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## **Wherewithal of China's Grand Periphery Military Strategy**

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### **Introduction**

'Grand Periphery Military Strategy' (*da zhoubian guojia junshi zhanlue*) is the new cliché in vogue in the lexicon of Chinese think tanks. It appeared first, in a story in a Hong Kong based Chinese vernacular daily *Ta Kung Pao* on September 24, 2009 that doubted the capabilities of the People's Liberation Army to defend its 'far flung borders'.<sup>1</sup> The views were subsequently echoed elsewhere including another prominent Hong Kong based vernacular daily *Jing Bao* in its despatch on January 29, 2010. As it could impinge on geopolitics of a number of countries in China's periphery including India, it calls for due academic understanding.

The concept strikingly received doctrinaire fillip three months late in April 2010 in a paper of Chen Xiangyang, an associate researcher at the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). He spelled out the dynamics and espoused the imperatives of the strategy for China in the face of fast changing geopolitics in Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia. He has thereafter found ready audience in a section of both serving and retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) senior officers, including the deputies to the just concluded annual conclave of the Chinese People's Political Consultative

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1902, *Ta Kung Pao* (大公报) is the oldest Chinese language news paper in China. For long, it sported no political affiliation with a widely talked about aphorism of '4-no' (大公报). However, it is now mouth piece of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and normally goes to pilot otherwise contentious issues to test the water in public domain.

Conference (CPPCC) National Committee, notably Rear Admiral Yin Zhou and Major General Luo Yuan, with a difference.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the China watchers, including Christina Lin look at the Chinese move to expand the high speed rail networks, and equipping over 1000 railway stations with military transportation facilities as a step forward in this direction.<sup>3</sup> The analysts tend to link up the involvement of PLA General Logistics Department (GLD) in the design, planning and operations in strategically located railway projects as a testimony. Nonetheless, the PLA decision to take to Shanghai-Nanjing Express train to transport back military contingents to barracks in November 2010 has been hailed as a pilot run towards the military goal of rapid deployment in hours of need.

Adherence to ‘grand peripheral strategy’ in China’s case, *ipso facto*, would mean proactive military actions along several theatres, including maritime border countries. However fast and secure rail communications, already built in Tibet and put on the drawing board to connect to Nepal, and for that matter, the future plans to expand the networks to other country locations in its periphery will have squarely limited end operational bearings for a variety of reasons.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, it would call for doctrinal reforms in its approach, which can come only at a substantially high costs in the multipolar world of tomorrow. As China presently stands on the right side of the changing international power balance, the freaks of unilateral military option can not be completely ruled out.

The paper explores the dynamics of China’s craving for ‘Grand Periphery’ strategy’, and delves into all plausible contours of its strategic bearings. As an heir of a distinct strategic culture, built assiduously on the conceptual edifice of *Shi*, putatively an approach to turn the strategic configuration of power to ones side, the Chinese elites are least likely to speak out of turn. It is thus, postulated that media articulation on the issue as such constituted China’s ‘strategic deception’ (*Zhanlue Zhali*) to hoodwink the world at large, much in tandem with Sun Zi’s strategic edict *bing yi zha li* (war is based on deception), and something that the folk tales of Zhuge Liang goes to speak about China’s strategic culture.<sup>5</sup> Official silence, including conspicuous absence of the concept in the just published White Paper, “China’s National Defence in 2010”, can not brook any different either. Every time China has acquired a measure of economic and military muscle, it has revised its doctrine. The media adulations of

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<sup>2</sup> Rear Admiral Yin Zhou, a senior officer at the PLA Navy Equipment Research Centre and Chairman of the Navy Experts Advisory Committee. And Major General Luo Yuan, a researcher with the PLA Academy of Military Sciences hold voice by virtue of their long standing as strategic thinkers.

