Evolving Paradigm in Tibet with Civil-Military Dual-Use Integrated Approach

Options for India to Transform Geostrategic Deterrence into Compellence

Partha Pratim Dubey

Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, better known as Sam "Bahadur", was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw's contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier's soldier and a General's General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India's best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.

Photographs courtesy: The Manekshaw family/FORCE

Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC
1914-2008

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

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Introduction

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), due to geopolitical reasons, is considered to be one of the toughest places in the world in terms of living or earning a livelihood. The region is mostly characterised by its rugged terrain, harsh high-altitude weather, sparse population and remoteness, thereby resulting in very limited socio-economic development.

In the last decade, Chinese authorities in Tibet, as part of its 12th and 13th Five-year plan, had undertaken sustainable development through a multi-disciplinary management approach including Change Management, HR revitalisation and Project Management. The initiative continues to gain momentum under the current 14th plan and has gained fresh impetus with the establishment of the dedicated Border Construction and Development Department and the Border Laws of 2021.

The period post Xi Jinping taking over as President of The People's Republic of China and Chairman of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has witnessed a massive civil-military dual-use infrastructure development in the border areas of Tibet. The focus has been on the construction of roads, rail networks, airports/ airfields, heliports/ helipads, and power and telecommunication networks with the inclusion of 5G technology.

Xiaokang[1] (the construction of 628 moderately well-off settlements by employing the latest technology and the best use of local men and material resources) had been launched as a flagship poverty alleviation project by Xi Jinping. The initiative eradicated absolute poverty from Tibet, which is being projected as an important landmark achieved in record time through an integrated approach and coordinated work of all stakeholders.

Civil-military fusion has evolved as the core of Xi Jinping's vision for all forms of initiatives for achieving "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era". The aim is to achieve integrated socio-economic development through a host of poverty alleviation projects involving multiple stakeholders, thereby addressing existing security vulnerabilities in the remote inaccessible frontier region of Tibet and strengthening overall national security. The dual-use infrastructure in Tibet has resulted in infrastructure asymmetry on the Indian northern borders. The actual intent of the Chinese in the garb of poverty alleviation in Tibet is clearly to address internal vulnerability

and create an integrated defence network to further enhance its border management along the LAC.

It is imperative from the security point of view to holistically study the aggressive approach of the Chinese in Tibet post-Doklam in 2017 (mostly mentioned as Doklam in the Chinese narrative) and Eastern Ladakh from 2020 to till date. An assertive foreign policy on the part of India towards the Chinese occupation of Tibet, together with the setting up of vibrant settlements with its associated dual-use infrastructure all along the Indian northern borders, can undermine the perceived geostrategic deterrent to confront China head-on and to checkmate the Chinese at their own game.

Buffer State

Documented records related to the history of Tibet can be traced from the introduction of Buddhism, which spread from India in the 6th century AD. This further paved the way for the unified Tibetan Empire in the 7th century AD. Post dissolution of the unified empire, the country witnessed a period of disintegration, a breakup which lasted for around two centuries, till the Buddhist revival during the 10th-12th centuries, which ushered in the development of three of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Post a brief control by the Mongol Empire and Yuan dynasty, Tibet became effectively independent in the 14th century and was ruled by a succession of noble houses for the next 300 years. In the 17th century, a senior lama of Gelug school became the head of state as the 5th Dalai Lama and took multiple initiatives to unite the other Tibetan schools to achieve political unity in Tibet.

The Ming dynasty, from 1368 to 1644, had negligible influence in Tibet. The Manchus conquered China in the 17th century and embraced Tibetan Buddhism, which led to close relations with the Tibetans. Further, the 5th Dalai Lama evolved as the spiritual guide of the Manchu emperor, in exchange for patronage and protection. Formal ties prevailed between the Tibetans and the Manchus during the period of the Qing dynasty in the form of priest-patron dynamics akin to that with the Mongol Khans.

Subsequently, in the 18th century, a few Manchu rulers enjoyed considerable influence in Tibet as a result of a close association with the Dalai Lama, as on multiple occasions, troops were sent for the protection of Tibetans from foreign invasion. The representative of the Manchu rulers stationed in Tibet gathered considerable political capital by virtue of prolonged presence. However, the sovereignty of Tibet continued to be respected.

Tibet, as a sovereign nation, signed a treaty with Nepal in 1856 without reference to China. A significant example of the powers exerted by the central power of Tibet at Lhasa was the way it had dealt with the internal war in the middle of the 19th century between the chieftain of Nyarong and the king of Derge with the Horpa princes in his support. The Tibetan government dispatched its forces, which defeated the Nyarong chief and thereafter appointed a Tibetan governor with the responsibilities of administrating Derge and the Horpa principalities.

In 1876, the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, at the age of 19, took over the duties of the Tibetan government from Chokyi Gyaltsen Kundeling and was instrumental in assuring the sovereignty of Tibet in all international engagements. The British invaded Tibet in 1904, which, eventually, marginalised the role of the Manchu rulers and all ties between the Manchus and the Dalai Lama ceased post the defeat of the Qing dynasty in 1911. Post this development, the 13th Dalai Lama continued to maintain Tibet, from 1911 to 1950, as an independent nation, defying any form of foreign influence.

It is interesting to note that in the Shimla Convention and Tripartite Agreement of 1914, Tibet participated as an independent state along with two other stakeholders–China and British India. The Shimla Convention eventually resulted in the signing of an agreement between two of the three countries as the ground for Tibet to evolve as a buffer state in the Himalayas between India and China. China did not sign the agreement due to reservations related to its role in Tibet.

Tibet's existence as a buffer state ceased in 1950 when the PLA first crossed into the Himalayan Buddhist Kingdom. In May 1951, after the defeat of the Tibetan Army, China forced Tibet to sign the "17- Point Agreement for Peaceful Liberation of Tibet". To date, China continues to occupy Tibet with a sizable deployment of the PLA, thereby nullifying the concept of the buffer state as envisaged by the British in the spirit of the Shimla Agreement of 1914.
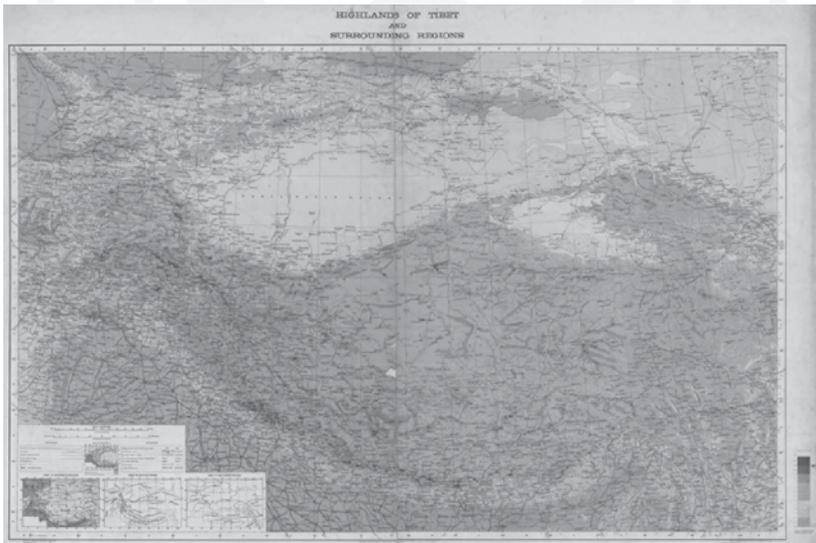
1936 Survey of India map of Tibet, showing Tibet as an independent country.

Contours of the Tibetan Uprising

The signing of the "17-Point Agreement for Peaceful Liberation of Tibet" by the local government on 23 May 1951 ceased the very existence of Tibet as an independent nation. Post the developments which followed the agreement, a series of repressive military actions by the PLA commenced, which continue till date, with the objective to destroy the very root of Tibetan identity. However, the local population rallied behind the Tibetan identity, which derived its strength from its enriched culture and historical past. Buddhism emerged as the common bond to shape the transforming contours of the uprising for the independence of Tibet with the 14th Dalai Lama as the guiding light.

If one takes a closer look at the nature of the Tibetan uprising since 1951 against the forced occupation by China and its repressive rule, it can be broadly classified into three distinct phases according to time, nature and characteristics. Each of these phases is illustrated in the succeeding paragraphs to highlight the evolving nature of the mostly non-violent uprising, which had minimal external support in terms of resources to take on the might of the Chinese repressive rule in Tibet.

Tenjin Dorjee, in his monograph, "The Tibetan Non-Violent Struggle—A Strategic and Historical Analysis"[2], has comprehensively covered the evolving nature of the Tibetan uprising, spanning the last seven decades. The key issues of the struggle from Tenjin Dorjee's monograph are included as part of this paper in a chronological order for a better understanding of its evolutionary nature, underlying factors and the internal and external dynamics that shaped its course and how it is relevant even today.

The three distinct periods of the uprising—1956-59, 1987-89 and 2008, together with three distinct terms—"principled non-violence" (the Dalai Lama's moral and ethical commitment to non-violent dialogue and mutual compromise), "non-violent resistance" (improvised and spontaneous non-violent activities) and "strategic non-violent struggle" (strategic and organised application of non-violent civil resistance)—helps in traversing the contours of the Tibetan struggle for independence.

The civil resistance in Tibet has a major component of passive actions (non-cooperation with higher authorities, the boycott of Chinese-owned businesses, refusal to attend state schools and rejection of social institutions) that are seldom noticed. On the contrary, active resistance (protests, marches, slogans and waving of flags) has enhanced visibility and has generated high impact, greater traction and broad domestic and global coverage. It has, therefore, been utilised for research compilation and study.

In the initial phase, China's repressive regime targeted religious leaders and civilians, which shattered the age–old beliefs, values, trust and faith in the 17-point agreement. The situation compelled the locals to shun their regional and sectarian differences and forged a bond based on religious and cultural convergence to have a Buddhist Tibetan national identity. The developments were instrumental in the political mobilisation of the masses.

First Tibetan Uprising

The general perception of the first uprising is limited to the events that unfolded in 1959 (the great revolt in Lhasa and the escape of the Dalai Lama to India). However, multiple events had taken place before that event in the Eastern part of Tibet. In 1956, the Chinese government, as part of its efforts to impose the Communist ideology, initiated multiple reforms in Kham (the area spread over current Sichuan, Qinghai, and Yunan) in southeast Tibet and Amdo (current Qinghai) in northeast Tibet.

In 1956, religion was the central theme as well as the core of the revolt with the convergence of all efforts to protect religion. "The Volunteer Army to Defend Buddhism" was formed. Religion provided the base for political unity across the regional divide in Tibet and was instrumental in mobilising the civil society to rally in mass nation-wide public support against the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

To further impose communist control, the Chinese authorities commenced their anti-Buddhist campaign, targeting religious and monastic seats, cultural festivals and places of worship. The host of high-handed actions, including violent crackdowns, large-scale arrests, targeted execution of religious figures and a blanket ban on religious rituals, led to a series of violent protests commonly known as the Khampa uprising.

The revolt gained momentum and rapidly spread across eastern Tibet, resulting in the exodus of the Chinese authorities from the region. However, the PLA took charge to reinforce in great strength, which compelled the Tibetan resistance members to escape towards central Tibet, where "democratic reforms" were still not in place. The leaders of the Khampa

uprising realised the futility of the splinter alliances that forged small groups into a single resistance army.

On June 16, 1958, Khampa merchant Gonpo Tashi evolved as a military leader of the Chushi Gangdruk armed resistance force and established contacts with multiple nations for military support to take on the PLA onslaught. However, he did not meet with any success. Strangely, however, the CIA extended covert support from 1959 to 1964 by providing training to Tibetans in guerrilla warfare.

In Lhasa, events took a dramatic turn in early March 1959, which started with the spread of the news that "Dalai Lama is invited to Chinese military camp to attend an Opera and he should be unescorted by his security". This news, which spread instantly all over Lhasa, was assessed by Tibetans as a Chinese attempt to abduct the Dalai Lama. The local leaders urged Tibetans to gather in large numbers at Norbulingka (the Dalai Lama's summer palace). It was a move to protect the Dalai Lama at all costs by providing a human shield to prevent the entry of Chinese forces into the palace.

However, the peaceful gathering at Norbulingka turned violent due to the presence of a Tibetan official (Khunchung Sonam Gyamtso) who had collaborated with Chinese. The crowd saw him exiting the palace in modern attire, wearing a Chinese cap. The enraged crowd became violent, which led to his death. In a few moments, the peaceful nature of the gathering turned into chaos and the very purpose of the whole exercise—the protection of the Dalai Lama—was defeated in the absence of a strong leadership that could provide motivation and direction to the movement.

On 11 March 1959, the largest demonstration ever was staged in Lhasa at Shol village (at the foot of the Potala Palace). The platform was used by 50 government officials to establish a front known as the "People's Assembly" to protest China's interference in governance in Lhasa. It also called to overthrow the Chinese rule and outrightly rejected the 17-Point Agreement. On March 12, the crowd marched toward the Indian and Nepalese missions in Lhasa to urge support for Tibetan independence. The Tibetan government, sensing the mood, gave orders to distribute arms out of its arsenal to the general public to further fuel the resistance movement.

The chaos persisted for a week with the spread of the revolt to other cities in Tibet and news of the Tibetan resistance spread to the outside world. On 17 March 1959, the Chinese shelled parts of Lhasa to disperse the protestors. The overall security situation in Lhasa became worse. It was during this period that one of the resistance groups took charge and successfully executed the escape of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa to Arunachal Pradesh in India.

On 19 March 1959, Tibetan protestors commenced targeting Chinese administrative and military establishments, which eventually led the Chinese to launch a massive operation to quell the revolt the next morning. As per the Chinese government data, 87,000 Tibetans were killed in the uprising. However, according to Tibetan estimates, 4,30,000 locals died during the uprising and thereafter, 2,60,000 Tibetans died in prisons and labour camps from 1950 to 1984.

Irrespective of the Tibetans' use of 22 types of non-violent tactics, the first phase of the uprising remained, by and large, violent. However, it is important to note that a significant achievement through the non-violent method was that of the establishment of a Tibetan government in exile, which today remains a hope and continues to command loyalty amongst the masses in Tibet and its diaspora globally.

Intervening Phase between the First and Second Tibetan Uprising
Before covering the second phase of the Tibetan uprising (1987-1989), it is important to briefly highlight the long intervening period. The renunciation of violence by the Dalai Lama and the internationalisation of the Tibetan liberation cause, articulated by the Tibetan government in exile were two main issues, which found resonance at the international level. The Tibetan liberation cause, which remained in cold storage for a considerable period, was provided with a new platform in the form of the "Global Political Arena" and "Court of International Public Opinion".

It is to be noted that after Deng Xiaoping's accession to power and initiation of reforms, Tibet witnessed a sudden relaxation of the repressive policies. A New Tibet policy came into existence, which focused on the revival of Tibetan culture, education, science, and technology. The period from 1980-1987 ushered in cultural freedom for Tibetans. However, the cultural freedom further motivated the masses to aspire towards political freedom and empowerment in the overall economic development of Tibet. The phase of the second uprising, which followed this period, can be largely attributed to greater aspirations triggered through cultural and religious freedom.

Second Tibetan Uprising
The second phase of the uprising was predominantly non-violent, with only limited instances of violence. Over the course of six years, from 1987 to 1993, the protests changed into riots only three times—in 1987, 1988 and 1989. It is important to note that this period witnessed a gradual shift in the central theme of the struggle by shunting out the religious narrative and

adopting a political discourse. The lessons of the first uprising were taken into account as the non-violent nature of the protest enabled the monks to keep the vows intact and emerge as the leaders of the resistance, mobilising greater public support, which was mostly restricted to Lhasa from 1987 to 1989.

