

Chinese Anti Access Strategy: Conceptualising and Contextualising an Indian Version

Arun Sahgal*

The asymmetric military balance prevailing between India and China is likely to get accentuated overtime if effective political and military steps are not taken by to address the same. The paper looks upon the need to develop an asymmetric strategy by India to prevent domination by inimical or hostile adversaries. This paper attempts to examine the principles of the Chinese Anti Access Strategy and use that as a model to develop the contours of an Indian 'Grand Strategy that entails developing military capabilities capable of inflicting damage and raising the cost of intervention. The strategy is aimed at dominating the area of interest through an observable military doctrine backed by a political to serve as dissuasive deterrent and for securing India's growing geopolitical space. The paper also stresses that, increasingly, India's doctrinal philosophy must focus on formulating a joint operational doctrine and developing high-tech weapons systems for fighting limited, high-intensity conflicts. In short it offers a conceptual framework for dealing with future security challenges and a possible way forward toward effective capability development.

Introduction

Chinese military strategists, have a long tradition of developing strategies and tactics for defeating superior military forces. In the early 21st century as the Chinese military and political power has grown Chinese strategic thinking is addressing the issue of a possible confrontation with a superior American military force sometime in not too distant future as both countries jockey for power and space in Asia.

Traditionally the Chinese military planners have been concerned with a large-scale invasion of their country, first by the United States and later the former Soviet Union. However around the 1980s Chinese strategic thinking began veering away from a long drawn people's war to the concept of a limited war, termed as "local wars under modern conditions". The Vietnam conflict in 1979 was a manifestation of this concept - a peripheral war fought to ensure the territorial integrity of

*Brigadier Arun Sahgal, PhD, is former Director Net Assessment, Integrated Defence Staff and member Task Force on Net Assessment and Simulation, National Security Council.

China. However In 1993 China issued a new set of military-strategic guideline called, “Active Defence for the New Period,”¹ followed by a new set of doctrinal regulations in 1999 that consisted of the Chinese military’s assessment of how its forces should be employed in the early 21st century. While these doctrinal regulations are classified; but from the discourse that followed it is apparent that the Chinese operational thinking had shifted to the broader problem of how to defeat a militarily superior adversary seen by many Chinese strategists and thinkers as an historical inevitability.

The Chinese term for their approach to this broader challenge is “using inferiority to defeat superiority”. Chinese doctrinal writings describe a wide range of actions and tactics consistent with how a militarily inferior country might defeat a militarily superior power. The operational thinking behind this is based on a concept that is loosely termed “anti access”, or area denial which if simply put implies preventing the build-up of superior forces by potential adversary. The concept has a deep meaning for India, and in fact is a shift from our traditional attrition oriented thinking to a more deterrence oriented grand strategy based on the ‘Chinese Anti Access’ strategy model, that deals with asymmetric threats and challenges.

Given India’s current level of military modernisation and the military industrial complex there is a growing conventional asymmetry with China. This is likely to increase over the next decade-plus, particularly as India’s indigenous defence industrial complex will not be able to match that of China. It therefore follows that India has to rework its doctrinal thinking and capabilities to deal with the growing Chinese political and military challenge.

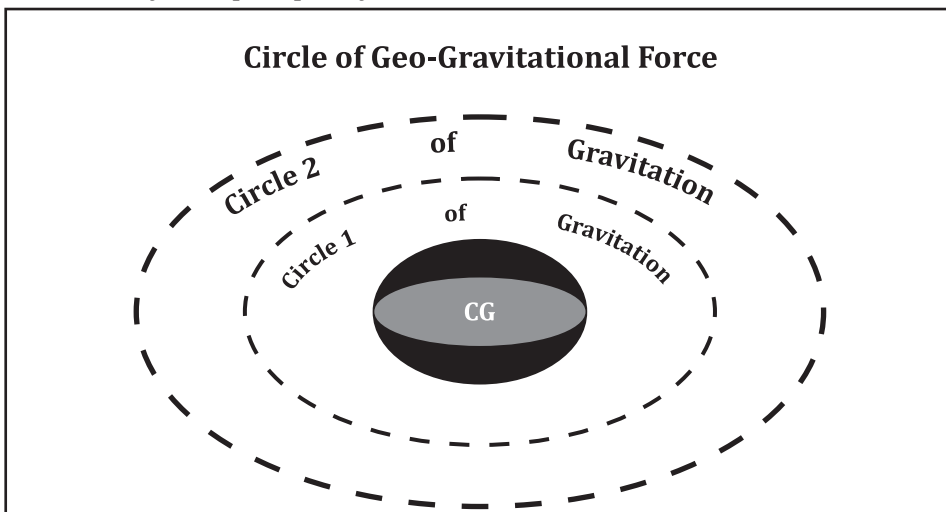
This paper is an attempt to study the principles of Chinese Anti Access Strategy and use it as a basis to develop the contours of a ‘Grand Strategy Framework’ for India together with a broad outline of the technological capacities that India must create and develop.

What is an Anti-Access Strategy?

At the conceptual level, it can be defined as an *asymmetric* strategy expressed as an observable military doctrine backed by an accompanying political posture aimed towards both securing and increasing nation’s geopolitical space. It cannot be equated to pre-emption or dislocation as these fall within the realm of symmetrical power equations with the ability to manage escalation dynamics. Anti Access on the other hand is a dissuasive strategy that seeks to highlight the likely costs of intervention for the potential aggressor. Thus nuanced within the strategy is the fact that the state will not allow itself to be dominated by inimical players or adversaries. The above

entails the developing of military capabilities that are seen to have the credibility to inflict the type of damage that is perceived and the consequences thereof; and second, the ability to dominate the area of interest from hostile influences and conversely preserving it from domination. In a sense it is a denial strategy that aims at preventing coercion or direct interference by dramatically raising the costs of military intervention in an area of strategic interest.

