

Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)

**Talk by Dr. Lora Saalman, Associate, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie
Endowment, Beijing, China**

On

Chinese Views on India's BMD Programme

07 May 2013

Dr. Lora Saalman, Associate, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment, Beijing, gave a talk on “Chinese Views on India's BMD Programme” on 07 May 2013 in the CLAWS Seminar Hall. In attendance was the faculty of CLAWS, military officers and civilian scholars.

Opening Remarks: Col Vivek Verma, Deputy Director, CLAWS

The Deputy Director welcomed all present and informed the audience that issues of deterrence and the Chinese view of the same would be the main theme of the talk. The current Chinese face off in the Ladakh region and its implications would also be discussed.

Chairperson's Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd)

The chairperson welcomed Dr. Lora Saalman and her team for taking time out to discuss critical issues from the Chinese perspective. He also put forth the idea that we all are living in interesting times according to one of the famous Chinese sayings. The Chinese perspective on the recent stand-off in the Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) sector would be discussed to get a wholesome view on the issue. He stated that in his view, the India-China relationship was stable at the strategic level, but gradients of instability do exist at the tactical level. Some of the tactical pinpricks that have come to the fore are visa issues for Indian nationals, rapid military modernisation of China and its assertive posture on both land and sea to further its national interests. It is interesting to note that there was no mention of China's no-first use nuclear policy in the recently released defence white paper by China.

Talk by Dr. Lora Saalman

Dr. Lora apprised the audience that it is her eighth trip to India and she is also working full time in China since 2006. According to Chinese scholars, the deterrence relationship between China and India does not fully exist and is going through an evolutionary phase. Some of the similarities that exist between China and India and can be used to harness fruitful relationship between the two countries are:

- No first use nuclear policy
- Notion of credible minimum deterrence
- Crossover between strategic and conventional forces

Chinese view India as a country aspiring for a greater voice/greater power dream and seeking capabilities to dominate the South Asia region as a hegemon (China describes USA as the only other country with hegemon characteristics). As deterrence results from Comprehensive National Power (CNP), thus striking asymmetries exist between China and India. The Chinese are also worried about the application of the principles of the Cold Start doctrine to China. A study of Chinese research papers on India presents at least ten different types of deterrence being applied to India:

1. Traditional – Recessed, Denial, Minimum, Limited
2. Conceptual – Regional, Offensive Regional, Containment
3. Operational – Punishment, Invasion, Maritime

The defence white paper discusses the alliance behaviour and the emergence of India-US relationship which is of great interest to the Chinese. The Chinese believe that India has five critical strategic interests:

- Consolidate dominant position in South Asia
- Safeguard territorial interests
- Control/influence of smaller countries in South Asian region
- Dominance of Indian Ocean Region (IOR)
- Maritime and nuclear deterrence

India is trying to increase its CNP on border with China by strengthening of infrastructure, troops, missiles etc. along with the preemptive strategy. In the near

future, Chinese perceive that maritime deterrence would increase in importance in consonance with India's ability to control IOR militarily and thus, the Chinese PLA's focus is more on Indian Navy rather than the Army.

There is an active debate within China on what constitutes a limited versus minimum deterrence capability vis-à-vis the perceived threats. Some of the major challenges are the BMD programmes and conventional strikes on strategic assets. One observation from the white paper is the reduced transparency of Chinese 'Intent'.

The situation between India and China is still in the formative stages and is highly fluid, as was visible with the situation in Ladakh. Within China, the discourse on the issue was muddled and focused entirely on what the Indian periodicals had to say on the issue and thus, was more of a response rather than an opinion forming discourse. Personally, the Ladakh incident was a tactical response to India's infrastructure buildup on the border. Some of the events that had profound visibility in China are India's BMD programme and the visits by Presidents Bush and Obama, particularly relating to the issue of Entity List.

Chairperson's Comments: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd)

China does not recognise India as a nuclear weapons state and hence, refuses to discuss confidence building measures and risk reduction measures with India, which has a detrimental effect on the relationship. India's BMD is a technology demonstrator and is in the experimental stage. India has the right to develop any technology to safeguard its national interests.

Discussion

The idea of dissuasion versus deterrence was discussed. There is de facto acceptance of India's nuclear capability within China and the Chinese view is of deterrence through counter coercion rather than dissuasion. The Chinese predominant interest in maritime affairs is visible by emergence of new think tanks based on naval capabilities and monthly trips by think tank experts to Beijing for briefing government officials. India's nuclear doctrine is based on punitive deterrence/ response but the Chinese perception is of limited Indian capability. The US-India partnership affords some sort of comfort vis-à-vis its nuclear arsenal in the

Chinese thinking. According to the Chinese, the Agni V is more of a status symbol and thus restrained mention in Chinese media.

The current standoff in the Ladakh sector has witnessed sensationalism on the part of the media but it is heartening to see that existing mechanisms have been utilised to ameliorate the hyper situation. The Chinese perceive themselves as responsive power and were responding to aggressive patrolling by Indian troops. China believes that it needs to upgrade its remote sensing, surveillance and communication capabilities vis-à-vis India. The cyber component according to the Chinese is basically for two purposes: propaganda and industrial espionage.

Chairperson's concluding remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd)

Early resolution of the territorial dispute with China is in India's national interest. There is an urgent need to clarify and demarcate the LAC and not let the Chinese get away with its violation. India should use every asset at its disposal to resolve the border issue and forge cooperative ties with China.