The Tibetans built the narrative around the global audience with their message as the uprising provided the required visibility and platform to the Dalai Lama, in terms of legitimacy, to represent the just cause of the liberation of Tibet while engaging with foreign governments. A great deal of emphasis was placed on ensuring that the protests were non-violent through a range of engagements, including marches, circumambulation, demonstrations, display of the flag of the Tibetan government in exile, songs and music with metaphors and slogans and similar smart approaches like posters, graffiti etc.

Intervening Phase between the Second and Third Tibetan Uprising
It is important to analyse the period between the second and third Tibetan uprisings to understand the prevailing geopolitical environment, emerging global perception of the Tibetan freedom struggle and issues leading to the third uprising in 2008. The period witnessed two significant positive developments—the first was the support that the Tibetan struggle received from the Western countries and the second was the initiation of grassroots activism across the globe, led by the Tibetan diaspora across the world, wherein the Chinese repressive occupation of Tibet evolved as a central theme as part of the internationalisation strategy.

An effort is being made to highlight the rise and fall of the "Tibetan grassroots mobilisation" regarding a series of developments during the period. The ante of the second uprising set the stage for the internationalisation of the issue by the leadership of the Tibetan government in exile (CTA), which was methodically executed by engaging with the legislatures in the West. The developments received a further boost when the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. The Tibetan cause was featured in primetime debates and was the subject of discussions in seminars and multiple forums to acquire majority space in global public opinion.

The multiple visits of the Dalai Lama to Western countries created waves of public sentiment in support of the Tibetan cause and the legislatures of these countries continued to pass resolutions condemning the "Chinese occupation of Tibet". The intensity of the political outreach by the CTA can be gauged by the fact that the period from 1987 to 1997 witnessed 20 US and 12 EU resolutions against China for its forced occupation of Tibet.

US legislatures facilitated Voice of America (VOA) Radio to commence a Tibetan service, which could broadcast inside Tibet.

In the meantime, China's value as an important trade partner started to gain traction towards the end of the Cold War as the majority of the nations tried to engage with China. The dichotomy created differences between the legislatures and executive branches of nations as China's economic potential as a trade partner could never be undermined vis a vis the Tibetan cause.

The CTA understood the inadequacy of its strategy to pressure China through the legislature and, accordingly, modified its strategy to mobilise the Tibetan cause at the grassroots level through a public campaign spearheaded by NGOs. Tibetan Freedom Concerts were able to attract a great deal of public and youth interest, which was further expanded with the Dalai Lama's trips to the West. The CTA provided leadership and direction to the global grassroots campaign through detailed planning of the targets, timings, and tactics.

Students for a Free Tibet, International Campaign for Tibet, and Free Tibet campaign were the prominent groups which came into existence during the period and were duly supported by the advocacy groups of Tibetan migrants. Tibetan support groups played a key role in shaping the pro-Tibet public opinion and orchestrating protests, targeting even global institutions like the World Bank (protracted protest and campaign stopped loan to China to resettle farmers in Tibet and discouraged major corporations {Australian firm stalled its project of gold mining in Tibet} from investing in China).

The global grassroots mobilisation for the Tibetan issue could gain the highest international platform and intervention. The advocacy groups, comprising the majority of the Tibetan migrants, were instrumental in organising protests against any visiting Chinese leaders. This caused a great deal of embarrassment for China and also the host for their engagement in contrast to the public sentiments associated with the Tibetan cause. During the period, the momentum achieved by the global grassroots activism reached a point wherein the Chinese authorities decided to initiate a dialogue with the Tibetan leadership and invited the Dalai Lama for talks in 2002.

The commencement of the dialogue led to the end of global grassroots mobilisation as the CTA agreed on the toning down of global protest as the first prerequisite to further the dialogue and invested in trust-building with Chinese authorities. However, the actual intent of the Chinese was lost in the sight of the protest against the hosting of the Olympics in Beijing

in 2008. The offer for dialogue was made in 2002, just a month after being nominated for hosting the Olympics. The Tibetan leadership missed the opportunity to exploit the Chinese vulnerability through preconditions for talks. On the contrary, the toning down of the protest destroyed the momentum and also created a disconnect between the CTA and Tibetan support and advocacy groups.

China was smart enough to adopt a strategy, as articulated by Warren Smith, to "appear conciliating while making no concessions". The Chinese exploited the situation by building a narrative that "since direct talks are underway with Tibet, there is no room for any third-party interference". The talks were stalled in 2008, and the dialogue finally collapsed after nine rounds in 2010. Tibetan grassroots mobilisation, which had reached its crescendo in the 1990s, fizzled out by the turn of the millennium post commencement of the dialogue.

China's Tibet policy, which was a mix of political restrictions and a host of economic incentives in the form of subsidies, ensured crushing all forms of dissent and gave a major blow to the internal resistance movement in Tibet. China's exponential economic growth led the majority of nations across continents to make a beeline to establish trade ties with it, thereby raising its international status. Overall, in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the Tibetan cause had been completely obliterated from the global canvas.

Third Tibetan Uprising

Barely a few months before the start of the Beijing Olympics (August 2008), on 10 March 2008 (anniversary of the Tibetan uprising), the world was stunned to witness the largest protest in Tibet since its uprising in 1959. The protestors were from all walks of life and included monastics, students, teachers, intellectuals, traders, farmers, labourers, and herdsmen, all holding the Tibetan national flag and raising slogans for "Freedom of Tibet", "Return of Dalai Lama to Tibet" and "Independence of Tibet". Protests were sporadic and spread like wildfire across all three historic Tibetan provinces, and in solidarity, protests were also held in Beijing and multiple cities in the US, Europe, Australia, India, and Nepal.

On 14 March 2008, the protestors targeted the police to force them to retreat from Lhasa and thereafter, the wrath of the protestors was directed at any establishment of the Chinese government and businesses owned by the Han and Hu mainland Chinese settlers. Barring a few instances, the nature of the protest was non-violent. However, the Chinese media, Political Works Department, and Foreign Ministry portrayed it as the most violent

act undertaken by Tibetan militant youths, orchestrated under the direct orders of the Dalai Lama to stall the Beijing Olympics.

The period preceding the Beijing Olympics witnessed a total of 130 protests and violent crackdowns by Chinese forces and resulted in considerable loss of lives, injuries and missing people. The fallout and extent of the protest could be gauged from the differing data released by the Chinese government (19 fatalities, including one policeman and 382 injured) and the CTA along with other human rights groups (220 Tibetans killed, 1,294 injured, 5,600 arrested, 290 sentenced, and over 1,000 missing).

It is important to understand the various factors, prevailing conditions, and triggers that contributed to the transformative nature of the Tibetan uprising to date. An in-depth study of the events that preceded the third Tibetan uprising would certainly reveal Tibetan culture at its core. The Tibetan language, literature, music, and art created a distinct identity amongst the masses that resonated pan Tibet in the form of collective cultural pride. Music became the fastest medium to spread the Tibetan cultural identity and pride across Tibet and to its diaspora around the world. Eastern Tibet in TAR, where the controls were more relaxed in comparison to Central Tibet, became the seat of the Tibetan cultural revival and with time, made inroads in other counties, finally merging in Lhasa.

As the stage was being set for political mobilisation through cultural revival in the period from 2001 to 2007, three prominent factors played a vital role in creating a common purpose, unique identity, and motivation to struggle for political rights. These factors were "socio-economic" with the increased purchasing power of Tibetans, "musicians emerging as social cult figures" to shape public opinion and "accessibility of instant communication tools and technologies". Socio-economic factors enhanced income, which was spent on arts and cultural entertainment, including organising music or cultural festivals displaying traditional artefacts, jewellery, swords, and associated aspects of the rich Tibetan heritage.

Along with cultural festivals, Tibetan music concerts were major hits and singers became very popular. Song lyrics, using metaphors for the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama, and Karmapa, promptly went viral and rapidly spread across the Tibetan community, including areas with a high degree of restrictions. Singers, through the medium of music, evolved as influencers of public discourse and opinion and were instrumental in mobilising large crowds for the cause of Tibetan freedom and bridging the gap between Tibetans residing inside and outside Tibet. The crafted lyrics of the songs sung in concerts by singers were so strong that they evoked a tremendous

emotional response, a case in point being 100 Tibetans exiled in Dharamsala, commencing a march to Lhasa, which was given extensive coverage by Radio VOA.

On the communication tools and technology front, Windows Vista was released in 2007, which had an inbuilt Tibetan font in Unicode that was further expanded to Microsoft tools and Apple iPhone. The Tibetan font in cyberspace created ripples and seamlessly connected Tibetans across the globe, thereby bridging the gap between the rest of the world and the physical barrier of Dharamsala across the Himalayas through the digital bridge. The development revolutionised the people-to-people connect through SMS, chats, emails, and video calls, even on exclusive Chinese applications, thereby making the Great China Firewall irrelevant. Courtesy of communication technology, the most contentious issue which covered the cyberspace amongst Tibetans was the commissioning of the Golmud-Lhasa Railway with an influx of Hans as a means to engineer demographic transition in Tibet.

The issues highlighted above clearly reveal how culture created the ecosystem, which was instrumental in the political mobilisation to organise the most potent Tibetan uprising to date. Culture also acted as a glue to ensure unity of purpose across the physical divide between Tibetans and non-violent discipline. Irrespective of the provocation of the Chinese authorities, the uprising remained resilient and adopted a strategy of non-violence to shatter the Chinese narrative of a violent uprising by Tibetan militants.

Chinese authorities, through a host of repressive and violent instruments, were able to crush the dissent, which brought an end to the third Tibetan uprising of 2008. However, the repressive actions could not deter the spirit of the Tibetans. The seeds had been sown and taken root at the individual level using non-cooperation and derived strength from Tibet's culture and traditions. The cultural resistance which followed in the aftermath of the third uprising was called the Lhakar movement. It de-collectivised to focus on efforts at the individual level. Each Wednesday, resistance was offered within the confines of individual space to forge a collective identity, with acts ranging from listening to independent radio to wearing traditional clothes and the use of only Tibetan language and food.

The Chinese actions in crushing the acts of resistance by Tibetans in the public space had been successful in warding off political dissent through a host of policies and restrictions, control, and censorship. However, the Lhakar movement transformed the very nature of the Tibetan resistance, igniting

the simmering discontent by creating the home, workplace and cyberspace as individual resistance fronts.

Resistance may not be visible in the public space, but it has percolated in the minds of the Tibetan masses and gets echoed within the social, cultural, and political spaces, wherein each individual is a crusader for the Tibetan cause. "Parallel institution building" and "non-cooperation movement" are two key proponents in the present context of the Lhakar movement by being non-intrusive yet potent and cost-effective in relation to organising public protests.

The third uprising has proven how efforts at the individual level can galvanize the local population to take on the might of the Chinese. In the present context, where social media has become a potent platform to shape public opinion, the growing wedge between Han Chinese and Tibetans can trigger major public unrest, bringing the issue of Tibetan independence to the forefront.

The study of the Tibetan uprising provides us valuable inputs to further analyse the future course of the movement about the holistic approach undertaken by the Chinese authorities in Tibet. The holistic approach is in the form of a series of actions undertaken to address the challenge originating from internal vulnerabilities arising out of the Tibetan uprising in the future and threats posed in relation to the disputed border issues with India. A comprehensive coverage of the Chinese approach is being dealt with in the subsequent parts.

A few figures are being included with data sets to further illustrate the contributing factors, dynamics, and relations using a comparative analysis across the three uprisings to understand and assimilate the contours and transformation over the period.

Number of Non-violent Tactics
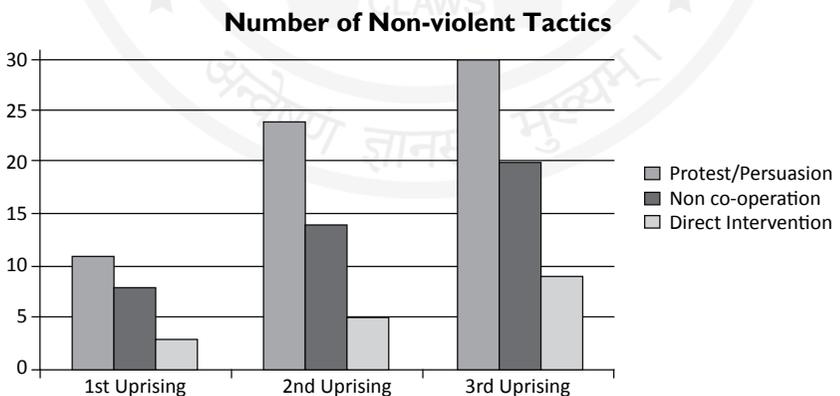
Source: Tenzin Dorjee, ICNC.

Non-violent Tactics or Methods by Tibetans

METHODS OF PROTEST AND PERSUASION	1956-59	1987-89	2008-13
Public speeches	✓	✓	✓
Letters of opposition or support	✓	✓	✓
Declarations by organizations and institutions	✓	✓	✓
Signed public statements	✓	✓	✓
Group or mass petitions	✓	✓	✓
Slogans, caricatures and symbols	✓	✓	✓
Banners, poster and displayed communications		✓	✓
Leaflets, pamphlets and books	✓	✓	✓
Newspapers and journals	✓	✓	✓
Records, radio and television		✓	✓
Skywriting and earth writing		✓	
Displays of flags and symbolic colors	✓	✓	✓
Wearing of symbols		✓	✓
Prayer and worship		✓	✓
Destruction of own property			✓
Displays of portraits			✓
Paint as protest			✓
Symbolic reclamations		✓	✓
Rude gestures		✓	✓
Vigils	✓	✓	✓
Singing		✓	✓
Marches	✓	✓	✓
Religious processions			✓
Motorcades			✓
Political mourning		✓	✓
Demonstrative funerals		✓	✓
Assemblies of protest or support		✓	✓
Protest meetings			✓
Teach-ins			✓
Walk-outs		✓	✓
Silence		✓	✓

Source: Tenzin Dorjee, ICNC.

Non-cooperation and Non-violent Intervention Tactics

METHODS OF NONCOOPERATION	1956-59	1987-89	2008-13
Social boycott	✓	✓	✓
Selective social boycott			✓
Interdict			✓
Boycott of social affairs			✓
Withdrawal from social institutions		✓	✓
Stay-at-home		✓	✓
Total personal noncooperation		✓	✓
Protest emigration	✓	✓	
Consumers' boycott			✓
Refusal to let or sell property	✓	✓	✓
Refusal of a government's money		✓	✓
Blacklisting of traders			✓
Peasant strike			✓
Prisoners' strike		✓	✓
Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance	✓	✓	✓
Literature and speeches advocating resistance		✓	✓
Withdrawal from government educational institutions		✓	✓
Refusal to dissolve existing institutions	✓	✓	✓
Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse	✓	✓	✓
Sit-down	✓		✓
Hiding, escape and false identities	✓	✓	✓

METHODS OF NONVIOLENT INTERVENTION	1956-59	1987-89	2008-13
The fast		✓	✓
Nonviolent obstruction	✓	✓	✓
Nonviolent occupation	✓	✓	✓
Establishing new social patterns			✓
Alternative social institutions			✓
Alternative communication system		✓	✓
Alternative markets			✓
Seeking imprisonment			✓
Dual sovereignty and parallel government	✓	✓	✓

Source: Tenzin Dorjee, ICNC.

