vice Chairman and former PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Commander Xu Qiliang asserted that the reforms will be implemented, that non-combatant personnel would be “eliminated”, and that the reforms will enable the PLA to “win wars”.

On March 15, 2014, China’s authoritative official news agency Xinhua announced the creation of a new “Small Leading Group for Deepening Reform of National Defense and the Military”. It was set up as a sub-committee of the Central Military Commission (CMC) under the chairmanship of Xi Jinping assisted by two deputy chairmen who were also the vice chairmen of the CMC, namely, Gen Fan Changlong and Gen Xu

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Qiliang. The names of the other members were not disclosed, but the outspoken Gen Liu Yuan, a high-ranking ‘princeling’ close to Xi Jinping, and political commissar of the PLA’s General Logistics Department (GLD), could have been one member.

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s public announcement downsizing the PLA at the grand military parade on September 3, 2015—with former Chinese Presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao present on the dias—was a major event.

It signalled that the final stages of reform and reorganisation of the PLA would begin now that internal consensus had been reached. Despite the transparently thin attempt to package the 300,000-personnel troop reduction as a move towards promoting peace, the troop reduction is actually part of a long-planned effort to streamline and strengthen the PLA and fashion it into a hi-tech, lethal, “informationized” force capable of defending China’s national interests at home and abroad, while expanding China’s strategic space.

On December 31, 2015, while conferring flags on the new formations, Xi Jinping outlined the future direction of the PLA in an official speech known as *Xun Ci* literally translated as ‘admonishing words.’ Xi Jinping is only the second Chinese Communist leader to give a *Xun Ci* since the founding of the PRC. The other leader to have delivered a *Xun Ci* to the military in China’s 67-year history was Mao Zedong, who did so in 1952 and 1953. Xi Jinping’s decision to deliver the *Xun Ci* is a sign of his confidence and indicates that he is consolidating authority to implement major military reforms.

The substantive contours of these reforms are fast becoming clearly visible. On January 1, 2016, the Central Military Commission headed by Xi Jinping issued the full text of the 4,993-character “Guideline on Deepening National Defence and Military Reform”. The “Guideline” emphasised the political nature of the PLA and its subordinate relationship to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The central features of these are: strengthened political and

ideological education; expansion of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organisation in the military; strict political discipline, organisational discipline and personnel discipline; financial discipline and discipline regarding secrecy; strict action against “political and organisational liberalism”; thorough implementation of the resolutions of the Party’s 18th Congress and the Third, Fourth and Fifth Plenums, Marxism Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of “Three Represents” (of Jiang Zemin), the guidance of Scientific Development Concept (of Hu Jintao) and the teachings of Chairman Xi Jinping’s series of “important speeches”.

The “Guideline” asserts that the main objective of the reforms is to equip the PLA for “theatre battles”, in other words, replace existing military regions with Theatre Commands. Simultaneously, it said a joint operational command system would be established and military-civilian integration would be promoted. Asserting that the PLA will have the capability of “winning the information war” and effectively carrying out “mandated missions by a military system with Chinese characteristics”, the “Guideline” asserted that these reforms would be achieved by 2020. This coincides with Xi Jinping’s declared objective of the “Two 100s” (namely, well-off society by 2021 and fully developed nation by 2049) to realise “the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”.

The “Guideline” also disclosed that while in 2015, the focus was on organising implementation of the leadership and management system and reforming the joint operational command system, in 2016, the reforms will focus on downsizing the PLA and its organisation, reforming the “military combat force structure” and institutions, and basically completing the

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reforms. The period between 2017 and 2020 is to be devoted to making further adjustments to specific areas of reform and optimising and improving the reforms that have been implemented. Attention will be paid to the development of military and civilian integration. Underscoring the need for reorganising the command structure, the "Guideline" stipulated that there is "need for a joint operational command at the CMC level and at the theatre level, a two-level operational command system; and an integrated command system for peacetime and especially a main and capable strategic and tactical command system". Outlining the Theatre Command configuration, it said the reform will establish a three-tier "CMC battle zone commands troops command" system and an administration system that runs from the CMC through various services to the troops.

The main features of the "Guideline" are:

- Regarding military scale and structure, the focus will be on fewer but better troops with 'Chinese characteristics' and a switch from quantity to quality and greater efficiency. There will be a reduction of military personnel by 300,000, whereby 2.3 million troops will be reduced to two million. There will be a proportionate reduction in the number of non-combatant personnel and institutions. Old equipment will be eliminated and there will be developments in new equipment.
- Depending on the strategic tasks and operational requirements and the need to enhance functions and create more synergy, the structure of the reserve forces and militia will be optimised.
- New military academies will be built for training new military personnel; there will be emphasis on military training and practice to improve the early, middle and higher three-tier training system; the size and structure of colleges and universities will be optimised.
- The human resources policy and military personnel classification system will be revised and adapted to establish a rank-dominated hierarchy and promote professional military service officers, non-commissioned officers, and civilians. Military wages, housing, insurance and other systems will be reformed.

