

India's responses to growing strategic capabilities of China

Defining moment

DR ARVIND KUMAR

China's rise as a major international actor has emerged as a defining feature of the strategic landscape of the early 21st century. This rise has been mostly due to the sustained and consistent economic development, which has helped China in elevating China's international profile.

It was also mainly because of the development in the field of science and technology base. The comprehensive and ongoing military modernization programme has led China to a situation that it has emerged as a first rank power.

The evolution of strategic thinking intertwined with a robust strategic culture has helped China to acquire all the sophisticated strategic technologies. The question, which is being debated among the members of academic and strategic community whether a strong, prosperous and successful China will be in India's interest.

Undoubtedly, China has been assuming new roles and responsibilities among the members of international community in general and the Southern Asia in particular. It was even asserted in China's 2010 Defence White Paper that its future and destiny

have never been more closely connected with those of the international community..

Assertive China

The very objective for which China has been modernizing its military is to see how best it can attain certain diplomatic edge in resolving certain disputes in its favor. Over the years, China has become both aggressive and assertive because Taiwan certainly remains its main strategic direction.

China has been continuing with its modernization effort even in the existing international security milieu with a greater focus on Taiwan contingencies despite the overall improvement in cross-strait relations.

The Pentagon's Annual Report to Congress in the year 2011 on the theme "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" has reflected the concerns, which the People's Liberation of Army (PLA) has in terms of seeking the capability to deter Taiwan independence and influence Taiwan to settle the dispute on China's terms.

It must be highlighted here that it was "Taiwan factor", which provided sufficient impetus to China for achieving strategic arsenals in addition to its nuclear deterrent capability.

Especially in the last one decade, China's military has benefitted from robust investment in modern hardware and technology. Many modern systems have reached maturity. It is most likely that a number of other strategic technologies will become operational in the next few years.

China has been evolving new and complex platforms, which would add lots of value in the probable joint operations and network-centric warfare. It would certainly be difficult to assess the certainty of how China will be using its growing capabilities in due course.

At the same time, it would be a worthwhile exercise to monitor China's overall force development and its military strategy. It would help in terms of understanding the intent and the behavioral patterns of key decision makers.

It is a well known fact that China has been modernizing its strategic weaponry for the last more than three decades. It has reached to a significant level in the current context by acquiring anti-ship ballistic missile capability, which is again a unique and very sophisticated technology.

The development of long range missiles and hypersonic cruise missiles along with the enhancement of capabilities in the nuclear warhead arena by China has posed greater challenge to India's force structure.

India's vulnerability to ballistic missile attack has increased with the proliferation of ballistic missile technology in its neighborhood. The growing China-Pakistan nexus culminating into a robust horizontal proliferation of strategic technologies again will have a wider ramification for India's national security.

China so far has deployed the DF-3, the DF-4/4A and the DF-21 to target India. These missiles are mainly India specific. The DF-3 is deployed at the Jianshui and Kunming bases in



China has been modernizing its military capability at a very fast pace

Yunnan province. The DF-4 is deployed at DA Qaidam, Delingha and Xiao Qaidam bases in Qinghai. At the Jianshu base, DF-3 is being replaced by the DF-21.

India's response to the strategic modernization program of China and its military capabilities has not been addressed in an aggressive manner.

The pace at which the development in the field of strategic technologies has taken place in India in response to China's capabilities has not been in commensurate with the overall developments in China.

However, India's requirement certainly has been different from China. It is largely dictated by the articulation of threat perceptions. The challenge has always been immense for India.

The recent acquisition of anti-ship ballistic missile capability and aircraft carrier by China has again raised new debates on the impact of such capabilities on global and regional strategic stability among the members of strategic and academic community.

The question whether China's anti-ship ballistic missile would be a threat to Indian warships is a crucial one. It would certainly be a daunting task to even spot the vessels in the vast expanse of high seas.

But, at the same time, the total elimination of threats emanating from China's anti-ship ballistic missile cannot be ruled out. Obviously, targeting ships at high seas is not an easy task or as simple as land warfare.

Challenges for India

China's precision in the context of maritime reconnaissance and long range searches would become crucial and paramount. India would require to develop maritime reconnaissance and long range searches capabilities.

China's plan of using space for strategic purpose has also raised concerns in India. The anti-satellite (ASAT) test conducted by China demonstrated its intentions and S&T prowess. It signaled to the rest of the world that outer space is going to be a major place for the next battlefield.

India has been pressurized by China's actions to rethink and strategise a robust and proactive space policy, which would help in dealing with the



China will have more sophisticated submarines in future to prowl in deep sea waters

emanating challenges from the space fairing nations in general and China in particular.

India's response to the growing China's capabilities in space has to reflect how best it can serve its strategic interests and protect its satellites. The technological requirements in the field of space power projection and anti-satellite capabilities are immense as far as the pace at which the developments have taken place in this field.

The space based lasers and space based interceptors have linkages with the larger requirements for having anti-satellite capabilities. The anti-satellite capabilities are one of the essential requirements for making the inroads into the weaponisation of space.

It must be reiterated here that India's defence concerns would largely be confined to its region. India's technological aspirations in the field of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons are in large part a response to China's capabilities and intentions.

In the existing geopolitical environment, India's main target would be to contain China's growing sphere of influence in the region. Indian nuclear and strategic requirements would be sized against China, which should also be sufficient to cover targets in Pakistan.

Viewed in this context, Indian planners and scientific and technological community would keep concentrating on achieving long range intermediate range ballistic missiles to have a second strike capability against China.

China's aircraft carrier capability will have the potential to complicate

the regional security milieu in Southern Asia. There will be action-reaction cycle through such acquisitions by China.

A number of nations in Southern Asia will have to address the concerns emanating from China's acquisitions. Japan and India particularly will respond by showing its willingness to augment its naval capabilities and may like to acquire aircraft carrier.

Such capability is essential for projecting power far beyond a nation's shores. China's acquisition of aircraft carriers might be seen as a step towards challenging American pre-eminence on the high seas. It also signals its intent and capabilities to the rest of the neighboring countries and major powers across Asia-Pacific Rim.

India has been placed in a very complex geopolitical environment where it has to address the concerns emanating from its adversaries. How India has to cope up with the growing security challenges and protect its national security interests will always be a question to ponder among the members of strategic community.

The future trajectory of India's strategic capabilities will certainly be guided by the action-reaction syndrome in Southern Asia. India's technological and strategic aspirations have grown over the years.

It has been largely reflected in the successes of its long range intermediate range ballistic missiles. The evolution of a coherent and systematic policy in India would be the need of the hour especially in the context of its responses to the growing capabilities and influence of China. ■