Characteristics of the Three Tibetan Uprisings

	1st Uprising: 1956-59	2nd Uprising: 1987-89	3rd Uprising: 2008-13
Dominant theme	Religious	Political	Cultural
Catalyst	His Holiness The Dalai Lama's (HHDL) life in danger	HHDL's reputation attacked by China	Beijing Olympics
Method	Armed struggle	Nonviolent (some incidents ended in riots)	Nonviolent (15 out of 200 involved property destruction)
Nonviolent tactics used	22	43	59
Geographic scope	Nationwide	Lhasa and Central Tibet	Nationwide
Slogan, demands	China out of Tibet, Independence for Tibet	Independence for Tibet, Long Live HHDL	Return of HHDL to Tibet, Independence, Freedom, Language Freedom, Equality
Tibetan casualties	87,000 dead in the 1959 uprising, thousands imprisoned in the aftermath	Thousands imprisoned, number of dead not fully known. *The Observer* reported that according to a report from the Public Security Bureau and the Tibet Military District Command dated March 11, 1989, "387 Lhasa citizens have been killed . . . 721 were injured, 2,100 have been arrested or detained . . . 354 have disappeared. . . 82 religious people have been killed, 37 injured, 650 arrested or detained."	The Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy registered more than 135 Tibetans deaths as a direct result of armed retaliation by law enforcement forces. Thousands imprisoned in Central Tibet, Kham and Amdo. In Kanlho (Gannan) Prefecture alone, a total of 2,644 Tibetans were arrested between March 14 and April 9, 2008.

Source: Tenzin Dorjee, ICNC.

Building the
Tibet Narrative

Chinese White Paper on Tibet

On 05 May 2021, the Chinese State Council Information Office published a white paper on Tibet titled "Tibet since 1951: Liberation, Development and Prosperity"[3]. The white paper is the Chinese narrative on Tibet with Xi Jinping's thoughts on "building modern socialist Tibet in the New Era" or as brought out in the November 2023 CPC policy on "Governance of Tibet in the New Era"[4], wherein guidance has been provided to Tibetan Buddhism in adapting to a socialist society.

The white paper, with a total of 10 chapters, starts with the "Historical Context" that Tibet has been part of China, highlighting governance and social structure before 1951. It presents the 1951 Seventeen Point Agreement as a significant step toward the liberation and integration of Tibet into China. Subsequently, it touches on "Liberation and Reforms", wherein it highlights how China ended the feudal serf system and restored basic human rights to Tibetans. It also highlights land reforms and claims to have improved living standards.

The next part focuses on "Economic Development" with sizeable investment in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and industry since 1951, which has initiated economic growth and improved quality of life in Tibet. It further highlights "Cultural Preservation" with reference to the work undertaken to preserve Tibetan culture, language, and religion together with the promotion of Tibetan Buddhism and cultural heritage.

The concluding part of the paper covers two aspects: firstly, "Social Progress", with data on improvement in literacy rates, life expectancy and overall improvement of health as the key indicators as Tibetans have greater access to education and social services; and secondly, "National Unity and Stability", highlighting stability being ensured by the Chinese government irrespective of external criticisms and the need for national unity to respect China's claim over Tibet.

The white paper on Tibet, which has been covered in the preceding paragraph, was supplemented by another publication by the Chinese State Council Information Office in November 2023 titled "CPC Policies on the Governance of Xizang in the New Era: Approach and Achievements". It is important to note that 'Tibet' has been replaced by 'Xizang' to align with China's historical claim.

The publication is the CPC's narrative in maintaining national unity and countering external criticisms, framing its governance as a model of successful integration and development that respects local culture while promoting progress. The salient issues covered in the publication are included in the succeeding paragraphs to provide insight into the CPC's approach in Tibet.

A historical context is provided with an overview of Tibet's historical integration into China, emphasising the CPC's role in stabilising and developing the region since the 1950s. It highlights the governance model with a focus on economic development, social stability, cultural preservation, and environmental protection. The CPC's leadership is framed as essential for maintaining national unity and sovereignty.

In the context of economic development, the publication highlights significant investments in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation. The positive impact of these developments has contributed to improved living standards and economic growth in Tibet. Cultural and religious policies support the preservation of Tibetan culture and Buddhism as well as ensure the protection of Tibetan language and traditions while promoting socialist values.

The publication highlights social progress and stability initiatives, which have led to achievements in healthcare, education, and social services, asserting improvements in literacy and life expectancy. It also covers the projects launched to combat poverty and enhance social welfare. In the context of environmental protection, the publication stresses the need for ecological preservation in the governance of Tibet with policies aimed at sustainable development and conservation. The concluding part of the publication counters international criticism of China's policies in Tibet with the positive impacts of CPC governance and the benefits experienced by the local population.

The issues highlighted in the latest white paper on Tibet and the publication of CPC policies on governance in Tibet are integral to the narrative building where the majority of the issues are common and complementary to each other. The publication lays down the policy support, guidelines, framework, and structures to multiple stakeholders

in diverse fields to have a unity of purpose to synchronise all efforts and resources to strengthen the overall narrative on Tibet. Recent examples of expanding the Tibet narrative are doctored maps (cartographic warfare) and assigning Chinese names to 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh with claims of it being part of Southern Tibet.

Civil-Military Dual-Use Infrastructure in Tibet

In the last decade, authorities in Tibet, as part of the 12th and 13th five-year plan, had undertaken sustainable development through a multi-disciplinary management approach including change management, HR revitalisation and project management. The period witnessed a massive civil-military dual-use infrastructure development in border areas with focus on the construction of roads, tunnels, rail network, airports/ airfields, heliports/ helipads, and power and telecommunication network with the inclusion of 5G and other cutting-edge technologies.

In addition to this, Xiaokang (the construction of 628 moderately well-off settlements by employing the latest technology and the best use of local men and material resources) had been an important landmark achieved in record time through an integrated approach and the coordinated work of all stakeholders. The civil-military approach had been the brainchild of the CPC under the leadership and direction of its chairman, Xi Jinping.

The stated aim of the CPC, based on Xi Jinping's concept of a "Socialist Tibet in the New Era"[5], is to achieve integrated socio-economic development through a host of poverty alleviation projects involving multiple stakeholders, thereby addressing existing security vulnerabilities in the remote inaccessible frontier region and strengthening overall national security.

China faced two major challenges in Tibet post its forced occupation: firstly, the internal security threat arising from the dissent of the local population and secondly, border management along the Indian northern frontiers in an extremely hostile terrain and weather conditions. With the turn of the millennium (2000), the successive leadership of the CPC came up with policies and a host of initiatives in Tibet to holistically address the issue of internal dissent and ensure comprehensive border management. In 2012, as Xi Jinping took over the leadership of the CPC, a series of reforms were launched, including military reforms and reorganisation.

The leadership of Xi Jinping, with clear-cut objectives and goals, accelerated the pace of civil-military dual-use infrastructure projects in Tibet. At the core of its poverty alleviation initiative had been the construction of Xiaokang settlements in the remote inaccessible 21 border counties of Tibet sharing borders with India, Nepal, and Bhutan to empower the locals with the slogan "**Border Guardians and Builders of Happy Homeland**" and integrating it with multiple security stakeholders.

Impact of Recent Laws in Tibet

Counter-terrorism Laws

China's counter-terrorism laws[6], enacted in December 2015 and amended in 2018, provide a comprehensive framework for addressing terrorism, with a focus on prevention, intelligence sharing, and law enforcement. It includes provisions for monitoring and regulating activities deemed threatening to national security. The enacted laws are stringent in Tibet, where any form of dissent could be perceived as a potential security threat. As a fallout, government security agencies in Tibet would have enhanced surveillance and policing. Therefore, it would be easy to connect any local concern highlighted by a Tibetan to broader issues related to terrorism and extremism.

The laws allow a high degree of surveillance and security measures by enforcement agencies including facial recognition technology and widespread monitoring of communication. Security forces use the laws to their advantage, with a prominent presence in Tibetan areas, around significant religious sites and during political anniversaries. The laws have led to restrictions on religious practices, as officials often view expressions of Tibetan Buddhism through a security lens. Monasteries are subjected to stricter regulations and any gatherings or public displays of faith can be subjected to extreme scrutiny.

The laws severely impinge on "civil rights and freedom", leading to a decline in civil liberties, with individuals facing arrest for expressing dissent or for perceived ties with separatist movements. Reports of arbitrary detention and a lack of fair trial processes have increased, particularly among activists and those advocating for Tibetan rights. The laws have a socio-economic impact influenced by security concerns prioritising military and police interventions within the realm of development projects and social initiatives. Local communities may face increased socio-economic marginalisation due to heightened security measures disrupting daily life and local governance.

Land Border Law

On 23 October 2021, China's Standing Committee of National People's Congress (NPC) passed a new "Land Border Law"[7] for the protection and exploitation of the country's land border areas, which came into force on 01 January 2022. The law is divided into seven chapters encompassing 62 articles, each chapter dealing with a specific characteristic of the law.

It is the first national law on the protection of the land border of China, which aims to manage border-related matters at the legal level and to maintain national security in a better manner. The enacted law states that the state would take measures to improve the level of border public services and infrastructure construction, improve the living conditions of locals residing in border regions and support their livelihoods.

The state guarantees funds for work on land and borders and amalgamation of national economic and social development plans with those of the border areas. Within the framework of the law, the government would also take up education and publicity initiatives to solidify the sense of community in China, promote the spirit of China, defend the unity and territorial integrity of the country, strengthen citizens' sense of nationalism and homeland security and build a common spiritual home for the Chinese nation, especially for the people living in border regions. It would also promote coordinated development of border defence construction, border economy, and society and also encourage citizens and organisations that carry out work related to land borders by suitably rewarding them with commendations and rewards for their outstanding contribution.

The land border law can negatively impact the overall socio-economic culture of Tibet, starting from governance at the grassroots level, traditional land use, ownership, and freedom of action of locals close to border areas. The law prioritises integrating the interest of the government with local concerns in the garb of national security and resource control. It enhances government control over land to facilitate the extraction of resources in the ecologically sensitive Tibetan areas.

Dual-use infrastructure projects like construction of roads, railways, dams, and power grids are prioritised even at the cost of the displacement of local Tibetan communities. The law severely impacts the nomadic communities, owing to land use restriction for grazing and restriction related to movement in the vicinity of border areas. The law creates a perception of infringement of cultural and traditional rights, leading to encroachment of land and livelihood, which further increases differences between the Tibetans and the Chinese government. The heightened border security measures to include enhanced surveillance and security under this law leads to increased

presence of security forces personnel, impacting the locals with restrictions of free movement and 24/7 monitoring of their activities.

Both laws conform to legal warfare as part of the Chinese "Three Warfares Strategy". The laws provide a set of tools in the hands of the Chinese government to control political unrest in Xinjiang and Tibet. While the counter-terrorism law focuses more on the internal security threats to subdue any form of dissent, the border law extends legitimacy to the dual-use infrastructure, including Xiaokang settlements, along with stricter control, enhanced surveillance and monitoring of locals in the border areas of Tibet. The law would provide China with a legal framework in future negotiations related to the settlement of border disputes to its advantage. Overall, the laws serve to reinforce Chinese authority in Tibet and Xinjiang, while subjugating local voices, issues, and communities.
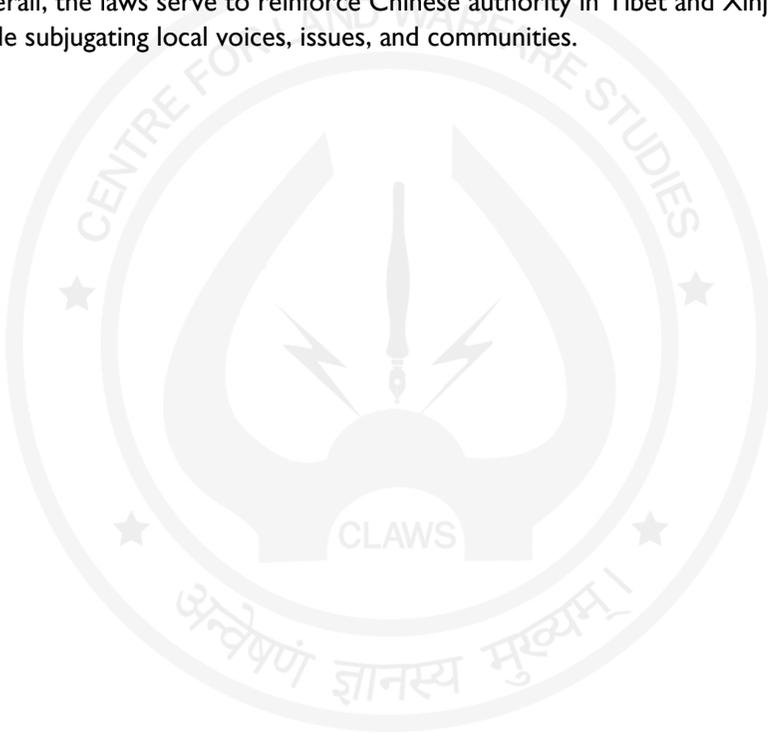
Sinicization and Securitization in Tibet

A report by the International Campaign for Tibet, titled "Generation Change: 10 Years of Xi Jinping's Sinification and Securitization of Tibetans"[8], covered exhaustively the subject of Sinicization and Securitization in Tibet for a decade after Xi Jinping came to power. The issues covered in the ibid report are summarised in the succeeding paragraphs to highlight the transformation achieved by the authorities through pursuing the policy at the individual and institution level while targeting Tibetan religion, culture, traditions, and the spirit of free Tibet.

Xi Jinping's regime strengthened control over Tibet with two goals: the Sinicization and Securitization of Tibet in the Chinese nation state. The intent was clearly to decimate the Tibetan identity by reconstitution of Tibet and Tibetans as an integral part of the Chinese identity, "Zhonghua Minzu"[9], that is, the modern notion of Chinese nationality transcending ethnic division with a central identity.

Sinicization

The domestication of Tibetan Buddhism with a methodical approach towards assimilating and developing "Consciousness in community of the Chinese nation" to realise the "Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" is the stated Chinese version of Sinicization in Tibet. In January 2016, the CPC approved the creation of an online database for all Tibetan Buddhist incarnations as "authentic living Buddhas". By undertaking this exercise, the CPC asserted control over the Dalai Lama's incarnation, thereby marginalising the authority of Tibetan religious leaders on the subject.

Initiatives were undertaken to create a new generation of Sinified Tibetans by an early start of Sinification of the younger population with a focus on Tibetan schoolchildren. Schools and the use of Chinese as the primary language were identified as two primary domains to further the initiatives. Research data from the Tibet Action Institute, from its study titled "Separated from their Families, Hidden from the World: China's Vast System of Colonial Boarding Schools in Tibet", reveals that 800,000

Tibetan children (78% of total schoolchildren in Tibet) in the age group of 6 to 18 years are currently studying in government-run boarding schools across Tibet.

In Tibet, the CPC functionaries and officials in government-aided schools are mandated to ensure focus on imparting training on ethnic unity and integration together with the use of Chinese language in school life and Mandarin script in learning. The "school consolidation policy" of 2001, which implied shutting down of village schools and merging them into larger boarding education centres, was reversed in Mainland China in 2012 due to widespread social outrage. However, the policy continues in Tibet. Chinese state media regularly highlights reports on the Sinification of Tibetan children as an ongoing process with clear goals of fostering loyalty to the state and advancing Chinese indoctrination.

Sinification of religion has been an aspect which has been included as a state policy of China since 2019. It enhances the CPC's grip and control on the religious community, builds the party's support base in the religious community and encourages research work to fuse religious philosophy with the Marxist philosophy on religion.