<sup>3</sup> Christina Lin, “The PLA’s “Orient Express”: Militarization of the Iron Silk Road”, *Institut für Strategie- Politik- Sicherheits- und Wirtschaftsberatung (ISPSW)*, Berlin, Germany, March 28, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> As one of the signatories of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) sponsored 80,900 km long Trans-Asian Railway, China has already come out with plan to build high-speed rails to Laos, Singapore, Cambodia (Kampuchea), Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar along its Southeast Asian periphery. It has got nod of Iran to construct China-Iran rail that will pass through the Central Asian countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. China’s long term plan included connecting China’s rail networks with Europe through Middle East countries, including Iraq and Syria.

<sup>5</sup> *Zhuce Liang’s* legend goes back to China’s Three Kingdom (220-280 AD) epoch. He is credited for harnessing deception to get over the stronger enemy. While the strong enemy contingent had encircled the Kingdom of *Shu*, he is said to have sunbathed on the rampart. The invader thought that the Kingdom of *Shu* was per se well defended and hence, retreated without engaging in the battle.

the concept, as such, could be assumed, much less explained, as a concomitant but planned, outcome of China's surge on international scene, both as a reckonable economic and military power.

Schematically, the Paper focuses on: Doctrinaire Roots and Elbow of the Approach; Fault Lines in the Evolving Strategic Disposition; and, the Vulnerability and Survival Fits against the Chinese Adventure. The assumptions of the study include: the change phenomenon in China's strategic disposition from defensive to offensive is a product of China's growing stature in economic and military might; the Chinese decision makers are cognizant of the fault lines and hence, the media articulations underway largely lacks teeth in the final go; and, the peripheral countries can not afford

### **Doctrinaire Roots and Elbow of the Approach**

Successive generations of Chinese leadership including Hu Jintao is credited for upholding in age old *parabellum* strategic culture with a difference, where the concept of *Quan Bian* (absolute flexibility) constitute a key decision axiom.<sup>6</sup> It is meticulously grooved in the fundamentals of the concept of *Shi* (strategic advantage), which gives Chinese leadership a measure of leeway in strategic positioning with regard to time, place, and correlation of forces and deception to magnify limited resources and deter enemies from taking adventure either by way of military attacks or ideological subversion.<sup>7</sup> It draws on Sun Zi's maxim of 'war as vital function of state'.

As the study of Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis bears out, China has gone for use of aggressive coercive and/or pacifist non-coercive measures, either to secure Chinese heartland against foreign invasion or annex peripheral country all through its imperial and modern epoch in full calculation of its comparative advantages.<sup>8</sup> Expansion and contraction of control and influence over its extended boundary and periphery has constantly been a function of rise and fall in its China's comprehensive national power (CNP). It has historically used military

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<sup>6</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. x. Also see Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China' in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 216–68; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'International Structures and Chinese Foreign Policy' in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 55–90; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Realism(s) and Chinese Security Policy in the Post-Cold War Period' in E. B. Kapstein and M. Mastanduno, eds, *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 261–318.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of *Shi* is the cornerstone of Sun Zi's 'Art of War' (孙子兵法). There is perhaps no equivalent of it the western lexicon. In warfare, when *Shi* is translated as strategic advantage, on both sides of the conflict, including numbers, terrain, logistics, morale, weaponry, as they converge on the battle field to give one side the advantage over the contestant. In over all perspective, it can be explained as being "the alignment of forces," the "propensity of things," or the "potential born of disposition." Sun Zi has discussed four key aspects of *shi*: First, it is the idea of *qi* and *zheng*. *Zheng* is the regular way of doing things, or in military terms, the regular order of battle. A commander deploys troops in regular (*zheng*) ways. However, the commander must mobilize his troops to engage the enemy in extraordinary (*qi*) ways. *Zheng* is, in essence, a given. It is open knowledge to friends and foes. Yet *qi* is a variable and its variation inexhaustible. The 2 second aspect of *shi* is about creating an overwhelming force with irresistible unleashing power (a grindstone against eggs, and the strike of a hawk at its prey). The third aspect of *shi* is about developing a favorable situation with great potential to achieve the political objectives. Finally, *shi* is about taking and maintaining the initiative. As Sun Tzu puts it, "those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform."