Strategy involves operations or actions, to deter, delay or prevent actors from entering or interfering in the core zone of interest. This aspect is best described by the theory of the “Geo Gravitational State”. A geo gravitational state can be described as a big power, located in a relatively geo strategic area of a region, which exercises strong gravitational pull in terms of political stability, economic growth and regional security. Owing to its relatively advantageous comprehensive national power, it gradually becomes a key venue for regional ‘political and diplomatic’ activities and security initiatives. Economically it acts as the engine of regional economic growth on which peripheral states become increasingly dependent. Culturally, it plays a leading role in determining the people’s way of life in their region and is the primary driver for regional integration and is a determinant of regional stability and prosperity.



In conceptual terms a geo gravitational state acts to preserve its circles of influence while preventing inimical forces from dominating the same. Seen in above terms the Anti Access Strategy, is an “active defensive strategy” aimed at preserving and maximising a country’s strategic space through “deterrence” exercised by “strong military capability” that is intended to raise the costs of intervention for a potential challenger. Logically, this is an asymmetric strategy that deals with the challenge posed by a militarily and technologically superior adversary.

Strategy therefore essentially reflects the *intent* of a state to reorient the geostrategic status quo to protect its growing interests in its region in concert with its developing comprehensive national power (CNP). This is underscored by the fact that the state as an aspiring regional power would want to expand its sphere of influence in concert with its political, economic and security ambitions. Thus, “anti-access” and “area denial” often go hand-in-hand.

Understanding China’s Anti-Access Strategy as a Concept

The reason for analysing China’s case is that we are more interested in discerning the dilemmas of the weak rather than the counter strategies of the superior power. A study of China’s strategy might lead to the inculcation of some of the strategic principles (albeit contextualized to India’s periphery) into India’s own military-strategic doctrine in order to have a more systematic and logical basis for India’s defence modernisation plans as it confronts geopolitical challenges over the next decade-plus in its regional periphery.

As stated earlier PLA strategists by 1985 had arrived at the judgment that local, limited wars triggered by disputes over maritime and land borders were more likely than a massive foreign invasion of China. Thereafter, the PLA adopted several new strategic principles, such as “victory through elite troops,” “gaining initiative by striking first,” “victory over inferiority through superiority,” and “fighting a quick battle to force a quick resolution.”² As the Chinese military modernisation began to take shape Chinese military strategists began writing about possibility of “local wars under modern conditions”. After the 1991 Gulf War which brought home to Chinese leadership role of technology and effect based capability in future wars they began developing the doctrinal concept of “local wars under high technology conditions” the central theme of which was recognition of technology as a force enhancer if not multiplier. Consequently in concert with the RMA with Chinese characteristics they began fielding the integrated C4ISR system together with giving increasing prominence to space, cyber and information warfare in their military doctrinal thinking and began preparing for local wars under conditions of “informationisation”. This essentially meant upgrading the entire detection to shooter chain through multilayer integrated C4ISR systems employing multiple sensors and media connectivity backed by automated real time information support system. To achieve operational synergy, PLA strategists began to advocate the principle “joint operations” (JO), which emphasised both “equality” and “partnership” among the four services (ground, naval, air, and missile (Second Artillery)) while each service conducts relatively independent sub-campaigns.³

In a sense the Chinese strategy of “anti access” is a construct of the above broad strategic thinking. China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) does not employ the terms “anti-access” or “area denial” but uses the term *shashoujian*, or “assassin’s mace” to convey the same principle. An alternative term that Chinese strategists use is “counter-intervention” strategy. Since the end of the Cold War, China’s political and military leadership has grappled with the dilemma of how to deal with possible confrontation with world’s most dominating military and technological power in East Asia. The use of force in the first Iraq War (1991) was a seminal moment for all regional powers, and China has sought to draw lessons from American intervention for its own modernisation programme. The 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis further convinced PLA strategists that a likely war which the PLA should be prepared to deter or fight is a medium-sized local war while preventing major power intervention.

Chinese military scholars have dedicated great efforts to study the change in the requirements of warfare from the mechanisation-firepower age to the information-firepower era. At the heart of this introspection was the candid admission that China’s military development had lagged behind the West and Russia and would remain so until the early decades of the 21st century. Thus, in order to overcome this inferiority, China would need to dedicate resources towards an asymmetric strategy – pursue a path to acquiring select strategic and conventional weapons platforms, informationisation, jointness, honing new combat tactics and doctrines, all as part of a technologically and economically feasible counter-response to the forward deployed forces of the US.

PLA Air Force (PLAAF) officer, Senior Colonel Yang Zhibo has offered the most comprehensive explanation of *shashoujian*:

Basically, it is whatever the PLA needs to win future local wars under modern high-tech conditions...Weapons and equipment are the systems needed to deal with the enemy’s electronic warfare and information warfare...[Shashoujian] [c]ombat methods include attacking different types of weapons, such as early warning aircraft, stealth aircraft, and cruise missiles, as well as the combat principles to deal with different situations...It is something that all the services will use. It is an all-army, all-location, composite land, sea, and air system.⁴⁴ Bruzdinski, Jason E., Chapter 10, “Demystifying Shashoujian: China” Major General Wang Baocun, a leading PLA scholar on military strategy and an expert on information warfare, concluded in 1997 that ten features will characterise warfare in the information firepower era of the 21st century: 1) limited goals in conflicts; 2) wars of short duration; 3) less damage; 4) larger battlefields and less density of troops; 5)

transparency on the battlefield; 6) intense struggle for information superiority; 7) unprecedented force integration; 8) increased demands for command and control; 9) strategic objectives achieved through precision, not mass; and, 10) attacks on the weaknesses, not strengths, of the enemy's "combat system."⁵

China's Strategic Principles to Balancing a Technologically Superior State⁶

The objective is not to annihilate the enemy, but to paralyse it. PLA strategists often discuss the importance of conducting *shashoujian* strikes on critical infrastructure that supports military operations. Some targets identified by Chinese military scholars include command and control centres and networks, early warning and intelligence systems, remote sensing platforms (specifically unmanned aerial vehicles and reconnaissance satellites), and military logistics systems. PLA scholars view these systems as operational dependencies – the relative weaknesses of a superior enemy – and more vulnerable to attack than the relative strengths (weapons and platforms) of a superior adversary.⁷ In sum, contemporary PLA strategists believe that "the effective use of effect based strategy can reverse the asymmetric balance of combat strength".