Tibetan Buddhism has been one of the key targets of Sinification, wherein religious leaders have been forced to take an active role in guiding religious believers and promoting the adaptation of religion to a socialist society. As part of the initiative, the "Four Standards Campaign" was formulated and fielded within the Tibetan monastic society to train monks and nuns.

Securitization

Xi's focus on the political security of the CPC has been articulated in the legal language related to the national security of China. Overall, the national security concept of China encompasses the political, economic, developmental, cultural, and environmental aspects of Tibet. Any activity or initiative undertaken by Tibetans unilaterally could be perceived as a threat to China's sovereignty and termed as "secessionist".

The evolution of Xi's National Security Concept is primarily built upon two policy planks: development and security. In April 2014, the "Comprehensive National Security Concept" was formulated, and for its implementation, the "Central National Security Commission" was established with pan-China jurisdiction, including Tibet. China's first National Security Strategy was issued in 2015, and the centre of gravity of the strategy was explicitly internal, unlike in the past when the thrust was on external threats.

The shift in strategy was a result of understanding that economic and social development does not mean solving issues of unity and stability or opposing separatism naturally. Securitization and Sinification, therefore, gained higher priority in Tibet over material basis, which essentially meant socio-economic development projects and overall progress of the society. Since 2020, an integrated development and security approach has been the way forward, striking the right balance between development and security by reconciling the fact that development alone cannot assure political stability and counter internal vulnerabilities.

Leveraging new age technology, Securitization with a focus on internal threats has been further upgraded with the "Pre-emptive Prevention and Control Model for Security in Tibet". The security model involved a fully integrated and networked multilayered surveillance and monitoring system with the amalgamation of cutting-edge multi-domain technology to include high-resolution facial recognition cameras, AI-based solutions, cyber applications, and biological interventions, including genome, IRIS scans and DNA harvesting. The entire exercise is to pre-empt any challenge being posed to Xi's/ CPC's rule in Tibet and address any potential threat at the very onset before it manifests as a major challenge.

The effectiveness of Securitization can be gauged from the data related to drastic reduction in the flow of refugees from Tibet to India and cases of self-immolation.

Flow of Refugees from Tibet

Year	Number of refugees from Tibet	% change relative to 2011
2011	753	
2012	375	-50.2%
2013	156	-79.3%
2014	88	-88.3%
2015	88	-88.3%
2016	129	-82.9%
2017	52	-93.1%
2018	43	-94.3%
2019	19	-97.5%
2020	5	-99.3%
2021	10	-98.7%
2022	5	-99.3%

Number of refugees from Tibet since 2011
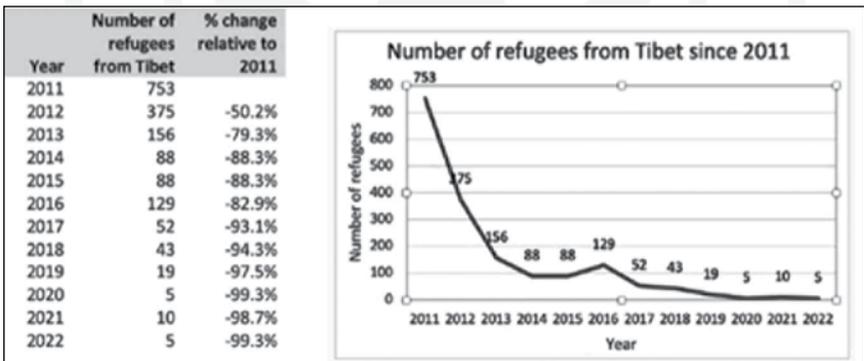
Source: CTA.

Cases of Self-immolation in Tibet

Year	self-immolations	% of total self-immolations
2009	1	0.6%
2010	0	0.0%
2011	12	7.6%
2012	84	53.2%
2013	27	17.1%
2014	11	7.0%
2015	8	5.1%
2016	3	1.9%
2017	6	3.8%
2018	3	1.9%
2019	1	0.6%
2020	0	0.0%
2021	0	0.0%
2022	2	1.3%
Total	158	
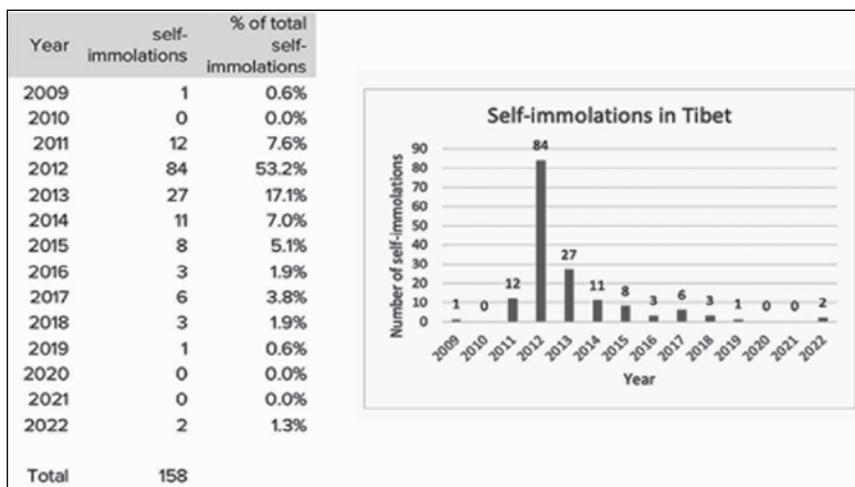
Source: CTA.

The overall idea being propagated and implemented across Tibet is that of Sinifying all people with their identity characteristics to make them Chinese for the Chinese nation-state (Zhongua Minzu). In mid-2022, CPC Secretary of TAR Wang Junzheng launched the "Three Consciousness Campaign" (national, citizen and rule of law) for governing Tibet in the new era. On the securitization front, as part of "comprehensive national security", a total of 16 domains (traditional and non-traditional) have been identified to ensure the survival and longevity of the CPC with more focus on non-traditional security domains.

Sinicization and Securitization in Tibet are complimentary to each other, and these tools are being wielded ruthlessly by the Chinese authorities with a focus on crushing dissent of any form or proportion in a preemptive manner. To exercise tighter control on all aspects of life for national security, a host of initiatives with policy outreach have been rolled out, one of them being part of the action plan towards achieving "Great Rejuvenation of Chinese Nation by 2049" with six and ten directives for Tibetans outlined during the 6th Tibet Work Forum in 2015 and the 7th Tibet Work Forum in 2020 respectively.

Militarisation in Tibet

The policy of Sinicization and Securitization being orchestrated by the Chinese authorities in Tibet without any form of resistance is due to the overarching shield achieved through militarisation by the PLA in synergy with other security stakeholders. Since 1951, with the PLA invasion and occupation of Tibet, the region has witnessed varying proportions of militarisation over the last seven decades. The Tibet Military District (TMD) or Tibet Military Command (TMC) under the Western Theatre Command is the PLA formation, which is overall responsible for ensuring the internal security and territorial integrity of Tibet.

In May 2019, Dr Amrita Jash, an Associate Fellow (later Research Fellow) at CLAWS, in her issue brief titled "Tibet Military Command: PLAs Combat Role in High Altitude",[10] focused on the acquired capability of the TMC to effectively conduct combat missions in any sector bordering India. The key aspects that the issue brief dwelled upon included Xi's initiative to transform the PLA through structural reforms and modernisation to undertake integrated joint operations in any terrain under a rapidly evolving operational environment to win wars. The elevation in the political rank of the Tibet Military Command (TMC) to directly report to the PLA Ground Forces unlike other provincial military commands, induction of modern equipment and dual-use infrastructure upgrade and lastly, the role of the TMC in the future combat missions were also part of the issue brief.

In China, the overall political thought or policy or guidance by the party in the past and now by Xi set the tone for initiatives on key fundamental issues of governance. In 2013, at the 3rd Plenary of the 18th National People's Congress, Xi Jinping, as Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), initiated the process of "national defence and military reforms", starting with organisational restructuring from the CMC down to the lowest formation and military unit, including Border Defence and Coast Guard, PAPF and militia. The figure below highlights the categories and targets to be achieved as part of the military reforms from 2016 to 2020.

PLA Military Reforms Agenda

| Table. PLA Reform Agenda, 2015–2020			
Reform Area (English)	Reform Area (Chinese)	Topics	Target Date
Leadership Management System	领导管理体制	Reform Central Military Committee departments, military services, logistics system, equipment development system	2015¹
Joint Command and Control System	联合作战指挥体制	Establish two-level joint command system, reform joint training, establish theater commands	2015¹
Military Scale Structure	军队规模结构	Reduce force size by 300,000, reducing noncombat personnel, reduce officer billets, phase out old equipment	2016‡
Force Composition	部队编成	Adjust force structure, optimize reserve force, reduce militias	2016
Cultivating New-Type Military Talent	新型军事人才培养	Enhance professional military education	2016
People's Armed Police command and control system and force composition	武装警察部队指挥管理体制和力量结构	Adjust People's Armed Police command and control and force structure	2016
Policy System	政策制度	Reform personnel system, budget management and procurement system, salary and welfare system	2017–2020
Developing Civil-Military Integration	军民融合发展	Enhance management of civilian-military integration	2017–2020
Military Legal System	军事法治体系	Reform military regulations and military justice system	No Date Provided

Source: NDU Press, Washington, DC.

In May 2016, as part of the military reforms, the TMD acquired its elevated status as the Tibet Military Command (TMC), directly reporting to the PLA Ground Forces HQ at Beijing whereas the other provincial counterparts report to the National Defense Mobilization Department. A point to be highlighted here is the strategic re-orientation of the TMC to address both internal Tibetan-led political unrest as well as external threats perceived on the borders with India.

Given the unique responsibility, the elevation in the status of the TMC provides greater command and control of resources in terms of formations, specialised regiments, and battalions to undertake combat missions in high altitude areas and at the same time, retain control of PAPF together with

other overt and covert internal security elements to crush any internal security situations. The figure below shows the post reform command and control structure under the CMC to highlight resources under the TMC.

Command and Control Structure under the CMC
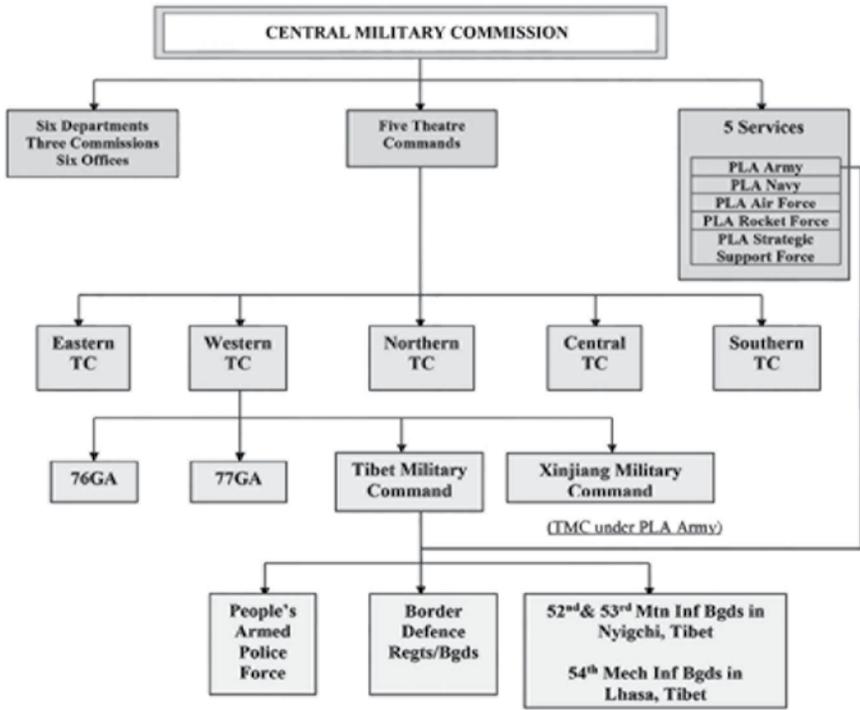
*GA – Group Army; Regts – Regiments; Bgds – Brigades; Mtn Inf Bgds – Mountain Infantry Brigades; Mech Inf Bgds – Mechanised Infantry Brigades.

Source: Dr Amrita Jash, CLAWS.

Xi's concept—"Implementing the strategy of military-civilian integration is a prerequisite for building integrated national strategies and strategic capabilities and for realising the Party's goal of building a strong military in the new era"[11]—has been the guiding philosophy for the PLA. In Tibet, post reforms, the CMC had undertaken a two-pronged approach to build capacity in terms of civil-military dual-use infrastructure, technology, and services and capability in terms of skills in harnessing the acquired capacities with technology adaptation, re-orientation, validation of joint exercises, military drills, and combat readiness.

Improvement of surface communication as part of dual-use infrastructure in the border areas, including 628 border settlements (Xiaokang), further complemented with the laying of power lines and OFC on either side of roads brought seamless physical and digital connectivity in the border areas of Tibet. Development in border areas accelerated the pace of construction of the RCC-based defensive layout (inclusive of permanent defences, firing bays, watch towers, and a network of underground communication trenches) in the vicinity of the existing PLA border defence deployments opposite Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

The first row of Xiaokang settlements closest to the border areas with a multi-layered surveillance and monitoring system have been integrated with the border defence layout to put in place an "integrated fortified defence and surveillance network system". Locals in the border settlements are being motivated as "Border Guardians" and being trained to dominate the areas across the border to mount surveillance, provide support to border patrols of the PLA as guide or porters, be deployed as Early Warning (EW) elements and maintain the networks of remote unmanned border weather and surveillance stations.

Post Galwan in 2020, the PLA, owing to the realisation of the limitations of mainland Chinese troops to operate in high-altitude areas of Tibet, had shifted focus on raising Special Tibetan Army Units (STAU)[12], also known as Yuma battalions, especially for prolonged deployment for guarding the border. The TMC has laid special emphasis on the annual training of People's Militia Battalions with the role to protect internal security and secure lines of communication during conflict. Most recently, People's Militia members have acquired training in air defence, drone technology and disaster response and relief operations.

Tibetan and ethnic tribals are best acclimatised to operate under the adverse weather conditions in high-altitude areas of the Tibetan Plateau. Military sub-districts, functioning at the level of counties under the Tibet Military Command, are routinely undertaking spring and autumn motivational drives for locals, coinciding with the bi-yearly induction of conscription in the PLA. Pressure is being exerted upon the commanders at all levels in border areas with specific targets of enrollment to ensure the success of the recruitment drive. Buddhist monks are co-opted to bless new local recruits as part of a grand ceremony to build a strong narrative in support of the initiative. Irrespective of the decision to raise STAU, fresh recruits' past profile is extensively screened to rule out any form of affiliation or link with the Dalai Lama or Tibetan government in exile.

Post reforms, Tibet has been the high priority for the induction of modern arms and equipment, including the establishment of bases for handling strategic land and air assets. In view of the high-altitude terrain, the focus is on fielding light, compact, and highly mobile equipment, which can operate on operational tracks to enable rapid deployment. There has been equal focus on deploying the latest technology related to AI-based integrated early warning (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) sytems for enhanced situational awareness of battle space and long-range precision weapon systems to shape the battlefield to meet the combat mission objective in a complex joint operations environment.