<sup>8</sup> Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2000).

force while in strong position to establish relations of difference towards China, to absorb nearby areas and to deter or end attacks from the near and/ or distant periphery.<sup>9</sup>

Strategic culture produces tendencies or creates predispositions. It has thus discernible role in developing attitudes and shaping behavior. This is why China under nationalist (*Kuomintang*) or communist (*Gongchangdang*) rule has been no different on the issue. Though with limited success, during 1911-35 epochs, China under the nationalist rule launched military campaigns in Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia to create strong buffers against the British and Russian powers in the periphery. As against all social, cultural, linguistic and historical factors in vogue, the nationalists blatantly took pretext of suzerainty and/or limited control of the last Qing emperor to justify the adventure. In 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, under the communist reign again, China has gone to undertake similar campaigns in its periphery with a variety of military and political objectives, ranging from formal incorporation of peripheral region that had taken place during the Qing and early Republican periods to invade other sovereign powers such as India and Vietnam. Differences, whatsoever, can be seen in the case of policy which is a function of an array of factors including technology. China's successive quest for doctrinal reform in military strategy (*Junshi Zhanlüe*) in the past six and odd decades testifies the hypothesis.<sup>10</sup>

While integral to China's strategic thinking, the doctrinal sheath of China's 'peripheral strategy' has been shedding opaqueness at a gradual but slow pace. This can be again a studied move in the contexts of Chinese leadership, embedded to their strategic past, expressed in two metaphors, the Great Wall (*chang cheng*) and the Empty Fortress (*kong yanwuting*), the symbols of an intermix of weaknesses and strength. There have been discernible shifts and swings in the connotations of key concepts in doctrinaire writings of Chinese think tanks at all the four levels strategic contemplations- the military thought (*junshi sixiang*), military strategy (*junshi zhanlue*), military campaign (*junshi Zhanyi*) and military tactics (*junshi zhanshu*).

For long until 1985 Central Military Commission (CMC) resolutions that endorsed Deng Xiaoping's strand of the 'local wars' (*jubu zhanzheng*) as against total war (*quanbu zhanzheng*), the Chinese think tanks did not speculate beyond the precepts of People's War (*renmin zhanzheng*) and Active Defence (*jiji fangyu*). There was perhaps no alternative either. China's subsistence economy must not have afforded in equipping 2.8 million strong People's Liberation Army (PLA) properly.<sup>11</sup> People's war strategy just called for broad based people's support and three stage strategy of protracted warfare (*chijiuzhan*) with guerilla warfare (*youji zhanzheng*) as the mainstay.<sup>12</sup> Mao Zedong defined Active Defence in contrast to passive

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> In Chinese doctrinal writings, strategy (战略) and military strategy (军事战略) are used interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> Founded on Aug 1, 1927 after Nanchang Uprising, the force level of the PLA ran to 5 million. After a wave of demobilization of what has come to be known as ill-trained and / or politically incorrect personnel, the strength of the PLA dropped to 2.8 million in 1953. It included 10,000 troops in PLA Air force and 60, 000 in PLA Navy, raised respectively in November, 1949 and September, 1950.

<sup>12</sup> In advocating the viability of protracted war, Mao Zedong drew on classic Chinese military writings as well as Western military theorists such as Clausewitz, where the principle of 'Unity of Opposites', enshrined in the Chinese concept of 'Yin' and 'Yang' hold the key. Guerrilla tactical doctrine can be summarized in four character Chinese compound 'shengdong qixi' which means