Strategic Principles

- **Avoiding direct confrontation** – "Non-contact war", since a frontal attrition oriented contest would certainly ensure defeat of Chinese forces, the Chinese strategists are acutely aware that a force-on-force high technology battle with the US is akin to "throwing an egg against a rock". The focus instead is on recognising and exploiting the vulnerabilities of the stronger adversary.
- **Seizing the initiative early** – "We always seek to keep our opponents from bringing their might into full play". To avoid a direct confrontation, preventing the adversary from deploying its combat forces in the region is vital. This implies targeting and attacking the adversary's transportation, bases, and other facilities and systems besides the weak points of its main combat forces.⁸ Denying or slowing an adversary's access to the theatre of conflict is consistent with seizing the initiative early as limiting the forces the adversary has in the theatre during the initial stages of conflict will provide the PLA with a local force ratio that will contribute to its ability to seize and hold the initiative.⁹
- **Military Surprise** – This is very similar to Admiral Gorshkov's dictum: the "battle for the first salvo". Seizing the initiative axiomatically requires the element of surprise and thus creates the logic for pre-emption.
- **Concentrated attack** –
 - o Chinese refers to this as "keypoint strikes" to convey the idea that the PLA will try to paralyse the adversary by attacking the critical nodes in its

systems. Concentrated attack – the idea that the best capabilities should be coalesced and used for high-intensity attacks on vital targets early on in the conflict – supports this principle.

- o China is rediscovering Clausewitz's idea of the "centre of gravity" (COG): "One must keep the dominant characteristics of both belligerents in mind. Out of these characteristics a certain centre of gravity develops, the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all of our energies should be directed." In other words, because there is a single enemy the COG serves as a focus for marshalling a nation's ends, ways and means, and a corresponding single COG on the friendly side that has to be protected against attack.
- o As stated earlier this includes targeting the adversary's command, information and logistical systems, with the objective of complicating and delaying its ability to mobilise forces and platforms under its command and hence achieving a denial into the principal theatre. For instance, damaging or destroying select targets like runways and fuel and ammunition supplies at the enemy's terrestrial air and naval bases (Okinawa, mainland Japan or Osan and Kunsan in South Korea) or attacking mobile platforms (aircraft carriers), and the US stealth aircraft, which would prevent them from operating effectively or optimally. Even the threat of successful attacks, would likely have the effect of deterring the deployment of additional aircraft into the theatre.¹⁰
- o A second category of anti-access operations include counter-C4ISR operations or targeting the adversary ability to collect, process, and disseminate information to forces in the theatre (command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance or C4ISR systems). PLA strategists identify satellites, terrestrial and airborne early warning radars, communications infrastructure, command posts, and computer networks as the principal targets in this regard. Means of counter-attack include jamming, anti-satellite weapons, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, aircraft with long-range air-to-air missiles, stealth aircraft, computer network operations (cyber warfare), and electromagnetic pulse weapons.¹¹
- **Achieving information superiority** – This lies at the heart of the potential success of an anti-access strategy because without information superiority Chinese forces would lack situational/battlefield awareness ("eyes and ears") and consequently would not have the necessary data to monitor, target and implement the other principles of anti-access (surprise, seizing the initiative, keypoint strikes etc.). Chinese strategists assess that political

and economic conditions constrain the scope of modern war, and this provides an opportunity for the combatant who dominates the information battlefield in the opening rounds of a conflict to control its outcome.¹² The PLA has established information warfare units to develop viruses to attack enemy computer systems and networks. They have also developed tactics and measures to protect friendly computer systems and networks. Computer Network Operations have been an integrated part of PLA exercises since 2005, simulating first strikes against enemy networks.¹³ Since China's dependence on electronic communication systems is rising, its own vulnerability to an anti-access strategy would presumably increase in the years ahead. China has sought to operationalise its anti-access strategy by focusing on the dual aspects of,

- (a) military-technical development in select spheres such as,
- Long-range ballistic and cruise missiles; with anti-ship, anti-radiation, runway-cratering, and other specialised warheads.
 - Offensive and defensive computer network operations capabilities.
 - Counter-space weapons capable of both destructive and non-destructive effects.
 - Advanced naval air defence.
 - Deep-water mines and advanced torpedoes.
 - Trans-regional mobility of forces

(b) Simultaneous attention has been paid to organisational restructuring with a focus on inter-service jointness for operating under an integrated net-centric command platform.¹⁴ The overall goal is rapid, stable application of command decisions by the PLA, while an adversary struggles to regain access to information and avenues for disseminating commands.¹⁵

In order to catch up with advanced military powers, the PLA has decided that its modernisation should encompass both mechanisation and informationisation. From the Chinese perspective this dual focus is vital. Unlike the advanced military powers that have mastered the development of platforms and hardware and are now focusing on honing and finessing the informationisation of their militaries, China's mechanisation levels are lagging a generation behind. Thus, in 2002, the Central Military Commission adopted the policy "to accomplish the dual-historical task of mechanisation and informationisation". For China, this essentially means creating a network that will digitally link command and control systems, information and reconnaissance assets with weapons platforms to provide a high level of situational awareness both for the operational commander as well

as at the tactical level and real/near term sensor to shooter capability. The PLA informationisation program will go through several stages, and can be expected to be a fully functioning network not before 2020.¹⁶ To be sure, this does not imply that Chinese capabilities will have leapfrogged to US or even Russian levels by the next decade. Nonetheless the key strategic capabilities under acquisition include developing wide area surveillance and targeting capabilities, new long and medium range ballistic and cruise missiles, new generation of submarine and surface combatant forces as also new generation advanced aircrafts, and growing capabilities for space warfare etc. Given the current stage of development the capabilities in pipeline will become operational by end of the present decade or latest by 2025. For example the Chinese ASBM is already operational and the missile brigade Unit 96219 equipped with DF21D is located at Qingyum in Yunnan province¹⁷. Similarly a long range (4000 Km) cruise missile DH 20 is under development and likely to be operational by 2015.