Significant weapons systems inducted in Tibet by the PLA Ground Forces include Rifle QBL 191, ZTQ 15 Light Tank, AFT 10 tank with 08 HJ Anti-Tank Missile, ZBL IFV, PCL 181 (155 mm vehicle-based howitzers), PCL-171 (122 mm SP Howitzer Gun), and PHL-11 (122 mm SP MLRS). Aerial platforms inducted in Tibet include GJ-2 long-endurance drone, multiple unmanned VTOL systems of varying payloads for surveillance and logistics supply, J-20 stealth fighter aircraft, H-6 Bombers, Z-20 and Z-8L helicopters, and Y-20 and Y-9 transport aircraft. To support the aerial platforms, Tibet has recently witnessed the construction of multiple heliports and helipads close to the border.

Chinese has strategic assets, like the PLA Airborne Corps, to undertake airborne or air assault operations with preemptive or rapid reaction capability for deployment in Tibet. The Airborne Corps has the Special Operation Force (SOF) brigade as a specialist formation apart from 6 Air Operations Brigade, Aviation Brigade and Support Brigade. Post Galwan in 2020, the PLA undertook a massive air transportation exercise from the hinterland into Tibet, which included the use of commercial aircraft for the movement of a large number of combat troops, equipment, and combat loads.

In January each year, the PLA takes out its training directive in the form of a detailed document laying out the broad conduct, priorities, and deliverables. Multiple military training exercises, including live fire drills, are conducted in Tibet each year to validate the joint operations structures, doctrines, technology adaptation, combat effectiveness of formations and leadership of commanders. In Tibet, training also encompasses the border regiments, STAU, PAPF, local militia, and other security stakeholders to take on simulations related to internal security threats and disaster relief. A set of inspection teams have been detailed to evaluate performance and highlight shortcomings.

Over the last decade, courtesy of the military reforms, the PLA in Tibet has been able to work on addressing the challenges while undertaking combat

missions in the high- altitude plateau through restructuring, prolonged training in actual terrain and adoption of technology. The PLA is slowly and steadily gaining confidence with new joint operational structures and equipment. The PLA has been undertaking joint exercises mostly with Pakistan and other countries, which also significantly provides professional exposure to enhance skills. However, recent exercises with Russia in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war have significantly raised its confidence while operating in a multinational operations environment.

The Dokala standoff in 2007 and 2017 and the Galwan skirmishes in 2020, together with the heightened situation all along the LAC, have highlighted that the PLA's assertiveness is to be assessed based on confidence derived by enhanced capability and capacity acquired in Tibet over the last decade. It also signifies Chinese sensitivity to issues in Tibet and threats it perceives given the unresolved border issues with India, which have the potential to escalate into a conflict. With limited progress in Eastern Ladakh, irrespective of multiple military and diplomatic engagements, the militarisation of Tibet continues, which has a direct bearing on India's security interest and, therefore, needs a fresh approach for any future engagements with China.

Threats to Chinese Occupation in Tibet
The paper so far has highlighted prominent factors to cover the complex dynamics in Tibet right from the historical perspective to occupation by the Chinese, contours of the uprisings and China's actions to keep Tibet under its tight control through narrative building, enacting laws, dual-use infrastructure, Sinicization and securitization, and lastly, militarisation. Chinese repressive rule coupled with the trust deficit has kept the simmering fire alive in the underbelly of Tibetan society, like a ticking bomb waiting for the right moment or trigger to detonate.

Very limited research material is available related to the critical vulnerabilities or shortcomings of the Chinese in general or Tibet in particular, as the majority of the material appears to provide a far larger perspective of China's success story while ignoring the pitfalls. Brigadier Manjit Singh, in his paper, titled "Critical Assessment of Chinese Vulnerabilities in Tibet"[13], published in IDSA in January 2013, highlighted the major challenges that China encounters in its continued occupation of Tibet. In the succeeding paragraphs, the critical vulnerabilities covered in the paper are being dwelled upon vis a vis the current status in Tibet to highlight the strategic window of opportunity in the geopolitical dimension that could be exploited by India to secure its national interest.

The ibid paper has exhaustively analysed trust deficit in the socio-economic dimension of vulnerability in Tibet, highlighting the 1st to 5th Tibetan Work Forums, growth indicators in TAR, Hanisation of Tibet, socio-economic inequalities, and religious intolerance. The subsequent part of the paper includes latent Tibetan militancy, vulnerability in lines of communication, vulnerability in the neighbourhood and finally, culminates with an overall assessment.

Trust Deficit

Post-occupation of Tibet, China enforced its rule with an iron grip, with little room for any moderate policy or concession, with the sole purpose of assimilating Tibet with the mainland. The period of liberalisation and reforms under Deng Xiaoping initiated the "Tibet Work Forum", a platform set up to steer the policy, direction, and focus for inclusive progress and development of Tibet. The First (1980) and Second (1984) Tibet Work Forums were spearheaded by moderates like Hu Yaobang with relatively liberal policies for Tibet.

Post Tiananmen, the Third Tibet Work Forum (1994) and the second Tibetan uprising witnessed major alterations in China's Tibet Policy as it felt the existing policy was too liberal and made too many concessions to Tibetans. The new policy ruled out the 'Tibetanised' form of development. The Chinese leadership was, by then, totally averse to the moderate outlook and reversed the prevailing Tibetan policy that encouraged Tibetan culture, religion and participation of Tibetans in government and economy by integrating Tibet into the wider economic and cultural model of China with the enforcement of laws on religion and providing job opportunities to the Tibetans.

The shift in the Tibet policy post-3rd Tibet Work Forum brought in political repression, stringent internal security provisions, extended sentences for political offences, enhanced control over monasteries and nunneries and a high degree of political education in schools. Officials also enforced restrictions on the spread of Buddhism and initiated political campaigns to destroy the religious as well as the political standing of the Dalai Lama. The Fourth Tibet Work Forum in 2001 endorsed the strict policies post 3rd Tibet Work Forum and provided the central mandate for policies in Tibet and broad guidelines for TAR leaders and officials to follow during the execution of works and projects. The 5th Tibet Work Forum in 2010 focused on accelerated economic development with emphasis on increasing household income, improving social service and protecting stability.

China's adoption of the policy of fast-track economic development and 'opening up' resulted in a massive influx of Chinese Han migrant workers and entrepreneurs into Tibet. The large-scale extraction of resources, along with strengthening Chinese authority and control over Tibetan, aided the 'Western Development Strategy'(WDS). The narrative of the 5th Tibet Work Forum had a modern and scientific approach towards development as a concept to build a prosperous society together with national ecological security barrier and achieve sustainability and at the same time, ensure national unity, social stability, and national security and forge a favourable international environment.

Tibet is the 'roof of the world' and its ecology and waters gained prominence with the origin of key rivers in Asia. It was imperative to protect China's key interests, competing factors, influence and control over Tibet's sensitive ecology and water supply. The President, during the forum, stated, 'It is all the more necessary to pay attention to turning Tibet into an important national security screen, an important strategic resources reserve base.' China's economic and environmental policies related to sustainable management of Tibet's water transformed into a serious security issue in the region, triggering tensions. Irrespective of a shift in the Tibet policy post- 3rd Tibet Work Forum with stricter norms and restrictions, the aim of 'assimilating' Tibetan people with mainland China remained far-fetched.

Growth Indicators

Since 2001, the Chinese government provided more resources with higher allocations in budget as part of its economic aid package for Tibet. In the 10th Five-Year Plan period (2001–05) alone, the Chinese government allocated 37 billion Yuan ($ 5.4 billion) to Tibet in subsidies and 32.2 billion Yuan ($ 4.5 billion) to 117 projects. In 2011, for 188 development projects in Tibet, a budget of 310 billion Yuan was earmarked. Out of the total allocated budget, 200 billion Yuan ($ 29.3 billion) were in various kinds of subsidies and 110 billion Yuan (16.1 billion dollars) was allotted to fixed assets investment that included the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

Tibet maintained double-digit growth in terms of GDP for 17 consecutive years (till 2010), surpassing the national average. Since the 1950s, development, literacy, health, and public utilities have improved with substantial investment made to build infrastructure. The GDP increased 30 times since 1950; life expectancy increased from 35.5 years in 1950 to 67 years in 2010; literacy rates improved from 2 per cent to 30 per cent; and the per capita income doubled in five years from 2078 Yuan in 2005 to 4138 Yuan in 2010. The growth trend has further intensified to date.

Hanisation

Engineering demography was a major policy that China followed post its occupation of Tibet in order to alter the very nature of its demography. Mao said,, "Tibet covers a large area but is thinly populated. Its population should be increased from the present two or three million to five or six million and then to over 10 million." The intent of Mao was implemented on the ground through an extensive scale of migration of Han Chinese from the mainland into Tibet. It was a tool by which the ultimate aim was to make Tibetans a minority in Tibet. Mao had a clear concept to 'Hanise' Tibet.

Official Chinese government demographic data shows that there are 2.62 million (2000 census) Tibetans in TAR. In contrast, the CTA questions the Chinese government data and estimates that 7.5 million Chinese co-exist with six million Tibetans in TAR. In Amdo (Qinghai) and Kham (Sichuan), the CTA claims that the Hans have already surpassed the locals in number. Asia Watch, in its report in 1990, has disagreed with the CTA figures of 7.5 million but accepts the on-ground reality related to a sizeable migration of Han Chinese from the mainland. According to the Asia Watch Report 1990, "majority of population in Lhasa is clearly Chinese".

Tibetans were barred from moving into Lhasa as part of a strictly enforced discriminatory policy, whereas the same policy has no such restriction on the migration of professionally skilled Han Chinese into Lhasa. The discriminatory restriction on movement and settlement in Tibet is the key element of the Chinese government's plans to strategically place the Chinese Han population for social integration and military development in Tibet. The official stance can be traced back to June 1987 when Deng Xiaoping admitted that the Chinese were being encouraged to settle in Tibet as the region's two million population is inadequate to develop its resources.

The Chinese government had put in place attractive benefits and concessions for its skilled workforce to encourage migration from mainland China. The benefits were extended to only Han migrants, which included housing, healthcare, special leave to visit China, cultural and educational facilities, high altitude allowance, 87 per cent higher pay packages from mainland China, special tax exemptions and loans at low interest rates. It is important to note that the one-child policy did not apply to Chinese settled in Tibet. Businesses benefitted from a preferential tax rate of three per cent lower than mainland China, and farmers and herdsmen were exempted from taxes and administrative charges. Banks enjoyed a preferential interest rate of two points lower than the mainland, as well as a low rate on insurance premiums. All this has ensured a double-digit growth rate for Tibet for more than two decades.

From 2000–09, the average savings in rural China were pegged at 1160 Yuan. However, in Tibet, this was 1080 Yuan below the national average. During the same period, sales in state-owned and individual (Han-owned) enterprises grew five times. However, 'others'—smaller/household businesses and shops owned by Tibetans—just trebled over the same period. Large businesses like wholesale and retail, hotels, restaurants, etc. multiplied four times over the decade (2000-09), but the 'others' stagnated. Although Tibet witnessed double-digit growth, the fruits of growth did not percolate to 76.2 per cent of the population, which is largely rural. Overall, the Tibetans could not reap the benefit of growth owing to selective discrimination in terms of policy, opportunities, and incentives.

Multiple reports of forced large-scale relocation of Tibetans from their native fertile lands are available in the open domain. According to prominent reports, "Tibetans have been relocated to higher reaches in Kham and Amdo areas, leaving the fertile valleys for the Han." In 1959, the total area of Tibet under farming was 0.2 per cent, largely restricted to the river valleys. By 1991, it had increased to 0.3 per cent (almost 50 per cent) largely due to the influx of Han migrants. However, the increase in cultivable land was at the cost of pasture land, forcing the nomads and shepherds to look for pastures in higher reaches and also overuse the pastures, upsetting the fragile ecological balance. For instance, in 2006, a forced relocation initiative resettled 2,90,000 Tibetans into urban dwelling units, which is almost 10 per cent of the Tibetan population. Scholars across the world have criticised the large-scale forced relocation policy. China has garnered criticism for not having researched its urbanisation policy and the effects it would have on employment, jobs, and Tibetan culture.

Socio-Economic Inequalities

Over the last decade (2001–2010), the ibid paper quoted that the living conditions of 2.21 million Tibetans out of 2.90 million living in rural areas have not witnessed any significant improvement. The specific date has been quoted, that is, in the year 2000, the average number of able-bodied and semi-able-bodied labourers in a household of 6.78 persons (say 7) was 3.91 (say 4). However, by the year 2009, the size of the average household witnessed a very marginal decline to 6.27, but the average number of labourers hardly came down to 3.88. It suggested that at least two persons in a family are elders and one child, which implies that all adults have to work to make a living. This kind of pressure on the average Tibetan family in rural areas to work seems to remain unchanged even after a decade of the study and holds good even today.

In 1999, in Tibet, 542 Yuan was saved annually by an average rural household, which within a span of a decade, doubled to 1137 Yuan. In 1999, the savings of the average urban household (largely migrants) was 5998 Yuan, which after a decade, went up to 13,544 Yuan, that is, almost 12 times the rural household. Similarly, the salaries of workers in State-Owned Enterprises (SOE), mostly Han Chinese and very few Tibetans, were the highest at 50,272 Yuan per annum. With sought-after departments like Public Management and Social Organisation, salaries went up till 55,215 Yuan. In contrast, low-end government jobs in urban collectively-owned units (cooperatives), which largely employed Tibetans, the average income was 12,231 Yuan per annum, less than a quarter of state-owned enterprises. The data, a decade apart, in terms of rural and urban households and also in terms of the type of organisation indicate a large inequality in terms of distribution of wealth.

In Tibet, labour remuneration accounted for two-thirds of the GDP. A critical analysis of the data of staff and workers reveals that these categories include upper-ranking cadres and workers in public utilities or SOE. They do not include the migrant or service workers who are from the mainland for a short period of time. Therefore, Tibetans have increasingly been marginalised from sectors that generate the GDP in Tibet. Over a period of time, the actual incentives related to enhanced wages have been disproportionately captured by non-Tibetans. In 2009, the per capita savings in Tibet were 6445 Yuan. In contrast, similar provinces like Gansu (9364 Yuan) and Yunnan (8327 Yuan) have a much better record of savings, an indication of the inequality in Tibet versus other similar regions in mainland China.

Traditionally, the Tibetan society has largely been an agrarian one, with agriculture and animal-rearing being the predominant occupation of the masses. However, the policies of the government, post-1979, had been instrumental in transforming the economy of Tibet and forced Tibetans to alter their economic model to shift focus to urban livelihood. In 1999, out of a total GDP of 107 million Yuan, the primary industry (agriculture) earned a GDP of 34.2 million Yuan (31 per cent) whereas the tertiary industry, still in infancy (services, rent, hotels, etc), earned 47.4 million Yuan (44 per cent).

During the next 10 years, the primary industry doubled to 63.9 million Yuan (reduced to 14 per cent in real terms), but the tertiary industry multiplied six times to 240 million Yuan (increased to 54 per cent, proving that Tibetans have been forced to abandon their traditional occupation in recent years and adopt other means of livelihood). The annual per capita income of a rural household in 2009 in Lhasa was 4149 Yuan, of which

only 1095 Yuan (about 26 per cent) was from wages and salaries and as much as 2232 Yuan (53 per cent) from household business operations, which suggest that wages alone cannot sustain a rural household. In the interior counties of Tibet, like Nagqu and Ngari prefectures, the income is almost entirely dependent on household business with almost no wages or salaries.