defence. In operational setting, it stood for seizing initiative of first strike. While intrinsically 'offensive in substance', the Chinese approach to war thus, measured 'defensive in form'. Drawing on Sun Zi's strategic palliative of 'strong-weak' state calculation, the strategy enabled China to make virtue of its necessity. All Chinese military campaigns in the past, including Sino-Indian War of 1962 theoretically stand ground to this set of periphery strategy. The change phenomenon, carrying seeds and sprouts of relative transparency in words and deeds, is a product of hard debate in face of an array of developments, though within the four walls of set national military objectives.<sup>13</sup> The *Science of Military Strategy (zhanlue)*, brought by the Academy of Military Science (AMS) in 1987, offered a limited approach to strategy of 'local wars' with offensive intent and purpose, based on People's War Under Modern Conditions, using positional and mobile warfare along with combined arms operations to counter plausible Soviet invasion. The 1999 volume of the *Science of Military Strategy*, by contrast, outlined a broader approach to strategy based on preparing to fight a range of 'local wars under modern high-tech conditions' (*gaojishu tiaojian xia jubu zhanzheng*) that vary in objectives, intensity and lethality. Two other works of the year, one by Gen. Zhang Wannian and the other by Gen. Ma Baoan under the captions *Contemporary World Military Affairs and China's National Defense (Dangdai Shijie Junshi Yu Zhongguo Guofang)* and *Strategic Theory Study Guide (Zhanlue lilun xuexi zhinan)* respectively added technological dimension to the thesis. The critique of the 1991 Gulf and 1999 Kosovo Wars rather served as the living justifications. The rhetoric of US promoting 'python strategy' and reaping the best of two worlds in selective use of "Monroe Doctrine," the "Open Door" policy, and the "Truman Doctrine" served as a teacher by negative example in goal setting for the strategy. *Study Guide for Strategic Theory (Zhanlue Lilun Xuexi Zhinan)*, brought out by the Chinese National Defence University in 2002, contains firmed up stance of the Chinese think-tanks on the nature and character the concept of 'local wars under modern high-tech conditions'.

## **Fault Lines in Offensive Strategic Disposition**

Paradigm shifts in China's doctrinaire approach to war runs along the startling changes in the institutional capacity and operational capabilities of the Chinese war machines. All this has come about with a change in China's threat perception. The break-up of the Soviet Union reduced the *casus belli* of a total war to a point of nullity. There were yet scores of flash points. It forced Chinese leaders and military planners to think of inevitability of 'local wars'.

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'uproar in the east and attack in the west'. It measures well with Chinese classic strategic culture of deception to pursue the core interests.

<sup>13</sup> China's national military objectives have been quite often aired by the top PLA brass. It is thus, evolutionary in nature. In 1996, for example, *Qiushi* (No.8, April 16, 1996, pp. 8-14) quoted the then Chinese Defence Minister Chi Haotian say that the basic objectives of China's national defence constituted of solidifying the defensive capacity, resist foreign invasion, and safeguard the unification and security of the country. In 1998, the Deputy Chief of General Staff Lt Gen Xiong Guangkai said, "the basic objectives" of China's armed forces are to consolidate national defense, resist aggression, defend the nation's sovereignty over its territorial land, sea, airspace as well as its maritime interests, and safeguard national unity and security. Subsequently, the then Chief of the General Staff Department (GSD) General Fu Quanyou provided this iteration: "the PLA's mission is to strengthen the national defense, fend off aggression, safeguard territorial sovereignty and the rights and interests of territorial waters, and maintain national integrity and safety."

Nonetheless, the speed and lethality of the Gulf war got Chinese strategists to think of 'local wars under modern conditions'.

Track change in China's strategic disposition while a reality, the decision matrix of 'offensive'-defensive military option in respect of either of the periphery countries including India can not be straight and simple for the Chinese decision makers. Proponents of politico-military 'offence-defence theory' (ODT), in particular Stephen Van Evera, Geroge H. Quester, Thomas J. Christensen, Keir A. Lieber and Jack Snyder, offer invaluable insights, though with varying thrust on technology and strategy respectively independent and dependent variables.<sup>14</sup> They talk of 'Offensive-Defensive Balance' (ODB) as the prime determinant of decisions. Among the contemporary Chinese military writers, Xu Jin and Tang Shiping tend to uphold the preeminence of ODB factor in strategic field decisions of either offensive or defensive disposition.<sup>15</sup> The predictive strength of the theory while not absolute, the changes in China's ODB in comparative perspective of one or the other periphery country including India can stand steady as veritable indicator of China's defensive and/ or offensive strategic disposition.

Drawing on the constructs of 'defensive realism', it is hard to imagine that the Chinese leadership and military planners would ever hold offensive strategic disposition while the ODB was tipped in favour of defence of the national interests.<sup>16</sup> Preemptive strikes as part of offensive strategic disposition stood future of draining out China's military, economic and diplomatic resources without tangible gains. It can better live with politico-military smoke screen of mighty military power until comparative technological advancement come to give a fillip to its offensive advantages. This is with a caveat that the adherents of John J. Mearsheimer's theory of 'offensive realism' among the Chinese academics do not get upper hands.