To operationally embrace this change in Chinese war-fighting philosophy, the PLA developed the concept of Integrated Joint Operations (IJO) in late 2002. Prior to 2002, Joint Service Operations (JO) was a priority area for doctrinal modernisation. While, JO was service based (akin to our standards of jointness) with each service implementing plans for their own sub-campaign, the IJO instead relies on a network or system of units from all services providing a cascade of capabilities required for the joint operation in a flat and compact organisation lead by the joint force commander. In the JO, the service separation implies that joint operation would be limited and time bound as each of these services possesses its own information system *that lacks effective lateral linkage and channels for communication and information transmission*; whereas in the IJO, the integrated units and platforms where service boundaries are blurred *implies that jointness would be a permanent state of affairs*.¹⁸ In sum, the JO's, effectiveness depends on a pre-planned division of labour between specialised services (army, navy, air force, missile force). In the IJO, the division of labour is between different units capable of multiple functions in different spatial domains with all these units plugged to a common information network to achieve interconnectedness, inter-communications and interoperability on near/ real-time basis. The advantages of the IJO are tremendous. The net-centric, real-time characteristic of IJO has alleviated the problem of long-range weapons guidance and target identification and acquisition, while simultaneously remaining outside the range of the adversary's firepower.¹⁹ Such a force multiplier is precisely what a successful anti-access strategy requires.

To organise such an "informationalised" force, Chinese military literature generally identifies five characteristics of integrated joint operations: unified command,

unified planning, integrated operations, integrated C4ISR, and joint logistics. The Chinese vision of net centric warfare envisages a level of jointness that has not been achieved even in the West. In contrast, in the US, while there are joint task forces, the primary formations below joint task force level in US doctrine are service-specific in nature and have significant experience executing operations under joint plans and command.²⁰

By developing its joint doctrine early in its modernisation process, the PLA is in the unique position that its organisational and technological modernisation, its training and professional military education, can be driven by defined doctrinal principles particularly since they unify the transformation.²¹ To be sure, this is an ongoing process and most analysts of the PLA are of the opinion that true jointness would take *at least* another decade.²²

Why does India need an “anti-access” strategy or a strategy of “active defence”?

In the face of ever increasing military asymmetry it is important for India to look at the growing Chinese challenge from the perspectives of technological and military capabilities. The broad idea is identify select asymmetric technologies, force capabilities and postures that can impose varying degrees of costs on inimical powers and their proxies with designs to meddle in the subcontinent. *Plainly put, India needs a review of its geostrategic thinking.* Within the above construct the geopolitical context of Southern Asia is one of those immutable factors that must be incorporated when conceiving an Indian *geostrategy*.²³ As Jakub Grygiel says,

...geopolitics is the world faced by each state. It is what is ‘outside’ the state, the environment within which, and in response to which, the state must act...A foreign policy that does not reflect the underlying geopolitics cannot increase or maintain the power of the state.²⁴

The geopolitical division of the subcontinent in 1947 permanently altered India’s potential to project power on its western frontiers and beyond. Partition, in the words of former imperial strategist, Olaf Caroe, was the “negation” of India’s power.²⁵ And far from being a defensive stalemate, Pakistan and its benefactors have ensured that India’s entire military posture and security institutions have been engaged in containing this threat to the Indian heartland. In post-nuclear conditions, Indian foreign policy has also flirted unsuccessfully with several constructivist and liberal arguments to re-alter the calculus of Pakistani rulers even as, during the same period, Pakistani rulers were exploring innovative means to use force below the nuclear threshold!²⁶

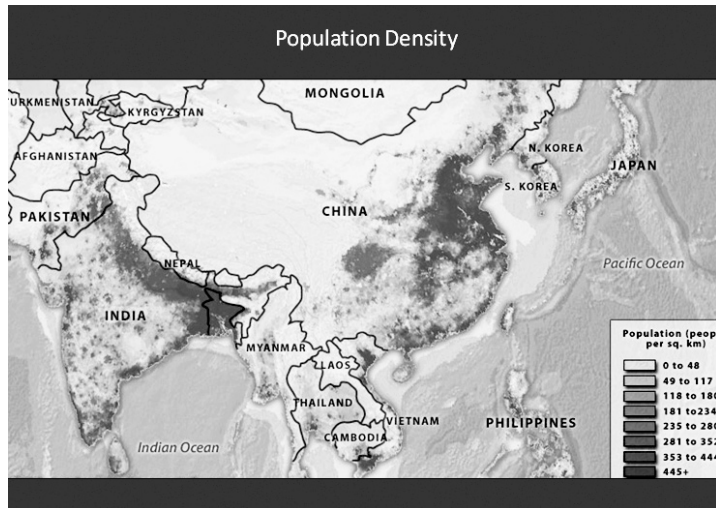
India needs to take a broader and farsighted geostrategic perspective on the territory that lies west of the Radcliffe Line and the Line of Control in Kashmir, since this will remain an attractive bridgehead to influence, target and constrain a rising India that will possess competitive coercive capabilities.²⁷ Both the US and China are likely to continue to influence the regional balance of power by virtue of arms transfers and by their multidimensional relationships with Pakistan, which provides each of them vital leverage vis-à-vis India. This requires India to remain more attentive and vigilant to the relationship between Pakistan and its two principal benefactors than has hitherto been the case.