In Tibet, unemployment is on the rise post the policy of adopting Mandarin as the principal medium of teaching. Local Tibetans have lost out on jobs, which puts Han settlers at an advantage vis a vis their Tibetan counterparts. Tourism is a booming industry, but fluency in Mandarin is essential for people to become local guides. This has effectively placed local Tibetans at a major disadvantage. The majority of the taxi driver community is Han Chinese and therefore, the bulk of taxi drivers are fluent in Mandarin. Chinese migrants are offered tax concessions, leniency on work permits, bonuses and greater market opportunities.

For strategic reasons and for control of natural resources, successive Chinese leadership did not soften their grip over Tibet. The manifestation of a regime with a tighter grip has resulted in the large-scale marginalisation of Tibetans in their own homeland, which echoes the popular sentiment that when communities are alienated, deprived and denied their rights, they breed dissent. Barry Sautman comments, "The Chinese government does see economic development as a panacea to cure all problems with ethnic minorities, but economic reforms, with its resident unemployment, inflation and corruption has set many Tibetans on edge. The potential for inter-ethnic competition that comes with the development is unsettling. Where competition is seen as unfair and occurs in a context of low ethnic interdependence as in Tibet, ethnic conflict and separation are likely to surge."

It has been a universally accepted narrative that as long as Tibetans are without any international support, it does not worry the CPC. Yan Xuetong, a Chinese scholar, comments, "If separatists abroad get no support from China's neighbours, they will become frustrated, fail, and China- based separatists without international endorsement are not worth worrying about." The peddling of this kind of narrative gives strength to the PLA and CPC to unleash their repressive policy on the Tibetans without the fear of external intervention or interference.

Religious Intolerance

The Chinese government has not shown any sign of softening its stance on the issue related to its continued occupation of Tibet. To date, it continues to

hold a rigid approach towards the issue of religion and the Dalai Lama. China has articulated its arguments on Tibet underlined by the Tibetans' intention of separatism and threat to national unity, thereby blocking all avenues of rapprochement. The critical issues highlighted in the ibid paper that have hurt Tibetan religious sentiments are as under:

- Demonisation of the Dalai Lama: *The Chinese Government has made all attempts to demonise and discredit the Dalai Lama as a 'traitor' and a 'wolf in a sheep skin'. This has been a source of deep resentment amongst the Tibetan people.*

- Selection of the 11th Panchen Lama: *The Chinese Government has selected their own Panchen Lama—five-year-old Gyaltsen Norbu, son of a yak herder, officially enthroned as the 11th Panchen Lama in a ceremony attended by some Tibetan monks and senior Chinese communist leaders, rejecting the centuries-old tradition of the Dalai Lama's choice. The Chinese have also put the 'real' Panchen Lama, Gedhun Cheokyi Nyima and his family under arrest and he has never been seen since 1995.*

- On 03 August 2007, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) issued a set of regulations that required all Tibetan lamas wishing to reincarnate to obtain prior government approval through the submission of a 'reincarnation application': *The 'reincarnation applications' require to be originated from 'legally registered venues' for Tibetan Buddhism. Management measures for the 'Reincarnation of Living Buddhas' in Tibetan Buddhism proclaimed that the reincarnation of Living Buddhas shall not be interfered (with) or dominated by any organisation or individual abroad (read the Dalai Lama). This law attempts to ensure control over the succession of the Dalai Lama by ensuring his successor will be born in China.*

- Freedom of movement of monks and nuns has been severely restricted in TAR for purposes of teaching, studying or practising religion: *All such moves require a lengthy process of permission, reports and approvals from the local government and prefectures.*

- Forcible patriotic education of monks and nuns in monasteries: *During the 'monastery rectification', many monks chose to be forced out of monasteries rather than obey an order to slander the Dalai Lama in public.*

The issues in the ibid paper highlighted above establish how 'trust deficit' is a collective impact of multiple issues ranging from social disparities, cultural identities, economic disparities, demographic (Han/ Tibetan/ ethnic minority) inequalities and religious divide. No amount of money inflow or economic progress, development or growth can bridge the widening trust deficit, which has been engineered rampantly by socio-economic inequalities like

wage discrimination, unemployment, denial of equal opportunities, religious intolerance, demographic aggression, or Hanisation.

Irrespective of huge investments in Tibet in terms of multiple development initiatives and projects, the actual benefits flowing out of development have not reached the majority of Tibetans. The majority of the local Tibetan population remains severely disadvantaged, both socially and economically, with very limited provision of education, welfare, and healthcare and is marginalised by the influx of Chinese migrants. The existing policy, as part of the Chinese grand strategy to settle Tibetan nomads, herdsman, and hunters and to resettle Tibetans from rural ancestral landholdings in urban or semi-urban centres, is now threatening the livelihoods of the local inhabitants.

China's policies of development, which are based on an urban industrial model, in an area that is predominantly rural are counterproductive. These have further increased rather than closed the gap between urban and rural, rich and poor, Chinese and Tibetan, thereby affecting Tibet's fragile ecosystem.

Latent Tibetan Militancy

The paper has already covered the first Tibetan uprising in detail to highlight as to how the guerrilla force was organised and trained and how it took on the offensive to undertake multiple operations against the PLA across all the three regions of Tibet. The subsequent paragraphs cover prominent details of the Tibetan militant legacy of the past, which, as of today, remains dormant. However, indicators in the recent past suggest the potential for revival based on the converging geopolitical conditions in Tibet and external support extended to Tibet's independence cause.

The Khampas and Amdowas were the first to take up arms, with ordinary farmers, nomads, traders, and even monks joining the ranks. In 1954, Tibet witnessed the first large-scale uprising in Kham, known as the Kanting Rebellion that involved 40,000 Khampas. It formed guerrilla bands and attacked the PLA, which was then severely hampered by a short supply of food and sickness due to high altitudes and as a result, the PLA suffered heavy causalities during the period.

In February–March 1956, as part of another coordinated operation, 8,000 monks were involved in laying siege to the Lithang monastery. This development was part of the further expansion of operations. They attacked and laid siege to the PLA garrisons at Chamdo and Lithang. According to data available, during the period from 1954–58, approx. 40,000 PLA soldiers were killed in Eastern Tibet. Meanwhile, the Khampa resistance movement swelled

in ranks to 80,000 followers. However, the resistance movement was devoid of a coherent leadership.

On 16 June 1958, under the leadership of a Khampa trader, Andrug Tashi Gompo, also called Andrugstang, the Khampas in Eastern Tibet joined hands with Tibetans in Central Tibet to form the Chushi Gangdrug. It was a band of native guerrilla groups, which were brought under a common flag and fought against the PLA in Tibet from 1958–60.

A sizeable number of the Chushi Gangdrug cadres were secretly trained in the US and returned to Tibet to lead guerrilla groups. A notable achievement of the Chushi Gangdrug guerillas was that they were instrumental in the escape of the Dalai Lama to India in March 1959, once it became obvious that the Chinese were likely to arrest him from the Potala Palace.

Approximately 30,000 resistance members were killed in what is now called the 'Lhasa Uprising', which commenced post the escape of the Dalai Lama. However, after a prolonged struggle, China managed to bring Tibet under its political and military control, but to this day, resistance remains within Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora throughout the world and continues to gain strength due to the legacy of the brave resistance struggle forged by Tibetan freedom fighters more than half a century ago.

In 1960, the Chushi Gangdrug moved to Mustang, a semi-independent state in Nepal on the Tibet-Nepal border, after the death of its leader, Andrugstang. The movement set up base under a new leader, General Baba Yeshi and the resistance army continued to fight the Chinese till 1974. During the period 1960–74, external support in training, equipment, and logistics was forthcoming. However, it soon dried up in view of the evolving geopolitical environment in the region. Internal power struggle among the resistance leaders and lack of external support brought to an end the military resistance wing in the last battle with Chinese troops in Mustang in 1974. Since then, it has evolved as a political and social welfare organisation in the exiled Tibetan community.

In 1998, a radical Tibetan youth organisation called the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) was established in India. On 10 March 1998, the youth organisation came into the limelight worldwide when six of its members embarked upon a fast-unto-death in New Delhi. The aim was to draw the attention of the UN General Assembly to the Tibetan issue and demand for a rapporteur to investigate allegations of the abuse of human rights in Tibet. The demands of the youth organisation also included the appointment of a special envoy to Tibet and a request that the UN needed to initiate a supervised plebiscite on the future of Tibet.

On 26–27 April 1998, the forcible eviction and forced feeding of the fasting members by the police in Delhi put an abrupt end to the fast. However, one of its leaders, Thupten Ngodup, an ex-monk and an ex-soldier self-immolated in protest at the forced removal of the hunger strikers. He eventually died from almost one hundred per cent burns on 29 April 1998. The death of Ngodupas as a result of self-immolation was a major development in the ongoing Tibetan resistance and elicited a very strongly worded statement from the TYC: "The Tibetan people have sent a clear message to the world that they are willing to sacrifice themselves for the cause of a free and independent Tibet. If the attitude and indifference and lack of support to the issue of Tibet continue, more blood will be shed in the coming days." The youth organisation further stated, "The Middle Path is the strategy of His Holiness and the militant struggle is ours... Maybe one day both the angles will meet."

Vulnerability in Lines of Communication

The ibid paper has highlighted vulnerability in the lines of communication connecting the Tibetan plateau to mainland China in the pre-military reforms and modernisation period before 2013. Tibet, since then, has undertaken and concluded massive dual-use infrastructure projects to address vulnerability in terms of its extended lines of communication. However, the very fundamental of vulnerability holds good even today in terms of surface/air movement, which remains tied down to its weakest points like rail/road bridges, rail and road junctions, passes, landslide-prone areas, tunnels, airfields (runways, taxiways, hangers), heliports, helipads, and logistics support bases. The key issues covered in the ibid paper are summarised in subsequent paragraphs.

The extended lines of communication in Tibet require the PLA to preposition a large number of border guarding forces ab initio. All forms of resources, including men and material, permanently stationed on the Tibetan plateau at high altitudes, require special clothing, living infrastructure, equipment maintenance and protection to fight effectively at these altitudes. It implies a very high cost of maintaining a large military presence in Tibet. The bulk of the offensive formations for deployment in Tibet is located in Chengdu and Lanzhou, which are at distances of over 2000 km. During mobilisation and operational deployments, these formations have to cross large distances over four to five days, traversing high mountain passes at 5000 metres (16,000 feet) which are perennially under snow and also need to cross large rivers, valleys, and ranges.

The files along routes to forward deployment areas can be easily identified by air/ satellites and could be prominent targets during conflict. Further, for smooth movement of the troops, large transit camps are needed en route where, during halts, they can be sheltered and refuelled and can carry out repair and refit. Transit camps have inherent large signatures with fuel dumps, rations stores, vehicle repair facilities, and medical units. All these are highly vulnerable to interdiction by air, engagement by missiles, sabotage and subterfuge. The QTR alone has 675 bridges, which are extremely vulnerable to air interdiction.

All roads lead to Lhasa as it emerges as the hub of all activity during mobilisation or deployment of troops throughout Tibet. With key logistics depots, railheads, and airports in proximity, Lhasa would be the nerve centre or the centre of gravity in Tibet. The acclimatisation of troops as they move from low altitudes and plains to high altitudes beyond 9000 feet is an important facet of induction on the Tibetan Plateau. This process incurs a huge time penalty on the induction timings of forces from the plains.

To ensure the safety of the QTR, the PLA has deployed a large contingent of troops at regular intervals to patrol the railway even in peacetime. The foot patrols deployed for security are being routinely assisted by armed vehicle-based patrols—all adding up to the cost of security of these vital lines of communication. In view of enhanced battlefield transparency, the well-coordinated deployment of ISR resources, including human intelligence and air and space-based platforms, can provide early warning in time and space to cause attrition on the PLA during induction. The forward movement of logistics and supplies is susceptible to disruption of bridges on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) River.

In the case of air supply, the carriage capacities of all aerial platforms are restricted due to high altitudes. Therefore, it entails a higher number of air assets to be deployed for mobilisation. Since loads are reduced, the offensive formations (Rapid Reaction Forces), which predominately move by air from their mounting bases, are likely to take up the major share of resources at these altitudes. The other severely restricting factor in the PLAAF is the shortage of heavy lift helicopters, which are the mainstay to lift loads and maintain posts at extremely high altitudes that are isolated and not accessible by road.

Vulnerability in the Neighbourhood

The ibid paper, in its concluding part, covers Nepal and Bhutan, the two Himalayan kingdoms sharing boundaries with Tibet, as the perceived

vulnerability of China in its occupation of Tibet. In the present context, though, China has diplomatically gained significant leverage in Nepal through a host of engagements on the political, social, cultural, economic, and infrastructure development fronts to mitigate its perceived vulnerability. On the other hand, China has initiated diplomatic engagements with Bhutan by recently signing an MoU to deal with procedures for addressing the latter's boundary issues. It is to be noted that China continues to aggressively build Xiaokang settlements in the disputed areas bordering Bhutan and also in very close proximity to its border with Nepal.

China's is critical of its geopolitical sensitivity from history when Nepal gave refuge and space in Mustang to Chushi Gangdrug as the military wing of the resistance movement undertook guerrilla operations targeting the PLA post 1974. Therefore, learning from its past, China would not to be caught off guard again. China has, therefore, put in place a strategic move to win over the Himalayan states in return for guarantees against the use of their territories against Chinese interests in Tibet. Bhutan and Nepal both share a very cordial diplomatic and cultural association with India, thereby further strengthening its circle of influence in South Asia. Therefore, China constantly struggles to confine and contain India in Asia's geopolitical sphere.

Nepal and Bhutan share borders with Tibet and have a sizeable Buddhist population that believes in the Dalai Lama. These are fertile grounds for Tibetan resistance groups to regroup and reorganise to reignite the freedom movement of Tibet. China's reliance on diplomatic capital has its limits vis a vis the host countries' national interests, larger public sentiments and external support being provided to the Tibetan cause by global powers to ease or divert tensions in the Pacific region.

To sum up, the major takeaways highlighted in the paper hold relevance after a little over a decade, as the majority of the factors have not undergone significant alterations with time. However, a couple of the issues highlighted in the paper have led China to undertake a host of organised initiatives with a focus on developing dual-use physical and digital infrastructure within the policy of civil-military fusion to address its prime concern of internal vulnerabilities in Tibet.

Prevailing Threat Dynamics in Tibet

Post Xi Jinping taking over power in China, Tibet, through the 6th and 7th Work Forum held in 2015 and 2020 respectively, witnessed more organised efforts to target the roots of the Tibetan identity, taking strength from Buddhism and traditional culture. A series of wide-ranging initiatives have been put in place to assimilate and integrate the Tibetans into a larger economic, social, and cultural Chinese society.

The focus in the Tibet Work Forums has been on the border areas for creating dual-use infrastructure (Xiaokang settlements connected with all-weather roads, power grid and supply, digital connectivity, and social and health services). Initiatives in the name of development and progress were undertaken to exercise absolute control on its population residing in border areas as part of its security strategy and to further enhance border management.

China's sensitivity to the prevailing threat dynamics or the internal vulnerability in Tibet can be gauged from the opening remarks of Xi Jinping at the 7th Tibetan Work Forum in August 2020, just a few months post the Galwan episode. Xi stated the "strategy of governing Tibet in the new era" that includes "Sinicization" of Tibetan Buddhism and improving the ability of the Chinese Communist Party organisations and members at all levels "to deal with major struggles and prevent major risks".

In the latter part of his address, Xi laid considerable emphasis on ensuring "national security" and "ethnic solidarity" while urging patriotic re-education of the younger generation of Tibetans, with directions to officials to look into "strengthening ideological and political education in schools, put the spirit of patriotism throughout the entire process of school education at all levels, types and plant the seeds of loving China in the depths of the heart of every teenager".

