

## **Assessment of Chinese Military Modernisation and its Implications for India** by P.K. Chakraborty, New Delhi: Pentagon

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*Atul Pant*\*

China has had a chequered relationship with India since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Beijing views India as a strategic rival and appears to consider India's rise as an impediment to its own. The narratives, especially, convey or hint at India's gain being China's loss. Even though bilateral trade between the two countries has become substantial over the years and multiple linkages have been established post the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict, China still keeps India discomfited with its various overtures.

Since 1990, China has undertaken a massive military modernisation drive coupled with a reorganisation of its defence set-up. A fresh impetus has been given in the last few years to equipose this with its own rapid surge as a superpower along with envisioned future warfare scenarios, which are primarily being shaped by rapidly advancing technology. This modernisation, with indigenously developed state-of-the-art systems, is adding significant capabilities to China's military strength. The multidimensional ramifications of China's military modernisation and restructuring are generating debates globally. The book under review, *Assessment of Chinese Military Modernisation and its Implications for India*, is also a security-focused study of the various facets and connotations of China's modernisation drive and its broad-based implications for India.

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\* Group Captain Atul Pant is a serving officer in the Indian Air Force and is presently a research scholar at MP-IDSA, New Delhi.



There is little academic work done to gauge the extent of the military threat posed by China to India, especially keeping in mind its moves towards modernisation. With a closed and secretive state machinery, what filters through to the public domain most of the time is only what the Chinese government wants others to know. It is in this context that the book under review, with its insight into and analysis of China's recent modernisation drive, carries relevance.

The author has chosen a subject of relevance and interest for Indian readers as there is a direct fallout of China's actions on India, particularly when these are military-related actions. China is seen as being an untrustworthy neighbour, with little inclination to honour its words and commitments as also its deceptive use of words and frequent change of stance: Tibet, Honk Kong, territorial boundary claims and the Brahmaputra River dam project are few of the often-quoted examples in this regard.

The book comprises a total of eight chapters addressing four major themes under which the subject has been dealt with by the author. Chapters 1 and 2 give the historical context, including a literature review of sorts, that situate China's modernisation efforts as a whole in context. In chapters 3 and 4, the author highlights the salient aspects of China's modernisation drive in detail, by juxtaposing various aspects related to modernisation, including the drivers of change, the modernisation per se, re-organisation of the forces, governmental and institutional transformation taking place, and remodelling of the defence industry that has been undertaken to achieve modernisation objectives in set time frames. His approach is India-centric in covering this part. In Chapter 5, the author discusses the impact and implications of a militarily powerful and increasingly assertive China on global security. In chapters 6–8, the author has opined on the implications of China's trajectory for India. He explores how China's ascending military stature may shape future Sino-Indian conflict situations and the counterbalancing measures that India needs to take, strategically and otherwise.

While addressing the modernisation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the book, the author starts out with the political mindset and outlook of the Communist Party of China's (CPC) leaders as well as the military brass from Deng Xiaoping's era. He shows how the thought process changed with the technological developments that were taking place at the time; and especially after the First Gulf War in 1990-91, the conflict philosophy changed tremendously. One important aspect to take

note from the narrative is that the CPC echelons monitored the global developments closely and never failed to take lessons as well as adapt their policies and machinery, aligning them with current and future scenarios. Another aspect that the author underscores is how Chinese President Xi Jinping has been successful in increasing the combat prowess of Chinese military, while ensuring their unflinching commitment to his leadership.

In Chapter 3 in particular, while the author's endeavour has been to cover the modernisation taking place *per se*, he focuses more on the re-organisation aspect here. Infrastructure development in Tibet and its connotations have been discussed well. However, there is limited discussion on weapons and systems development philosophy and its induction into the armed forces as well as the impact on their capability build-up. This is a key area where there is a gap in the understanding of the issue, especially in open narratives and analyses, which crucially needs to be filled. The author does make an attempt to address this later in Chapter 5, but his assessment comes across as rather subjective. An objective assessment would have been more interesting. For example, an analysis of the capability build-up, with reference to American forces, could have brought out some useful deductions. While the handicap of information availability is well known, an intriguing subject such as this calls for deeper analysis and insight.

Chapter 4 highlights China's defence industry transformation effort particularly well. With a boom in its economy since the year 2000, and witness to rapid growth, China has taken care to prudently invest its enormous gains into infrastructure, research and development (R&D) and the industrial sector to garner further returns. The defence industrial sector has also been one of the key sectors of investment; this has not only benefited China militarily but has also resulted in economic returns. Though this transformation is a study by itself, the author has done well to address it in the chapter and has been able to bring out the essentials for the Indian readers, particularly those interested in defence.

China has also taken some significant strides in disruptive technology fields, such as artificial intelligence (AI), internet of things (IoT), nanotechnology and drones, and is using such technologies to develop state-of-the-art military equipment, weapons and systems. Though the author has touched upon these in the book, he could have discussed them in greater detail as these have increasingly started to define military capability the world over.

Another significant aspect that the author directs the reader's attention to is the impact of China's rise on global security. By amalgamating the historical, political, economic, military modernisation, and behavioural aspects of rise of China, the author shows that this has more of a threat, rather than faith, connotation to it. He has substantiated his case with examples of China's perceptibly increased aggressiveness and assertiveness, reflected in its statements, behaviour and actions, including military exercises. Yet one is left wanting more. As mentioned earlier, a more objective approach (that is, moving beyond the Indian context) would have led to a detailed comparative capability analysis of the Chinese military in present and future context vis-à-vis the United States and its alliances, and an assessment of where China's military stands to denominate its stance in case of clash of interests. Thus, a reference to the construction of a dam over the Brahmaputra (Tsangpo in Tibet) seems out of place here as it is an India-centric issue and probably would have fitted better elsewhere.

Chapters 6–8 analyse the implications for India, with the author touching upon various aspects having a bearing on the Indo-Chinese strategic equation, including geopolitical, economic, mutual (territorial and other) issues as well as drivers of conflict. Here, he also tries to visualise various conflict scenarios, such as single-front conflict with China or Pakistan, with the other invariably coming/posturing in support as well as a collusive hybrid war scenario. However, he does not spell out the degree of threat posed to India in such war scenarios and has only briefly outlined what India needs to do at strategic levels. Deeper engagement with the degree of threat based on the size of forces, modernisation level of both forces and other considerations would have added depth to the analysis.

The epilogue briefly sums up all the issues which need to be addressed in counterbalancing China. The author highlights the importance of having a national security strategy, which is the foundation of the entire defence planning for any nation. Although he has included numerous military capability build-up requirements, the feasibility of many of these seems improbable in the near future considering the associated budgetary requirements and other economic commitments of India.

With a near global focus on China, the book appears timely and makes for a good read, particularly for Indian readers and those following Sino-Indian relations. It is an intriguing and difficult topic for analysis, considering sensitivities of Sino-Indian relations and the lack of easily

available information. The subject certainly merits a deep insight and the book contributes to this end. However, there are some problems with it as well. One thing that jumps out at a reader is the apparent disconnect between some of the chapter headings and the content therein. Another lacuna, according to this reviewer, is the missing discussion of what will be militarily at stake for China in case of a future conflict that it is involved in, which would have made the discussion more illuminating. An analysis of the nuclear threshold being breached in war, and to what extent such a situation can pan out, even if speculative, would also have been another interesting focus area which the book currently lacks.