India's long-term challenge lies in converting the Pakistani bridgehead into a buffer and finally into a conforming neighbour while simultaneously attempting to influence the cost-benefit calculus of Washington and Beijing. While India's political elite has voiced its frustration at being locked in a sub-conventional regional conflict, it has shown neither the skill nor the resolve to impose costs on its troubled neighbour or on its benefactors. It may suffice to say that only a policy of *internal* balancing can enable India to transcend the sub-system balance of power.

The geopolitical context of India's northern frontiers subsumed in the rise of China and its growing assertiveness and attempts to shape the first and second tiers of the concentric circles within its gravitational power backed by military modernisation have just about begun to sink into the Indian political mindset. China's absorption of the Tibetan buffer has, provided it the geostrategic upper hand, together with forays into India's South Asian neighbourhood which remains estranged from us for one reason or the other.

Consequently Chinese forces positioned on the Tibetan plateau and their incremental modernisation and capability enhancement have compelled India to take a defensive position and deny the PLA potential access to and political leverage over the sub-Himalayan space. This has forced India to improve its logistical infrastructure in the Eastern and Western sectors on the Himalayan borders, and improve the tactical military balance on its frontiers but clearly asymmetry abounds. There is another geopolitical factor that India must account for: China's military-industrial and political heartland is concentrated largely on its eastern seaboard, several thousand miles away from the Indian heartland outside the reach of most of India's offensive capabilities. This basically implies that until India develops long range strategic deterrents such as long range ballistic missiles of the Agni 5 variety (likely to be tested later this year); together

with sea based deterrent, long range cruise missiles and acquires a greater reach in naval and air power, to bolster its diplomatic position in the event of a conflict,²⁸ this geopolitical context will remain relevant even after a potential resolution of the boundary dispute.



Threat from China: Applying Anti Access Strategy - Concept of No Contact War

There is a growing understanding within the Chinese military that the Indian military modernisation programme; howsoever limited it maybe gives it the capacity and capability to deal with any Chinese incursions thereby raising the bar for intervention and escalation control. There is a fear that this could degenerate into an 'attrition battle' with heightened escalation dynamics that could cross the nuclear threshold. The Chinese term this as India's doctrine of "limited conventional war under conditions of nuclear deterrence".

This is leading to a perception that force application models for any likely military option on the northern border would require much higher degrees of build up and force levels to achieve even modest politico-military objectives. Additionally a large scale border war with a country like India has the potential of creating serious political and economic consequences for China. A stalemate or a limited Indian victory could seriously impact the image of China as a pre-eminent power in Asia, impact its standing along its somewhat turbulent periphery, lead to worsening of its internal economic situation, which could aggravate social problems resulting in social turmoil which in turn could endanger the legitimacy of Communist rule. Thus the escalation to serious confrontation is subsumed in serious political risk and is something which China will need to calibrate much more seriously.

To deal with possible conflict scenario with India and to keep escalation dynamics at lower levels China could employ nuances of its Anti Access strategy through a doctrine of coercion - loosely termed as the doctrine of “No Contact War”. This is a form of politico military coercion, that focusses on political, economic, and psychological effects. The tactics employed under this doctrinal thinking include applying pressure by intimidating deployment, demonstration attacks, creating no-go zones to impede freedom of movement and targeted cyber and information attacks, similar to those employed in doctrine of area denial but in the form of a ‘punitive coercive strategy’.

The focus will be on both, military and non-military targets with low collateral damage to maximise political gains. Targets could include economic, infrastructural and networks aimed more at political decapitation than force destruction. Forces employed for such attacks could among others include;

- Theatre-Range Ballistic Missiles (TBMs) including equipped with manoeuvrable re-entry warheads, ASBM, Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs). The evidence of the 53 Missile Base of Second Artillery with three missile brigades located in and around Kunming in Yunnan province is significant. From this location majority of Eastern and Central India is within range of these missiles including Bay of Bengal and South China Sea.²⁹
- Precision strikes by Anti Ship Ballistic and medium to long range cruise missiles, CNO (attack, defence and exploitation), IW/EW attacks, backed by minimal force deployment to include regular and Special Forces.
- The entire concept of “No Contact War” is aimed at striking key points (including targets at land and sea) to paralyse enemy’s political and operational system by immobilising its command structures. There are two possible dimensions of this kind of warfare. One is termed as “intimidation warfare”. It involves exerting military pressure through show of force i.e. actions short of war, and includes large-scale military exercises, computer network and, electronic attacks, psychological operations and provocative air and naval activity.
- At the high end of the intimidation spectrum is “Paralysis Warfare” that could include, cyber warfare and electronic attacks, missile and long-range precision strikes, special operations and sabotage missions. The aim is to achieve a quick, decisive victory by “rapidly paralysing command and control system and political and military nerve centres; create “no-go zones” off India’s coasts with “assassin’s mace” such as ASBM, high power microwave E bombs, laser weapons etc to prevent the freedom of movement of Indian ships in Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea. The efficacy of the concept lies in Indian capacity to deal with this challenge through

demonstrated capabilities. In the next part of the paper we will examine whether India needs an anti access strategy of its own and if so what are its possible contours in outline.