Xi's remarks at the 7th Tibet Work Forum related to the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism, major struggles, major risks, national security, and ethnic solidarity acknowledge the omnipresent threat of the Tibetan

uprising, which can adversely affect Chinese national security exploiting the ethnic divide in Tibet.

Xi's remarks related to strengthening ideology and political education in schools underscore the massive efforts towards integration and assimilation of Tibetans in China undertaken in the last 70 years, more so in the last decade, with a security integrated development approach in Tibet. The evolving situation on the ground in Tibet suggests the desperation to mitigate the risk of separatism by targeting young minds and directing them towards the Chinese spirit of patriotism.

The CPC's priorities for Tibet, raised in the 7th Tibet Work Forum meeting, further highlight its focus on the critical threat or security dynamics, including border defence, frontier security, combating separatist activities, and forging an ironclad shield to safeguard stability and conserve the ecology of Tibet. The priorities of the 7th Tibet Work Forum are listed below:

- Ensure national security and enduring peace and stability, "steadily improve people's lives", maintain a good environment, solidify border defences and ensure frontier security.
- Focus on safeguarding national unity and strengthening "ethnic solidarity".
- Strengthen the building of leadership teams at all levels, cadre teams and primary-level party organisations in order to improve the capacity to respond to "major struggles" and prevent "major risks".
- Education and guidance should be provided for the public to mobilise their participation in "combating separatist activities", thus "forging an ironclad shield to safeguard stability".
- "Patriotism" should be incorporated into the whole process of education in all schools.
- Tibetan Buddhism should be guided in adapting to a socialist society and should be "developed in the Chinese context".
- Build a new modern socialist Tibet that is "united, prosperous, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful".
- Offer increasing support to Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai provinces in their Tibet-related work.
- Conserve the ecology of the "Qinghai-Tibet Plateau".

It appears from the priorities listed above that the Chinese authorities have acknowledged the fact that the country's aggressive policy in Tibet after Xi taking over power has its inherent limitations. The security-oriented development, wherein strengthening border area infrastructure

and addressing internal vulnerability through a policy of demographic shift through forced dislocation of ethnic minorities, has further instigated the local population, and there is a need to address the security concerns.

China's approach of creating dual-use infrastructure in border areas with Xiaokang settlements, along with other associated facilities, including road connectivity, has created a certain amount of asymmetry with India along the LAC in Tibet. However, it has failed to act as a strategic deterrent as envisaged by China, as is strongly evident from the firm stand taken by Indian troops at Dokala in 2017 and the aggressive posture in all sectors in Eastern Ladakh. The fast-paced infrastructure upgrade undertaken by India along its northern borders, including border roads and vibrant villages, is fast bridging the existing infrastructure asymmetry in Tibet.

The conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East has highlighted that technological superiority or asymmetry in numbers or size of forces alone cannot be relied upon to assure success in terms of military or political objectives of conflict. It also signifies that it is easy for a nation with higher conventional combat strength to start a conflict, but its further escalation and management could be a complicated and prolonged affair. In such a dilemma, grey zone warfare has evolved as the preferred choice of engagement by adversaries for shaping the battle space to their advantage. The ongoing conflict brings the spotlight on the role of non-state actors in waging a full-scale offensive against a superior force, as is evident in the current Israel-Hamas/ Hezbollah/ Houthi conflict.

Since April 2020, heightened tensions have prevailed along the LAC in Tibet between the Indian Army and the PLA in the absence of a major breakthrough. However, prolonged deployment in the high- altitude plateau has stretched Chinese resources. A major challenge has been the rotation of fresh troops from the hinterland and logistics sustenance with very limited local resources. It is assessed that China has stretched its military resources to their limit to reach a snapping point in putting up a brave front in sync with its narrative of resolutely defending the frontiers.

China appreciates its vulnerability in Tibet owing to numerous internal fault lines and external threats with unresolved border disputes with India. However, the Chinese government in Tibet continues to pursue a policy of "rule with an iron grip" to keep absolute control with the PLA's focus on both strengthening border defence as well as addressing its internal vulnerability through a pre-emptive approach.

The current Chinese policy on Tibet hinges on the phrase "absolute control", which entails "absolute control of territory, mineral resources, and water". However, a major challenge that China faces against its policy in Tibet

is that of internal vulnerability triggering large-scale public or political unrest. Absolute control cannot be voluntary and therefore, needs to be enforced upon the local population with a set of repressive policies, restrictions, censorship, economic incentives, and limited privileges.

Overall, any form of force generates friction, and it is this friction which has the potential to ignite the civil society to propel an uprising of mammoth proportions akin to the Arab Spring of 2010 or the most recent one witnessed in Bangladesh culminating in a regime change with the ouster of the democratically elected Prime Minister. Friction can reignite the fires of resistance groups with a host of contributing internal and external factors, which can finally put an end to the Chinese occupation in Tibet.
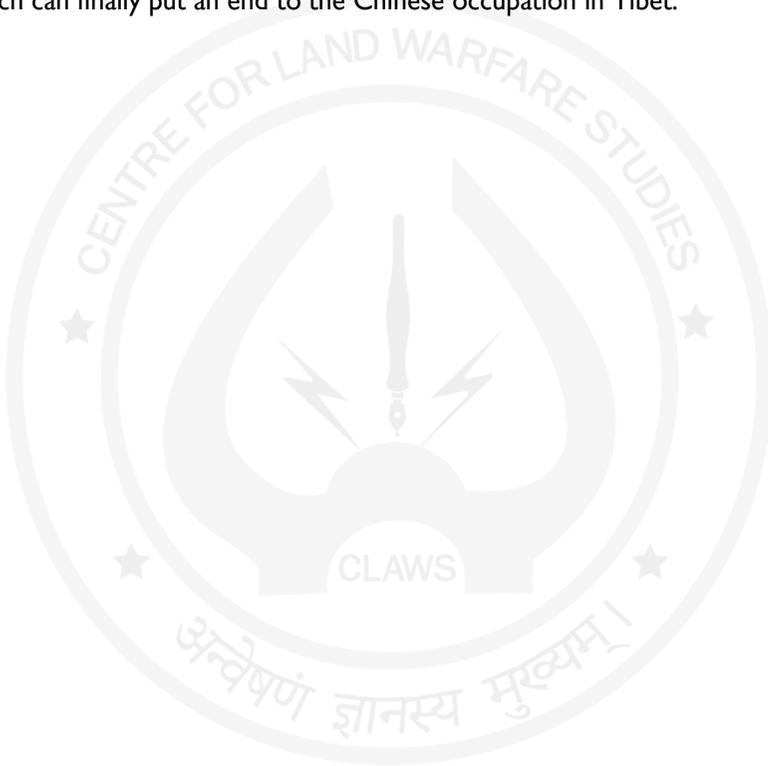
The Way Forward

The evolving internal and external dynamics in Tibet have far-reaching security implications for India on its northern borders with respect to its engagement with China from a foreign policy perspective on a host of issues, including disputed border areas and China's occupation of Tibet. The aggressive Chinese posture, a result of the existing infrastructure asymmetry, has resulted in a prolonged military standoff in Dokala (2017), followed by Eastern Ladakh (2020). India, through a plethora of initiatives, is all set to traverse the road map to be a developed nation by 2047 in the realisation of its vision of "Viksit Bharat-2047". Hence, its security interests must be addressed based on its fundamental strength of diplomacy, infrastructure, military, and economy.

The paper, so far, has put forth an overall picture of the evolving dynamics together with a historical perspective, a multitude of factors, approaches, initiatives and the ongoing challenges that China faces in its occupation of Tibet. In this chapter, an attempt is being made to list deliverables for decision-makers, think tanks, and researchers towards strategic policy formulation. It is being undertaken by highlighting India's inherent strengths and window of opportunities based on Chinese weaknesses and threats, which could be exploited to secure India's interest in Tibet from a position of power and strength.

Hawk Eye

This is an AI-based smart system of collation of inputs from all sources to be in place with the government to monitor and analyse even the minutest internal and external development in Tibet, including the Chinese government's response, together with its implication and study the effectiveness of China's recent global initiatives (development, security, and cultural initiatives), the negative fallout of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), engagements at regional multilateral forums like ASEAN, SCO and BRICS to gain diplomatic capital, defence cooperation/engagements, Chinese attempts in reaching out to conflicting parties/nations to broker peace and lastly, Chinese foreign policy narrative on major issues and fresh initiatives.

This system will also help in monitoring the Chinese security situation in the Pacific with respect to its aggressive stance on Taiwan, relations with the

US, Japan, and South Korea related to issues in the East China Sea (ECS) and other countries in the South China Sea (SCS) and analyse China's maritime outreach in the Indian Ocean Region and its diplomatic engagement with India's neighbours towards establishing or securing strategic assets like ports, monitoring stations, gas pipelines, etc.

The state of the Chinese economy is another factor which needs to be reviewed periodically as it funds its power projection and authoritarian rule through high investment in military modernisation, R&D on niche technology, infrastructure and loans/aids as part of its global diplomatic initiatives. Focus needs to be laid on monitoring the socio-economic public unrest based on severe post-Covid restrictions, issues triggered by rising unemployment in China, slowdown of growth due to reduced demand and consumption, fallout of stagnation in imports, challenges related to real estate sectors with a massive unsold inventory of housing and stress on earning professionals to take care of the ageing population.

Xi Factor

According to an article by Shahadat Hossain, published in the Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, "*Emotion often goes overlooked in discussions of international relations, yet it exerts a significant influence on geopolitical events, political dynamics and decision-making processes. Sometimes emotions supersede rationality, ultimately shaping foreign policy and decisions.*"

Xi Jinping is a key figure who had internally established himself as a cult figure in China in an attempt to even surpass Mao while influencing the geopolitical landscape of the world in the last little over a decade with China taking prominence in international affairs with a series of global initiatives (BRI, GDI, GSI and GCI). In the run-up to the 21st National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), slated for 2027, it is imperative to study the emotional fallout of Xi Jinping in the run-up to the next National People's Congress based on his grip on the CPC and PLA, emerging threats to his leadership, condition of the domestic economy, internal political challenges, results of the global initiatives and actions to counter other nations' strategy to limit Chinese sphere of influence.

Xi's desperation to remain in power at all costs has a bearing on his emotions, which are likely to influence decision-making. This has overarching security implications. Xi has created his position as supreme and the CPC is projecting his style of leadership and vision with "Xi's thoughts in the new era" as the only way forward for China for its very existence in the light of threats while the nation aspires towards the Centenary National Rejuvenation Goals of being a developed nation by 2047.

In scenarios where Xi is politically threatened due to prevailing events, conditions, circumstances, internal and external factors, including Tibet, or unrest due to a failing economy, he is likely to make emotionally-charged decisions. The decisions taken are likely to be unilateral, motivated by desperation to remain in power and purely based on the enhanced military capability of the PLA and economic strength to sustain a politico-military campaign either on China's Eastern front with Taiwan and South China Sea or Western front with India.

It is in this backdrop that the capability enhancement by China across the spectrum of conflict, factoring in cutting-edge technology, cyber, space and cognitive domains, needs to be comprehensively studied in light of the evolving geopolitical landscape. The internal factors developing within China and emerging threats need to be examined based on a set of indicators, events, and developments together with periodic assessment in time and space to generate options on our northern borders and be ready with an integrated synergised national response.

The political landscape has been deeply influenced by Xi Jinping's consolidation of power and his extensive anti-corruption campaign. Xi's strategy of dismantling previous factional structures, specifically targeting the Communist Youth League (CYL) and the Shanghai Clique, has significantly altered the internal dynamics of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC). The centralisation of authority around Xi is likely to have streamlined decision-making, reducing internal debate and potentially stifling diverse perspectives within the Party.

The consolidation of power resulted in a stable factional environment where Xi's allies dominate key positions but increased internal resentment, which could pose future challenges to Xi's leadership. The anti-corruption campaign initiated by Xi has been a tool for solidifying his authority. The recent purges at the highest level of government in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence further contribute to an environment of political repression, where dissent is less tolerated, and job security for high-ranking officials remains precarious.

Xi's control creates a political climate characterised by caution and uncertainty, as the fear of purges and the unpredictability of Xi's decisions shape the behaviour and stability of China's political elite. Overall, Xi's approach will lead to a more centralised and autocratic governance style, with significant implications for both the CPC's internal dynamics and China's broader political stability. However, in the absence of any successor to Xi, the resultant leadership vacuum may lead to a period of political leadership upheaval and turmoil with opposing factions attempting to regain their

influence on the CPC. The situation provides an opportunity which could be exploited by exercising options to further India's security interest.

Vibrant Village Programme

Building capacities, in terms of infrastructure and capabilities, with respect to skills, services and other deliverables, are key to a comprehensive border area development. The government of India, with focus on the northern borders, has launched the Vibrant Village Programme in 2023. Dr Puspita Das, MP-IDSA, in her issue brief titled "Vibrant Village Programme: A focused attempt to develop border areas?"[14] published on 24 August 2024, has exhaustively covered the government of India initiative to strengthen border area infrastructure.

The government of India approved the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) on 15 July 2023, covering 2967 villages in 46 border blocks of 19 districts in 4 states and 01 UT viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and UT of Ladakh. These villages will be developed in three phases. The first phase includes 662 villages, with an allocation of Rs 4800 crores for five years, out of which Rs 2500 crores has been earmarked for the development of road infrastructure to connect the vibrant villages. The figure below provides state and UT-wise details of VVP and year-wisefinancial allocation.

First Phase of Vibrant Village Programme

State/UT wise list of 662 villages are as follows:

Arunachal Pradesh	:	455
Himachal Pradesh	:	75
UT of Ladakh	:	35
Sikkim	:	46
Uttarakhand	:	51

Financial allocation approved for the VVP from 2022-23 to 2025-26 is as below:-

Scheme Component	Cost Estimate/Proposed Outlay (₹in Crore)				
	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024	FY 2024-2025	FY 2025-2026	Total
Road component	0.00	500.00	1000.00	1000.00	2500.00
Other components	50.00	700.00	750.00	800.00	2300.00
	Grand Total				4800.00

Source: Parliamentary Question dated 29 March 2023.

The initiative aims towards the comprehensive development of border villages, including constructing roads and dwelling units, provisioning for decentralised renewable energy, television and telecom connectivity, promotion of tourism and culture, skill development and entrepreneurship, and development of societies for employment generation. The objective is to provide basic amenities to the border residents as well as generate economic opportunities so that they do not feel left out of the 'development gains' and migrate from out of these remote areas.

The ibid issue brief of Dr Puspita Das highlighted increased recognition of the fact that the border population is a strategic asset with multiple roles, which contribute towards better security of India's frontiers. Border residents are an excellent source of information about the local environment through personal observations or through their networks of families and friends, some of whom may reside on the other side of the border. This network of border area residents can help law enforcement agencies develop a comprehensive picture of the border areas and better combat anti-nationals and criminal activities.

Border residents like nomads can serve as an informal layer for monitoring surveillance and acquiring inputs as they follow the livestock routes and hunter trails in remote uninhabited border areas, have good observation skills and act as early warning elements regarding any border transgression. A case in point has been the infiltration in the Kargil sector, which was first detected and reported by a local shepherd, Tashi Namgyal, on 3 May 1999, while searching for his yak.

Border residents provide logistical support to the border guarding forces and military. In remote border areas, long-rangepatrolling entails travelling for weeks or months. Therefore, villages located along the route act as a source of food, shelter and information. Villagers also allow the army or border guarding forces to recruit locals as porters and guides as well as workers for building defence infrastructure.