Military technology and military strategy respectively constitute the independent and dependent variable of ODB in the ODT.<sup>17</sup> In the decision matrix, the tactical and strategic advantage over the individual and/ or group of target countries would call the shot lest the adventure should turn counter productive. Again, the advantage of the kind can not be absolute for all time and against all target countries. The military technology is again both defensive and offensive in nature. The chasm whatsoever would stand for the fault line against adventure.

For long, the second-strike capable nuclear arsenal was often understood to indicate the supremacy of the defence in the offence-defence balance, essentially guaranteeing security for the state which possessed it. China has been assiduously working for it with a measure of

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and The Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); Geroge H. Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977); Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, 'Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,' *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (1990), pp. 137-68.

<sup>15</sup> Xu Jin, 'The Strategic Implications of Changes in Military Technology,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics* (2006) 1 (2): 163-193. doi: 10.1093/cjip/pol014; Tang Shiping, 'Offence-defence Theory: Towards a Definitive Understanding,' *Chinese Journal of International Politics* (2010) 3 (2): 213-260. Doi: 10.1093/cjip/poq004.

<sup>16</sup> Defensive realism looks at states as rational player, and differs with its counterpart, the offensive realism on points whether or not states must always be maximizing relative power ahead of all other objectives. Tang Shiping holds that the Chinese state under Mao Zedong subscribed offensive realism and the Deng Xiaoping epoch lives of defensive realism.

<sup>17</sup> Lieber, Keir A., *The New History of World War 1 and What it Means for International Relations Theory*, *International Security*, Volume 32, Number 2, Fall 2007, pp 155-191

reckonable success.<sup>18</sup>. However, it has yet to cross quite a few mile stones of aggressive strategic disposition. The epoch of information based warfare has come to put all pervasive premiums for China turning berserk. Sun Zi's heritage stands for 'victory without war'. Chinese leadership and military planners could then pull all stops for aggressive disposition only when 'strategic advantage and strategic positioning' against the adversary could look plausible.

### **Plausible Chinese Adventure and the Survival Fits**

China's ODB stands positive against most peripheral countries. Save neutralizing effects of extra-ODB factors at work, the probabilities of China want only flexing military muscles to settle score much less secure core interests look immensely high. With the projected exponential growth in some of the components of China's *zonghe guoli* (comprehensive national power) while the archaic institutional structure of the state responded sub-optimally in addressing the ever growing contradictions in what the Chinese call *shehui guanli* (social management), the fears of China using military means to safeguard core interests and/ or settle score with peripheral countries with relatively low ODB would theoretically remain real. The refrain of Chen Xiangyang and his ilk in the Chinese media articulation in favour of China better holding aggressive disposition in face of instable neighbourhood could turn prophetic for all practical purposes in times to come.

Perceived Diaspora effects of the April 2010 Kyrgyzstan crises on the political movements in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) perhaps lay at the back of China's concern. Ulumuqi is just an hour long flight away from riot-stricken Osh in south Kyrgyzstan. As an editorial in the Global Times suggested, China feared a Balkan-type crisis to the detriment of its strategic interests.<sup>19</sup> A wide range of Chinese think-tanks including Xu Xiaotian, an expert on Central Asian studies at the high-profile China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and Dong Manyuan, an anti-terror expert at the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) looked rather askance with a difference on the viability of regional security arrangements to stop the untoward developments.<sup>20</sup> Russian factor obliquely stood in the way of the Chinese leadership and military planners to think of military measures while the future hangs in balance. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the homes of over 60 million Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen populace, sympathetic to the political aspirations of their brethren could await little different fate.

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<sup>18</sup> China is totally secretive about its nuclear arsenal. According to the estimates of Stockholm International Peace Institute, China has since acquired limited deterrence capability with the deployment of 186 strategic nuclear warheads. The prospect of China augmenting its submarine fleet to 75 by 2020 with 12-16 JL-2 or DF-31 ballistic missiles has triggered speculation about China's capability to survive first attack on its military assets. The deployment of Chengdu J-20 stealth aircraft has added to the sensibility still further.