- Within the above context it should be apparent that, India's security managers need to conceive of a strategy that ensures that great power interference in the neighbourhood remains minimal and the periphery peaceful. There is thus a need to develop those capabilities in concert with soft power that can either deny or increase the costs of unilateral strategic involvement/interference on the Indian periphery. Simultaneously, a policy of reassurance and actively shaping the political choices of its neighbours by providing them the intellectual and technological wherewithal to fulfil their developmental goals will preclude an invitation to extra-regional patrons to occupy that space.³⁰ To be sure, while official commentary has stressed on a vision for a 'peaceful periphery,'³¹ it is declaratory and too vague a proposition to serve as a grand plan; it also exudes a passive posture as if India is pleading to be left alone to pursue its developmental endeavours. Additionally, by making the notion of a pyrrhic peace an end in itself, the quest for a 'peaceful periphery' might imply making premature concessions to adversarial states, resulting in geopolitically adverse outcomes.

Contextualising anti-access: A Multivector approach for India

India's self-image as the geopolitical heart of Southern Asia and a potential pole has not been matched by military-technical or doctrinal choices by both the national security and strategic establishment. India's entire military posture until recently has been predicated on a defensive stalemate vis-à-vis Pakistan that has lasted since 1947 and a similar posture vis-à-vis China, euphemistically called dissuasive?

To be sure, India was compelled to adopt this policy as structural response to the dynamics of the Cold War that transformed Pakistan into a frontline proxy state with relatively advanced military capabilities and a growing nuclear arsenal. Pakistan's seemingly unaltered status as a recipient of Western and Chinese military technologies, which regardless of the tactical or strategic rationale of its benefactors implies adverse and unequivocal consequences in the regional military balance make it imperative for India to respond. Similarly against China an environment of unmanageable asymmetry is slowly emerging with the hard power differential gradually increasing. India's aspiration to emerge as the pre-eminent regional power in Southern Asia thus implies a 360 degree or multivector approach towards an anti-access/area-denial strategic philosophy, which should act as a strategic deterrence. The three vital theatres are Pakistan, China, and peninsular India.

Pakistan-specific

The most succinct argument for an anti-access strategy is to challenge the “one-step escalation scenario” that has enabled Pakistan to prosecute a proxy war in Kashmir and the Indian heartland while relying on a nuclear shield to stave off a limited Indian punitive response.³² The dubious argument of “one-step escalation” has been sought to be ingrained in the security discourse on South Asia with Western analysts and scholars offering an intellectual rationale for this dynamic. Western scholars have also sought to de-legitimise and discredit India’s attempts (Cold Start, flexible response etc.) to conceptualise and operationalise a counter-strategy to Pakistan’s proxy war as a self serving argument concerned about a nuclear holocaust in South Asia.³³ India, for its part has perhaps not been savvy enough to couch its “Cold Start” in terms of limited political-military objectives (i.e. rolling back of Pakistan’s terror network in PoK and imposing cost and caution on the cult of proxy warriors in Pakistan’s military thinking) and articulate a robust anti-access (flexible response) strategy.

In order to refute the argument ‘that India has no options to deter Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the nuclear age other than waging an all out conventional invasion that quickly escalates into a nuclearised crisis’, India *can* develop an anti-access and Indian version of ‘No Contact War’ strategy (with the attendant creative innovations in the nuclear doctrine to match Pakistani brinkmanship if that contingency arises³⁴).

If successfully operationalised, it will offer credible punitive options and flexibility to the political-military leadership to signal a deterrence policy vis-à-vis Pakistan that will also be discerned by its benefactors. This idea is based on Thomas Schelling’s “suggestive escalation” first articulated in *Arms and Influence* (1966). These are deliberate escalatory actions to deter the opponent from pursuing its proxy war. They could take the form of threats or even actual use of limited force. To be sure, this strategy is predicated on astute escalation management backed by demonstrated capability together with modicum of resolve within the political elite.

To put it plainly, Pakistan’s state-sponsored terrorism can be deterred by effective anti-access and no contact war effect, based capabilities on the lines described earlier, aimed to complicate or deter offshore balancers from intervening or assisting in a bilateral conflict scenario, and, thereby providing space for the Indian political-military leadership to accomplish their limited objectives.³⁵ In sum, anti-access and area-denial capabilities will seek to prevent “horizontal” or geographic escalation and allow India to rapidly accomplish its limited political-military objectives.

China-Specific

China's relative geostrategic advantage in terms of the topographical and geophysical features of Tibet since the 1950s has enabled it to gain leverage over India's political-military position in the sub-Himalayan space. As mentioned, geography has compelled India to stake a defensive position on the northern frontier with China. Prevailing military doctrines are subsumed in defensive thinking predicated upon absorbing the shock of Chinese limited offensives and launching offensives of our own to restore the status-quo ante. This policy underscores the capacity to manage the escalation which could follow. Such a purely defensive "attritional" orientation is now outdated given the growing conventional asymmetry, technological options and doctrinal innovations available to both India and China and the contemporary priorities of Chinese political elite that no longer place a premium on large scale interventions in enemy territory. An anti-access strategy with the requisite capabilities will offer:

- 1) The Indian political-military leadership with flexible options to deter China from leveraging its natural theatre-specific advantages to pressurise or coerce India.
- 2) From a dispute resolution perspective, successful operationalisation of an anti-access strategy and the attendant changes in the theatre doctrine towards "active defence" will produce a modicum of symmetry in India-China relations in the Himalayan theatre and thus improve the bargaining power for political negotiators (i.e. special representatives) to arrive at a mutually acceptable and geostrategically logical solution for the border dispute with China. Plainly put, an anti-access strategy purports to create an environment of managed asymmetry and alter the theatre balance of power in India's favour, which could consequently reshape Chinese political calculus towards both Indo – China relations in general and on the border dispute in particular.

