

## **General**

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) organised a round-table discussion on “CMC Leadership and Civil-Military Relations in China” on 9 November 2011 at the CLAWS campus. The round-table was chaired by Mr Jayadeva Ranade, former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat. The speakers included Mr Roy Kamphausen, Senior Associate for Political and Security Affairs, The National Bureau of Asian Research, Washington DC and Prof Srikanth Kondapalli, Centre for East Asian Studies, JNU. The discussion was attended by a select gathering from the strategic community.

### **Opening Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd), Director CLAWS**

The role of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has appeared to have grown. Today, the PLA plays a considerable part in Chinese military decision-making and often is seen to play the role of a ‘spoiler’ in so far as the smooth flow of military-related discussions with neighbouring countries including India is concerned.

### **Mr Jayadeva Ranade**

The round-table is well-timed since the 18th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be held in Beijing in October 2012. The Central Military Commission (CMC) is elected by the Central Committee of the CCP and nearly 18 percent of the Central Committee is represented by the PLA. It needs to be seen whether this composition is a ploy to strengthen the presence and thereafter the role of the PLA in decision-making. President Hu Jintao has taken China’s military modernisation to a new level altogether, especially by the rapid mobilisation of command services.

### **Mr Roy Kamphausen**

As the time for the 18th National Congress of the CCP closes in, there are several questions that are awaiting a response. These include the nature of changes that are expected to take place in the CMC’s leadership, the new officers of the CMC and the future of civil-military relations in China. It is expected that the Standing Committee of the State Council shall see fresh faces. The CMC is also likely to see new appointments while only three members in uniform are expected to continue. President Hu Jintao is expected to continue as the Chairman of the CMC for another two years in spite of the possibility that he shall step down as China’s President and Xi Jinping will be his successor, who is known to have immense grassroots experience. In a similar precedent, Jiang Zemin had continued as Chairman of the CMC, although Hu Jintao had taken over as China’s President. Hu became Chairman of the CMC only two years later. This is commonly referred to as the “two-centre or dual-centre dilemma”. This arrangement is said to have created confusion in civil-military relations.

The new composition of the CMC in 2012 may witness an increased representation from the PLA's Navy and Air Force. The CMC leadership is likely to promote members with a services background as opposed to a commissar background. The CMC leadership will come from a new pool of officers purely based on merit. The scenario of junior officers from lower levels making it to CMC's top positions seems very unlikely.

The larger issue of Chinese jointness shall be in focus, although China's PLA is still very much a 'ground force' army. It is speculated that the Commander of Chinese Air Force could become one of the Vice-Chairman of the CMC leaving two remaining positions open. One of these might see Xi Jinping continuing as Vice-Chairman for another two years before taking over as the Chairman of the CMC. The new composition of China's CMC in 2012 will provide a more comprehensive orientation of the future direction of Chinese military thinking and policy-making.

Few conjectured positions likely to be absorbed are as follows:

- Current deputy chief of the General Staff Department (GSD) will likely take over as the chief
- A political commissar shall be at the helm in the General Political Department.
- A Commander of a military region (MR) shall take over the General Logistics Department (GLD).
- Another military regional Commander takes over as the leader of the General Armaments Department (GAD).

The past few years witnessed a strain between China's military and political leadership, though the relationship has turned for the better in the current context. That there would be an out-and-out collusion of interests between the political and military leadership, is ruled out; however, there could be an effort towards arriving at a consensual approach. The Tiananmen massacre of 1989 continues to remain a ghost in the civil-military relations in China. During the recent uprising in Xinjiang, the PLA was not actively involved. The PLA is the CCP's force of last resort. However, a powerful PLA will always create the possibility for a dilemma. The PLA responds only to the top Party leadership and to no other political/civilian authority. The PLA also does not coordinate through other ministries.

### **Prof Srikanth Kondapalli**

Predicting any changes in the leadership both in the Party and the CMC during the 18th National Congress of the CCP will be extremely challenging since most predictions have gone wrong in the past. The most important question revolving around the leadership change in China next year revolves around whether it will be a 'generational gap' or simply a 'term change'? The 17th Party Congress saw a generational change.

Military historians from the Lanzhou MR are expected to play a significant role. In addition, an information warfare expert shall likely be promoted. In case Xi Jinping continues as Vice-Chairman of the CMC for another two years before taking over as the Chairman of the CMC, then the competition for the remaining two slots of Vice-Chairman will be tough. The General Armaments Departments has been instrumental in China's space programme which has been seen as a milestone in China's military applications in space. The stock of the Chief of the GAD has been rising very rapidly. A PLA officer needs to go through 14 steps in order to reach the Party's Politburo Standing Committee. In contrast, a civilian leader needs to climb 10 steps for the same position. This fact further defines the discrepancy that exists between civil-military relations as far as promotions are concerned. Jiang Zemin emphasised upon professional excellence and considered merit as the major input.

Today, the PLA has 74 percent university graduates in the officer corps. Factional politics in the PLA may exert some institutional pressure on the revamped CMC. Overall, tension does seem to be prevalent between the civilian leadership and the PLA. Whether the PLA shall assume a 'coordinated' or 'subordinated' position vis-à-vis civil-military ties, remains only to be seen.

## **Discussion**

PLA is less prominent in political circles. PLA has set directives and works on certain set rules of implementation and does not play a role in policy making. PLA role in domestic politics is more ceremonial than influential. However, the PLA enjoys great bargaining power with the CCP. PLA also seems more focused on operational implementation. An added focus on information warfare in China is visible with most Chinese universities having a cyber warfare division. As a structural requirement, the GSD has a cyber warfare division as part of the four major verticals. China is currently using its cyber facilities for deterrence and not as an offensive posture.

CMC is more in line dealing with the national security issues and coordinating inter-ministerial issues. The Standing Committee is responsible to react towards crisis management. CMC has a list of 12 designated set of responsibilities and their proceedings are all classified and not much is known about them. The PLA is not a self-propagating force and has been given clear responsibility including supporting the economic development of China, international peace and cooperation and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China.

China uses PLA as a military deterrent when it comes to the Taiwan issue. Xinjiang extremism and Tibetan separatism are still complicated issues within China, and they are dealt with heavy influx of both financial and economic development in the region. In Xinjiang alone, more than \$ 2 billion dollars of financial aid has been provided.

The overall coordinated defence budget for Chinese military has increased, but that reflects as part of increasing GDP. In GDP terms, defence expenditure remains less than two percent. PLA has also increased its international operations, especially in international peacekeeping missions, and also within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.