<sup>19</sup> China and Kyrgyzstan share a 1,100-km porous land border, with two main border crossings at the Irkestan and Torugart passes through the XUAR. It has around 250000 Uyghur populations who are sympathetic to the East Turkestan Movement in the region.

<sup>20</sup> Kyrgyzstan happened to be a member of three high-profile regional security outfits including Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). While a forerunner of the group, the Chinese leadership preferred stoic silence as the regime crumbled to their utter displeasure for a variety of reasons. Kyrgyzstan was besides a member of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In the world view of Chen Xiangyang and his ilk, the other peripheral countries encountering political instability as well fall in the line of fire of China's aggressive strategic disposition. In South Asia, it included the so called all weather friends Pakistan besides Afghanistan and India. In Southeast Asia, Thailand and Myanmar and in Northeast Asia, Mongolia, the Korean Peninsula stand to bear the brunt. While farfetched, the Chinese strategists have the prescription for Japan. Chen Xiangyang and his ilk are painfully aware of China's Achilles heels, too. While warning against "spillover effects" of instable neighbourhood, and suggesting the imperatives of aggressive strategic disposition, they have called for caution against blind plunge and differentiate between the periodic flip-flops of political unrest in matured democracies from near anarchic scenario in countries with transplanted democracies. India, South Korea and Pakistan figured in the former category and Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the latter.

The studied responses of the development have set off a clarion call against the Chinese moves to bolster the war machines, in particular its logistics capabilities. Christina Lin talks of 'China threat' zone, where the existing and/ or up coming Chinese rail-road networks promise fast mobilization of troops.<sup>21</sup> Her concern has come to be shared by a large number of analysts, notably Konstantin Syroyezhkin of Kazakhstan's Institute of Strategic Studies.<sup>22</sup> Some of the PLA troop mobilizations in the recent past through the Chinese rail networks are looked at as being innocuous trial test. In early September 2010, China largely moved its PLA contingent, consisting of over 1000 ground force officers and men, a logistics group and an air force combat group to Kazakhstan by rail.<sup>23</sup> Two months later in November 2010, the PLA again moved its huge contingent from the site of Shanghai World Expo to its barracks in Nanjing.

The events go to testify China's increased force projection potentials. China has since built rail lines to Tibet, and it would link Nepal before long.<sup>24</sup> China is planning high-speed rails to Laos, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar. Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan have agreed to cooperate with China to build a China-Iran rail link from Xinjiang, passing through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and finally arriving in Iran. As part of the UN sponsored Trans-Asia Railway, it would extend westward to Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and connect Europe. Subject to a large number of dependent and intervening variables, China's aggressive strategic disposition could hypothetically thus, affect all these countries.

Survival fits against China's aggressive strategic disposition has to be multidimensional. There can be little in the name of thumb rule. Within the four wall of ODT, the peripheral countries shall have to create a hedge of collective bargains while reinforcing the soft and

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<sup>21</sup> Christina Lin, "The PLA'S Orient Express: Militarization of the Iron Silk Road", James Town Foundation, *China Brief*, Volume: 11, Issue 5, MARCH 25, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Syroyezhkin, Konstantin, China's Expansionist Policy Toward Kazakhstan Takes a New Turn, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, November 17, 2010; *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, November 9, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Xinhua News Agency, Sep. 7, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> The 253 km long Nepal link of the Qingzang rail will pass through strategically located Xigaze in the foothills of Mt Everest. The total length of Qingzang railway is 1,956 km (1215 miles). Construction of the 815 km (506 mile) section between Xining and Golmud was completed by 1984. The 1,142 km (709 mile) section between Golmud and Lhasa was inaugurated on 1 July 2006. The Nepal link of the rail was initially expected to take four years.



hard sides of ODB to stay safe against providence of China's aggressive strategic disposition. A win-win situation would call for rising China to come forward with acceptable agreements on critical issues including border disputes to set the ball rolling.

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*Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.*



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