Simultaneously, the larger conventional asymmetry vis-à-vis China (both in terms of comprehensive national power and combat war-fighting capabilities) must also be counteracted with an equal priority to operationalising a credible second-strike nuclear capability (Agni 3/5, strategic bombers, SSBNs) and developing space based soft and hard power capabilities. Areas of focus must be three; detection which demands robust ISR capabilities, second and more importantly sensor fusion which will be incorporated through a C4ISR system resulting in precision strike capabilities. Last and importantly India will need to develop both info and CNO capabilities to demonstrate both will and resolve. All three must be backed by robust strategic capabilities without which, India would few options for deterring a Chinese

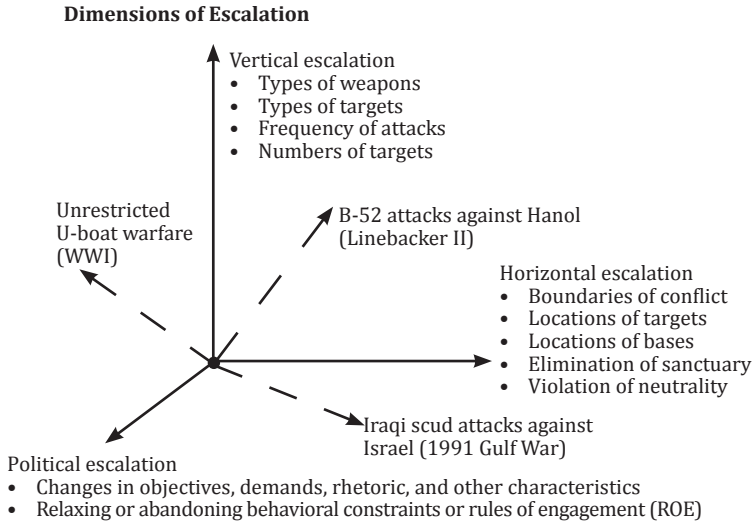
conventional escalation should India's anti-access strategy fail in its deterrence mission. Bluntly put, India must have the capability to raise the levels of violence if "vertical escalation" comes to pass.

Northern-Indian Ocean Region

India's near abroad in the northern Indian Ocean is an important theatre that could impinge upon the core continental priorities that have made pursuing an anti-access strategy imperative in the first place. Historically, there is a precedence of extra-regional powers seeking to deter India from pursuing its regional security agenda.³⁶ While India's current portfolio of 'strategic partnerships' makes it unlikely in the near-term that extra-regional actors will physically or threaten to intervene in India's near abroad to meddle in bilateral issues, the quality of India's relative rise (comprehensive national power potential) in the medium-term will inevitably draw in actors if India is seen to be pursuing policies that alter the regional balance of power.³⁷

Finally, aside from a purely defensive albeit offensive defensive rationale (anti-access to deter extra-regional involvement in sub-continental disputes and thereby isolating the area of political-military operations), India, like other rising powers, has traditionally viewed its periphery as a natural sphere of influence.³⁸ The littoral waters around the subcontinent are viewed as a strategic maritime space where India can engage with all regional actors in an open, non-block and cooperative framework within the overall emerging structure of a multipolar system. Indeed, India's emergence (external perception of the same) as a pole in the international system depends not only on how it manages its enduring continental dilemmas but more on how it positions itself in the Indian Ocean Region. To reiterate: anti-access in the naval realm implies developing sea-denial capabilities (denying/complicating power-projection by extra-regional actors), before India wholly develops blue-water sea-control capabilities to actually project power in its own right (multiple carrier-battle groups, expeditionary capabilities, long-range ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance) via terrestrial, air and space platforms, SSBNs (ballistic-missile nuclear submarine), anti ship ballistic missile and space capabilities etc. What needs to be underscored is that the scenario is changing, with China acquiring forward facilities in the Indian Ocean and its aircraft carrier development programme well under way backed by extensive nuclear submarine development effort. By 2020, China will be in position to deploy a fleet of 6-8 nuclear attack submarines backed by three or more SSBN's to secure its vital sea lanes. It could by that time period deploy at least one if not two carrier groups supported by its string of pearls. The Russian naval strategist and historian, Rear Admiral V.A. Belli has captured the essence of anti-access/area denial from a naval perspective:

To achieve superiority of forces over the enemy in the main sector and to pin him down in the secondary sectors at the time of the operation means to achieve control of the sea in a theatre or a sector of a theatre, i.e., to create such a situation that the enemy will be paralysed or constrained in his operations, or weakened and thereby hampered from interfering with our execution of a given operation.³⁹



Source: *Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century*, Rand Corporation, 2008.

Multipolarity and the return of regionalised security systems

The final rationale for an anti-access strategy for India is the emerging structure of the international system. The post-Cold War phase produced an unprecedented hierarchy or unipolar-type concentration of material capabilities. This phase involved a unitary alliance system dominating the security of the commons and conflict resolution options for geopolitical questions across the world, including, in India’s neighbourhood. Such unipolarity also spurred and sustained the most recent era of globalisation where new divisions of labour (between the north and south) were erected with emerging powers such as China and India.

The global economic crisis (circa 2008) that began in the Atlantic zone has accelerated the structural trend towards a multipolar system. The growing unsustainability of the unipole to maintain the geopolitical and geo-economics status quo – the result of altered economic fundamentals and “imperial overstretch” – implies a “self-help” system is on the horizon. Emerging powers’ grand strategies

had, until the recent crisis of the unipole's system, been tailored principally to leverage the globalised economy and establish linkages with the unipole's hierarchy. Geopolitical questions were in effect frozen and subordinated to the priority of intensive participation in economic globalisation. To put it even more bluntly, the emerging powers were in fact free-riding on the unipole's system and had for the most part ceded the security of their regions to the unipole's extensive and formidable security umbrella.⁴⁰

The current economic crisis is at its heart a crisis of the type of globalisation that was vigorously pursued by the unipole, ironically, even to the detriment of its own body politic. A fragmentation of the global political economy is a now plausible scenario that will reshape the entire geoeconomic and geopolitical trajectory of world politics in the coming decades. What then is the alternative?