- Reforms will focus on civil-military integration, developing a high level of civil-military integration, focussing on market-led demand and effective institutional policy incentives.
- The armed forces command system will be strengthened under the centralised leadership of the CMC.
- The system of Military Law, especially rules and regulations in the military counsel system, military justice, discipline inspection, supervision and inspection system, will be reformed.

On January 2, 2016, the state-run *Global Times* summarised the contents of the “Guideline” released by the Central Military Commission on New Year’s Day. In brief, the *Global Times* observed:

- “China’s national interests and current international situation are constantly changing, so is the task of the Chinese Army. Hence, the PLA and relevant mechanisms have to be adjusted accordingly to keep up with the pace of China’s rise”.
- “The task that confronts China’s armed forces is arduous and more than just safeguarding the nation’s maritime and land territories.....As China’s international cooperation grows, more Chinese enterprises go global and the country embraces greater responsibility to maintain regional and world peace, a strong Chinese Army is needed”.
- “China must have a strong military... China doesn’t need to worry about military aggression. But there is more about national security....During China’s rise, friction with the US has gone beyond broad geopolitics. If China has a big gap with the US in terms of military prowess, this will affect its international position and other countries’ attitude toward China”.
- “With a strong army, China can be more politically appealing, influential and persuasive, and will make it easier to network. As we gain more trust from other countries, many of them will no longer be dependent on the US for security and on China for economic benefits”.
- “Our military strength has to be demonstrated to the world. The army needs to be able to fight battles and provide real deterrence. The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting”.

Chinese-language media reports additionally revealed:

- Zone (Theatre) Commands would not directly command troops, which will be under the individual People's Liberation Army, People's Liberation Army Navy, People's Liberation Air Force (PLA, PLAN, PLAAF) Commands in each theatre, except in times of war. In times of war, the troops will be placed under a Joint Command which would be established in each theatre.
- Personnel strength of the PLA (ground forces) will be reduced to 360,000.
- Personnel strength of the PLAN and PLAAF will increase in ratio.
- The GSD will be upgraded and include high-ranking officers from all service branches. It will be a higher echelon organisation than the other General Departments. It will be entrusted with planning functions and providing advice to the chairman of the CMC and be modelled on the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. Also, the GLD and GAD will be merged into one GLD.
- The People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) will be transformed into a National Guard and will additionally absorb a considerable number of the demobilised PLA personnel.
- The number of military academies will be reduced from the present 150 to 29.

Retired PLA Maj Gen Xu Guangyu was quoted by the official state-run *Global Times* on September 6, 2015, as separately speculating that the ratio of ground, air and naval forces would finally be 2:1:1, a dramatic shift from the currently estimated about 4:2:1.

Implementation has moved rapidly since the beginning of January 2016 with the *Global Times* noting that on December 31, 2015, at a ceremony in Beijing attended by all its members, the CMC had announced establishment of the PLA General Command of the Army, the PLA Rocket Force and the PLA Strategic Support Force. Xi Jinping conferred military flags to all three new organisations on the occasion and also announced the names of their commanders and political commissars, indicating that they are now formal, separate, independent entities. Gen Li Zuocheng and Gen Liu Lei

were appointed commander and political commissar of the PLA's General Command of the Army; the commander and political commissar of the PLA Rocket Force are Gen Wei Fenghe and Gen Wang Jiasheng respectively; and Gen Gao Jin has been appointed commander of the new PLA Strategic Support Force, and Gen Liu Fulian as its political commissar. Establishment of these organisations, it was stressed, was "to realise the Chinese dream and the dream of a strong military, and a strategic initiative to build a modern military power system with Chinese characteristics".

Xi Jinping described the PLA Rocket Force as "China's core strategic deterrence power" and asked the new rocket force to develop "nuclear deterrence and counter-strike capability which is credible, reliable, medium and long-range precision strike ability, as well as strategic check and balance capacity to build a strong modern rocket force". The Second Artillery has essentially been renamed the PLA Rocket Force. Some Chinese language news sources speculate that the Second Artillery was restructured due to the realisation that it would be unable to adapt to the future strategic needs of the PLA and to simplify the process of three-dimensional combat missions. The new force, they say, might integrate the missions of strategic nuclear submarines and strategic bombers. The suggestion is apparently that the new rocket force will control, and have in its inventory, missiles with a range of over 300 km and control and coordinate the SSBNs (Sea Submersible Ballistic Nuclear) and strategic bombers.