The settled population in the proximity of borders, especially in disputed areas, strengthens India's claims, especially along the LAC on the northern border. Article 7 of the 'Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for Settlement of India-China Boundary Question', which India and China signed in April 2005, stipulates that 'the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas'. It implies that the settlement of the local population in border areas is a key aspect of protecting our national interest and safeguarding against external threats of adversaries.

It is imperative to build a positive narrative around VVP and not limit it as a response strategy to Xiaokang undertaken by the Chinese in Tibet. VVP is a development-oriented initiative with the locals at its soul or core to evolve as the first citizens defending India's frontiers against the evil design of adversaries as '**Northern Frontier Sentinels**'. The other security stakeholder, primarily the army and border guarding force (ITBP) in the remote border areas, needs to synchronise its outreach to form an integrated ecosystem with shared resources in terms of logistics re-supply, healthcare and education.

Border area tourism needs to be promoted and regulated based on carefully studied capacities to strike the right balance in terms of protecting the sensitive ecology and preventing overexploitation. Sustainable living, based on tourism, local handicrafts, rearing of animals, birds and greenhouse cultivation, needs to evolve as the mainstay to encourage reverse migration to vibrant border villages.

PM Gati Shakti, the government of India's flagship initiative, needs to create a vertical specifically dedicated to border area development to facilitate multi-ministry convergence. It would enable the creation of logistics hubs connected to the vibrant remote villages, improve existing logistics infrastructure and enhance digital connectivity in areas along the northern border. The initiative would further complement the military logistics supply chain in the remote border area in building additional capacities for any future contingencies.

Civil-Military Dual- Use Infrastructure

The government of India, post-2020, has fast-tracked multiple dual-use infrastructure projects along the northern borders wherein the focus has been on building all-weather surface connectivity with a major focus on the construction of roads, tunnels, airfields and habitats. Phase 1 and 2 of the Indo-China Border Roads (ICBR) project identified 73 roads on the northern borders as strategic roads. The BRO has been entrusted with the construction of 61 roads, the majority of which are in various phases of construction.

Phase 3 of the ICBR has been initiated in Ladakh with the commencement of the construction of five strategic roads. It is only a matter of time before the border infrastructure along the northern borders would bridge the existing infrastructure asymmetry with China in Tibet. Funds have been allocated on a priority basis to avoid any delay in the projects. Tunnels have been identified as the key to providing all-weather connectivity to border

areas, prominent among them being the Sela tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, Zojila in J&K and Shinku La tunnel, which would open the third axis to Leh.

Dual-use infrastructure would further boost connectivity to the border areas with enhanced capacities in terms of digital, telecommunication, power, fuel stations, healthcare facilities, banks/ ATMs, airports/ ALG/ heliports/ helipads. The socio-economic development of border areas, leveraged by dual-use infrastructure, would be able to promote tourism and sustainable living in remote areas in sync with VVP, thereby facilitating the reverse migration of locals.

The locals, who are best acclimatised to operate in the rough terrain of the Himalayas, would further be an important asset in terms of manpower as guides, porters, and local labour for improvement of infrastructure or defences, for the supply of fresh produce and lastly, to act as early warning elements. Locals in the border areas would be ideal for recruitment in the Territorial Army and Scout Battalions of Border States (Ladakh, Garhwal, Kumaon, Sikkim and Arunachal).

Military Modernisation and Restructuring

The Indian Armed Forces have been undertaking a modernisation drive with self-reliance or 'Atmanirbharta' as the fundamental guiding principle in defence acquisition and absorption of technology to take on the challenges across the spectrum of conflict dominating all domains of warfare to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation. The modernisation phase underway is being seen as a period of transformation for the armed forces to align their capabilities and capacities with the rapidly evolving nature of modern combat. The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East are a testimony to how technology is playing a decisive role in bridging the asymmetry in numbers or enhancing overall capacities.

The Govt of India, since 2014, has initiated multiple projects and taken bold decisions to acquire modern technology for a robust and technologically advanced military. A series of steps have been undertaken by the armed forces to meets their modernisation goals with clear strategic objectives 'to enhance combat capabilities', 'improve operational efficiency to ensure mission effectiveness' and 'to achieve seamless integration across platforms to undertake joint operations'.

The government of India has undertaken reforms in higher defence organisations to enhance synergy within the armed forces with the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), heading the Department of Military Affairs. In view of the threats emanating from multiple fronts, the Indian Armed Forces are presently deliberating on restructuring the existing

service-specific command into three operational- specific tri-services theatre commands for which required legislations have already been put in place by the government. It is assessed that the Northern Theatre Command would be entrusted with the command and control of military resources to take on the security challenges evolving across India's northern borders in Tibet.

The Indian Armed Forces have also reoriented their training for smooth transformation and technology absorption, especially in the fields of network-centric warfare, cyber warfare, drone-based solutions and incorporating AI technology with advanced robotics. The forces are setting up collaborations with IITs for undertaking research projects on niche technologies to rapidly bridge the existing technology gaps.

The Indian defence industry has also shown active interest in defence projects and, within a short span of time, has delivered products ranging from high mobility vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and specialist vehicles to self-propelled guns/howitzers and light tanks (in final phases of trial). The indigenously developed equipment has already been deployed along the northern borders, which has generated tremendous confidence in the Make in India initiative that has further boosted the morale of the Indian troops.

As part of the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, the government of India has launched bold policy reforms in defence acquisition (DAP-2020) and production domain to open the doors to the Indian industry, which is having far-reaching positive implications. The government has created an ecosystem for the defence technology industry and start-ups to invest in R&D in collaboration with academia based on the requirement of technology solutions as spelled out by the armed forces.

Defence corridors have come up in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu for industries to be set up by Indian corporations to meet the demands of military hardware and technology solutions by the armed forces. The results of the government initiatives have been witnessed in an increase in the volume of defence exports to multiple countries, including Vietnam and the Philippines and a reduction in defence imports. The government initiatives and efforts of the armed forces are rapidly closing the existing asymmetry gap in defence technology with China, thereby denuding its technology edge.

Re-orientation of Foreign Policy

In light of the fast-paced evolving geopolitical situation, to secure India's national security interest, there is a need to have a re-orientation of the foreign policy with respect to engagement with neutral nations, immediate neighbours, world powers, regional forums/ groupings, institutions like the UN, WHO, ICJ, and ILO and re-alignment of engagement with China on

the issue of Tibet to counter its military coercion or Three Warfare or unrestricted warfare approach.

Contrary to the debt trap approach of China or its desire to be the leader of the Global South, India's foreign policy approach derives its strength based on the principle of "**Viswa Bandhu**" with equitable status in all forms of engagement with shared objectives and collective goals. The government of India has already embarked upon a number of such initiatives, and its international stature was duly acknowledged by one and all during the conduct of the G-20 summit in New Delhi in 2023.

India continues to engage with Russia and Ukraine even in the backdrop of the ongoing conflict. This has been seen as a major diplomatic triumph for having the capacity to broker peace. In light of the geopolitical scenario, India needs to keep a watch on the developing CRIC (China, Russia, Iran and North Korea) grouping while it engages with the US, Australia and Japan in QUAD. India needs to step up its efforts for initiating reforms in the UNSC to rightfully get its veto power or dissolve the very concept of veto.

India's engagement with its immediate neighbourhood (Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Maldives) needs to be taken up on high priority basis with diplomatic engagements at the highest level to sensitise the nations related to Chinese efforts towards regional collusivity and to learn from the experience of other nations related to debt trap diplomacy. India needs to regain its influence in ASEAN to protect its interest and also engage with countries in the South China Sea facing military coercion issues with China.

Turning Tables at the Roof of the World
India should take a tough diplomatic and military stand while negotiating the disputed border issues with China. The narrative built around the myth that India is averse to a 2.5 front threat, therefore, would soften its stand to avoid confrontation with China at all costs and should be debunked outright. A strong narrative has already been built through resolute military actions and resilience in talks with China to not accept anything but only the status quo ante related to the LAC in Eastern Ladakh.

On 21 October 2024, Indian and Chinese diplomats, after a couple of months of intensive deliberations and engagements, brokered a peace pact regarding disengagement and joint/coordinated patrolling in Eastern Ladakh. It is, indeed, a major breakthrough from a position of strength on the eve of the BRICS Summit at Kazan, where the Indian Prime Minister had a bilateral meeting with the Chinese President after five years. The peace pact involves disengagement on the ground from Depsang and Demchok,

pull back to positions before April 2020 and coordinated patrolling at all points, as was the case in the past. However, given the experience with China, the tempo of resilience, preparedness and robust posture need to be maintained all along the northern border, protecting Indian security and national interests.

The robust military posture, the conduct of joint military exercises, manoeuvres and live fire demonstrations all along the northern borders, together with the recently conducted Army Commanders Conference at Gangtok in the first week of October 2024, chaired by the Defence Minister of India, sends a strong message to China. The developments in the last couple of years, while engaging with China on the northern borders, clearly signify the will of the nation to stand firm with a strong government and military-backed growing economy and vibrant infrastructure development. It also sends a strong message that China did start the border misadventure, but India will decide the future course and outcome on its terms in space and time.

Regaining the strategic initiative to dictate the future course in Tibet needs to be an objective around which there should be convergence of all policies and efforts. The way ahead clearly lays out the priorities for all security stakeholders to adopt a policy of creating capabilities and capacities woven around the government of India's flagship "Vibrant Village Programme", with the mainstay being the civil-military dual-use infrastructure development approach along the northern borders.

Inclusive socio-economic border area development will be the driver, and local residents, as "**Northern Frontier Sentinels"**, will be the flag bearers of the change. The evolving geostrategic imperatives result in decimating China's perceived strategy of deterrence in Tibet based on dual-use infrastructure in border areas and forces it to adapt or react to India's strategy of compellence by turning the tables at the "roof of the world".

Conclusion

It is imperative that any study of geopolitics or geostrategy takes into account a comprehensive coverage of the evolving paradigm in relation to time and space with respect to key players or stakeholders, traces the roots in history, critical issues, internal and external dynamics and response strategies and thereafter, carry out a SWOT analysis. The study, based on the quality of material, would thereafter be able to suggest a way ahead in terms of engagement or provide a prognosis to assist the strategists or decision makers to steer the future course or approach in protecting the national interest.

The paper has traced the roots of independent Tibet in history together with its status as a buffer state on the British Himalayan frontier. The Chinese occupation of Tibet disintegrated the buffer state to put Indian and Chinese troops in confrontation with each other on the Himalayas, leading to conflict in 1962. The security situation on the McMohan Line all along the northern borders since 1962 till date has witnessed phases of heightened tensions and normalcy, even leading to violent clashes and skirmishes.

China, throughout its occupation of Tibet, has been regulating the ante along the LAC to highlight the security sensitivity of the borders to gauge the Indian response (test the waters) or to provide a nationalist narrative, which is primarily to divert its domestic concerns of political instability in Tibet. The paper has covered the contours of the Tibetan uprising to highlight its inherent strength, which, over the period, transcended from religion to political mobilisation, then to cultural identity and finally, took the form of the Lhakar movement, which is taken as the resistance movement to personal space.

To crush the resistance movement in Tibet, China had taken a multi-pronged approach to target the very roots of Tibetan culture and identity through narrative-building, enacting of laws, Sinicization, securitization, and militarisation. To provide further strength to the repressive rule to subjugate Tibet, China focused on its weakness related to extended lines of communication by adopting an approach of civil-military fusion and building dual-use infrastructure with a focus on border areas in which the Xiaokang border settlements have been the key component with a multilayered surveillance and monitoring system to pre-empt any developing threat.

The study of the threats that China faces in its occupation of Tibet highlighted multiple issues, prominent among them being the trust issue in the socio-economic sphere with inequalities in opportunities due to Hanisation, skewed growth indicators, religious intolerance and latent Tibetan militancy. China has been able to address its concerns related to extended lines of communication and its neighbours, Nepal and Bhutan.

However, the prevailing threat dynamics in Tibet continue to be a matter of concern even after seven decades of its repressive occupation. The strategic goal to assimilate Tibetans into the Chinese mainstream remains far-fetched. The criticality of Tibetan resistance as a major threat to national security has been publicly acknowledged by none other than Xi Jinping while laying down priorities during the 7th Tibet Work Forum.

Chinese authorities are targeting young minds with initiatives in primary residential schools. With Xi Jinping at the helm of affairs, it only shows the desperation to control the Tibetan resistance movement. The study highlights that the Chinese plethora of multi-dimensional initiatives and approaches to control the internal threat in Tibet has reached a threshold, signifying that there is a limit to what can be achieved in terms of gain commensurate with the efforts. It is this stage that needs to be exploited to secure India's national interest. Building a constructive narrative is equally important to complement the national effort. Therefore, India should not shy away from acknowledging Tibet as a neighbour on the northern borders, like in the past, with the naming of border guarding forces as the "Indo Tibetan Border Police".

As India traverses the path of "Viksit Bharat-2047", the four pillars which are laying the sound foundation are diplomacy (Vishwa Bandhu), infrastructure (PM Gati Shakti), military (Atmanirbharta) and economy (Make in India—5 trillion economy). The way ahead for India needs to focus on border area development with VVP as the mainstay to regain the initiative at the roof of the world to turn the tables from a position of power and strength through a robust and resilient strategic approach, relying on its fundamental strength of democracy and national power.

"Evolving Paradigm in Tibet with Civil-Military Dual-Use Integrated Approach: Options for India to Transform the Geo-Strategic Deterrence into Compellence" is an attempt to highlight that the same tool of civil-military fusion and creating dual-use infrastructure with focus on border areas of Tibet to act as a strategic deterrence can be decimated by India with turning the same tool against China as strategic compellence in the backdrop of Tibet's struggle for independence.

Notes

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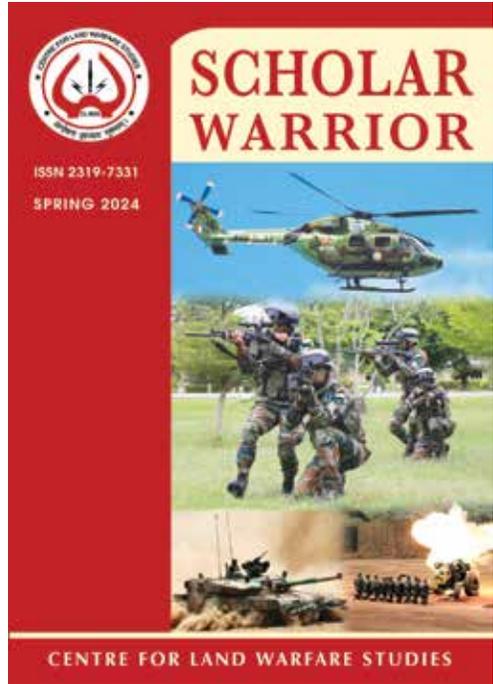
In the last couple of years, the prevailing geo-political situation in the aftermath of Chinese misadventure opposite Eastern Ladakh on the Indo-Tibetan border has witnessed strong resilience and robust response by India as a nation with its diplomacy at the global platforms and sheer strength of its armed forces. The civil military dual use infrastructure development projects to include Xiaokang settlement in close proximity of borders undertaken by China post Xi Jinping came to power as a strategic move towards achieving a Geo-strategic deterrence in Tibet has been decimated with multi-pronged approach undertaken by India. Current issue of Manekshaw paper holistically covers the evolving paradigm in Tibet, as to how India can use the same tool of Civil Military Fusion to turn the table of Chinese Geo-strategic deterrence into Geo-strategic compellence in the backdrop of the Tibetan's struggle for independence.

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