Commenting on the new "PLA Strategic Support Force", Xi Jinping said that it "is a new type combat force to maintain national security and an important growth point of the PLA's combat capabilities". The indication is that its responsibilities could include technical reconnaissance, electronic warfare, space-based warfare, innovation and missile Research and Development (R&D). Suggesting that it would cater to the requirements of all the different Services, Yao Yunzhu, a senior researcher at the PLA Academy of Military Science, said the establishment of the Strategic Support Force will integrate the support forces of different Services to improve efficiency and save costs.

The PLA's General Command of the army appears to effectively be the headquarters of the ground forces – since 2011 described in official Chinese

documents, including the Defence White Papers, as the PLA. It will likely absorb some of the functions of the erstwhile General Political Department, General Logistics Department and General Armaments Department while some would be merged into the CMC. The "Guideline", however, indicated that these PLA General Departments would remain. Lou Yaoliang, head of Military Strategy Studies at the National Defence University (NDU), described establishment of the PLA's General Command of the army as a "highlight", adding that modernisation of the ground force had been hindered till now by the more than 20 PLA central departments in charge of various aspects of the ground force. He observed too that "establishment of the Army Headquarters also means the PLA has begun to change its long-held Army-centered mentality".

In addition to formalising these new PLA organisations, 15 organisations including major departments like the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD) and General Armaments Department (GAD) have been absorbed directly into the Central Military Commission (CMC). Of these, the Political Department has already begun receiving noticeably more importance, indicating that the CCP leadership is determined to ensure that PLA officers are 'politically reliable' and that the PLA remains the Party's army.

Other departments directly under the CMC are: CMC General Office, CMC Equipment Development Department, CMC Training Management Department, CMC National Defence Mobilisation Department, CMC Discipline Inspection Commission, CMC Political and Legal Affairs Commission, CMC Science and Technology Commission, CMC Strategic Planning Office, CMC Reform and Formation Office, CMC International Military Cooperation Office, CMC Audit Office, and CMC General Affairs Administration.

Meanwhile, the US-based Chinese news service Boxun reported that restructuring of the existing 150 military academies and merging them into 29 had already begun under the supervision of Gen Liu Yuan, political commissar of the PLA's General Logistics Department (GLD) and close associate of Xi Jinping. Gen Liu Yuan, who is the son of former Chinese President Liu Shaoqi and a ranking 'princeling', supports the military reforms pushed by

Xi Jinping and has publicly spoken out against corruption in the PLA. The remaining academies will be transferred to the local civilian administration. Only military academies catering solely to the PLA, like the Army Non-Commissioned Officer Academy, the Officer College, Staff and Command College, Logistics College, Military Engineering College, Armaments and Equipment College and Strategic Artillery Academy will be retained.

Institutes like the National Defence University (NDU), Defence University of Science and Technology, Military Museum, PLA Archives, Military Academy of Medical Sciences, Engineering Design Institute, armaments research institutes affiliated with the general headquarters and military service branches, and science and technology and academic research organisations, will all be incorporated into the national defence administrative system. A major reform is that officers of these establishments will be demobilised and no longer have military ranks, but will be designated as civilian personnel. The NDU will, however, continue to be responsible for training senior military cadres.

Separately, the *Washington Times* reported on January 7, 2016, that as part of downsizing the PLA and structural reforms, the PLA Culture Work Units under the PLA's General Political Department (GPD) had been dismantled after 63 years. Incidentally, earlier in 2013, credible reports said that Maj Gen Luo Yuan favoured the closure of the PLA's Song and Dance Division under the PLA's General Political Department (GPD). Xi Jinping's wife, Peng Liyuan, is a major general in this division!

On January 6, 2016, Hongkong's *South China Morning Post* and China's authoritative official news agency Xinhua publicised the list of commanders of the new Theatre Commands/Zones and those appointed to top PLA posts consequent to the restructuring and reorganisation. It described the appointments as "temporary". The new PLA appointments follow the same criteria as the promotions effected earlier by Xi Jinping, with the emphasis on professional competence, experience in battle or Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) and political reliability.

Those elevated to the new posts are: Gen Fang Fenghui, born in 1951 and till now head of the PLA's GSD, who has been appointed to head the newly

Of special interest to India is the West Zone, which merged the erstwhile Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs. Comprising more than half China's land area, 22 percent of its population and more than one-third of China's land-based military, the newly constituted West Zone represents a strengthened military formation.

created Joint General Staff. The youngest Military Region (MR) commander at one time, he is an expert in the digital battlefield and an electronics enthusiast whose hobby is developing integrated military command software; 1953-born Gen Xu Fenlin, till now commander of Guangzhou MR is the new deputy chief of the Joint General Staff; Gen Li Zuocheng, a battle veteran of the 1979 Vietnam War who is reputed to have preferred delayed promotions rather than buying his rank and was till recently commander of the Chengdu MR, now heads the ground forces as commander of the PLA Army (PLAA); 63-year old Adm Sun Jianguo, a submariner and a former president of the

PLAN Submarine Academy, is the new PLAN commander, replacing Wu Shengli. He has been the front-runner candidate for the post of PLAN chief since 2012; 1958-born Gen Yi Xiaoguang who joined the PLAAF at the age of 16, takes over from Ma Xiaotian as PLAAF commander. A fighter pilot born into a family with a military tradition, he has been regarded a rising star of the PLAAF since his tenure as the DCOS in charge of Training and Headquarters Affairs when he was the second youngest PLAAF officer holding a corps level post. He composed "The Chinese/English Manual for Jet Pilots" in 1992; Gen Wei Fenghe, erstwhile commander of the Second Artillery continues as chief of the new PLA Rocket Force; and Gen Gao Jin is head of the new PLA Strategic Support Force. Born in 1959, both Gen Gao Jin's parents were PLA officers. Gao Jin served in the Second Artillery throughout his career except since December 2014 when he was appointed president of the PLA Academy of Military Science. He became the youngest regional-level commander in the PLA when he was 55 years old.

Among the new zone commanders, Liu Yuejun, till recently commander of the Lanzhou Military Region, is commander of the East Zone; Wang

Jiaocheng heads the South Zone; Song Puxan has taken over as commander of the North Zone and Han Weiguo as the commander of the Central Zone. All Military Region commanders have been accommodated in the new Zone Commands except for the former commander of the Nanjing Military Command, 61-year-old Gen Cai Yingting, who was a secretary to the late CMC Vice Chairman Zhang Wannian, a close aide to Jiang Zemin. He has been moved as president of the prestigious PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS).

His credentials indicate he was handpicked for this post. Gen Zhao Zongqi is fluent in Arabic and has experience of Tibet.

Of special interest to India is the West Zone, which merged the erstwhile Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs. Comprising more than half China's land area, 22 percent of its population and more than one-third of China's land-based military, the newly constituted West Zone represents a strengthened military formation. Merger of the Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs will improve joint planning, coordination and operations. Incorporation of the Qinghai region in the West Zone will facilitate the rapid induction and deployment of high altitude acclimatised and trained troops into Tibet and across Ladakh while making it difficult to monitor their training and movement. Establishment of the West Zone also reveals China's abiding military interest in the region in addition to facilitating focus on "threats in Xinjiang and Tibet as well as Afghanistan and other states that host training bases for separatists and extremists". Safeguarding China's investments in the northern areas of Pakistan will be a major task for the West Zone and there are adequate indications that China will maintain military pressure on India, including by pressing its territorial claims. Significant in this context are the backgrounds of the PLA, PLAAF and PLAN commanders.

Equally pertinent is the appointment of Gen Zhao Zongqi, till recently Jinan MR commander, as commander of the new West Zone. His credentials indicate he was handpicked for this post. Gen Zhao Zongqi is fluent in Arabic and has experience of Tibet. He is a war hero, having participated in the Sino-Vietnam War in 1979 when he is reported to have often disguised himself as a Vietnamese to gather information. He served over 20 years in

Tibet as Deputy Chief of Staff (1984-99) and Chief of Staff (1999-2004) of the Tibet Military District (TMD). Born in 1955, Gen Zhao Zongqi has foreign service experience and was posted in Tanzania as defence attaché. He was also military consultant for a drama serial on the PLA in 2006. Incidentally, the new PLAA Chief Gen Li Zuocheng also has experience of Tibet, having served in the Chengdu MR.

China's ongoing military reforms are an important indicator of Beijing's strategic ambitions and the role envisaged for the PLA. Reflective of the thinking in the higher echelons of China's military is the annual conference on the "Global Military Situation" organised by the PLA's prestigious Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) on January 9, 2015, which discussed the regional security situation in the Asia-Pacific, Europe and the Middle East. Attended by over 150 senior PLA officers and experts, including from the CMC, the four General Departments, NDU and the commandant and political commissar of the AMS, the conference concluded that "unprecedented changes are taking place in the global military situation; military force in international relations is more widely used; and the situation in the Asia-Pacific has worsened".

The reforms are based on these and similar high-level official assessments and intended to streamline the PLA and equip it to effectively to defend China's claimed maritime domain and "fight and win wars". Chinese President Xi Jinping, who as secretary (*mishu*) to Chinese Defence Minister Geng Biao in 1979 had a ringside view of how Deng Xiaoping thoroughly reformed the PLA, will guide implementation of these far-reaching reforms designed to make China strong and realise 'China's Dream'.