Regionalisation is the most logical result of the structural crisis of the unipolar-globalised order. In the (re)emerging "self-help" system where the unipole is incapable of large continental military interventions that were witnessed in the age of unipolarity (1991-2003), emerging powers will re-discover geopolitical responsibilities to their peripheries and seek to consciously reshape the economic and politico-security agenda of their respective regions, no longer be solely arbitrated by the former hegemon.

In such a plural and complex system, India will need to develop new technologies, doctrines, and capabilities within a grand-strategic framework. Anti-access will form a vital part of the national security toolkit in the transition to a regionalised multipolar order.

Concluding Observations

Ingredients of an Anti-Access Strategy to give it Tangible Expression in India's context? In a sense what this paper is attempting to offer is a select force modernisation plan underpinned by grand-strategic factors to pursue and attain military-technical innovations in select technology spheres.

In an ideal world, such a plan would have been driven by the political leadership which first identified concrete goals (i.e. pushing back PLA offensive formations in Tibet and thus increasing bargaining leverage vis-à-vis China) probably in collaboration with the military and then directed the armed services (Integrated Defence Staff) and defence PSUs to drive the relevant innovations in technology, weaponry (acquisitions) and doctrine to give the strategy expression (teeth).

However, since it is well recognised that there is no unified inter-agency political command structure and ‘jointness’ in the Indian armed services to drive a logical force modernisation plan, this paper is assuming the role of a grand strategist to offer conceptual elements, based on the rationale for an anti-access strategy and the attendant technical capability requirements to operationalise such a strategy. Nevertheless, this strategy would require renovating India’s services-driven doctrines to develop a joint operational doctrine for fighting limited, high-intensity conflicts using high-tech weapon systems. Thus, the institutional or organisational aspects of this strategy are as important as the technological means that are advocated. As the case study of China shows, “active defence” requires an element of surprise and taking the initiative by leveraging a diverse mix of capabilities. The first mover advantage is immense. But this is almost impossible to operationalise if a joint command structure is lacking. Tactical or sub-theatre level *ad hoc* collaboration between the three services in peace time is no substitute for a central joint command structure that includes a high degree of integration and coordination among the services if India is to truly operationalise an anti-access/area denial strategy. 

Notes:

- 1 Roger Cliff, *Anti Access Measures in Chinese Defense Strategy*, published by Rand Corporation, January, 2011, pp 2, available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/new.html>
- 2 Li, Nan, *et al.* ‘China’s Evolving Military Doctrine’, Issues and Insights, Vol. 6, No. 20, *Pacific Forum CSIS*, available at www.pacforum.org, December 2006.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Bruzdinski, Jason E., Chapter 10, “Demystifying Shashoujian: China’s ‘Assassin’s Mace’ Concept”, 2005, pp. 315, in *Civil–Military Change in China: Elites, Institutes, and Ideas After the 16th Party Congress*, edited by Larry Wortzel and Andrew Scobell, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College accessed at http://www.mitre.org/work/best_papers/04/bruzdzinski_demystify/
- 5 Ibid., pp. 332.
- 6 Cliff, Roger, *et al.*, *Entering the Dragon’s Lair: Chinese Anti access Strategies and their Implications for the United States*, RAND, 2007.
- 7 Bruzdinski, “Demystifying Shashoujian”, *op. cit.*, pp. 345.
- 8 Note that this contrasts with the protracted war concept envisioned in the 1960s, when Chinese military planned for holding operations and could only defeat an adversary after wearing it out in an attritional phase. The contemporary military philosophy is based on rapid short duration conflicts where to prevail means that the side usually has produced a window of time to attain specific political objectives.
- 9 See note. 1.
- 10 Ibid.

- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Cooper, Cortez A., 'Joint Anti-Access Operations: China's "System-of-Systems" Approach', *Testimony presented before the U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission on January 27, 2011*, available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/new.html>.
- 13 Kodskov, Kim, '*The Long March to Power: The New Historic Mission of the People's Liberation Army*', Royal Danish Defence College Publishing House, 2009, pp. 225.
- 14 A fully integrated, automated joint C4ISR and electronic warfare network.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Chinese Government White Paper, *China's National Defense in 2008*, January 2009, available at http://english.gov.cn/official/2009-01/20/content_1210227.htm
- 17 Asia Eye, Official Blog of Project 2049 Institute, titled Expansion of Chinese Ballistic Missile Infrastructure Opposite Taiwan, Mark Stokes, Apr 18, 2011.
- 18 Kodskov, Kim, '*The Long March to Power: The New Historic Mission of the People's Liberation Army*', Royal Danish Defence College Publishing House, 2009, pp. 209.
- 19 Li, Nan, *et al.*, 'China's Evolving Military Doctrine', *op. cit.*
- 20 Cooper, 'China's "System-of-Systems" Approach', *op. cit.*
- 21 Kodskov, 'The Long March to Power', *op. cit.* It is noteworthy that in the United States, which has developed joint doctrine to great refinement, it took a congressional act – The Goldwater-Nichols United States Department of Defence Reorganization Act of 1986 – to impose "jointness" on the U.S. Armed Forces. Similarly, India's defence reforms to overcome the bottom-up parochialism can only occur via a structured top-down process.
- 22 It is instructive to note that the US started the process of developing joint doctrines and the attendant organizational reforms in the late 1980s. This process of cultivating jointness only found practical expression in 2003. In China's case, the lack of combat experience in recent decades and the dominance of the ground forces in PLA military culture suggest the process could even take longer.
- 23 This section is drawn from Singh, Zorawar Daulet, 'Thinking about an Indian Grand Strategy', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2011, pp. 52-70.
- 24 Grygiel, Jakub J., *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, pp. 24, 36.
- 25 Aside from introducing a geopolitical redistribution of economic and natural resources, partition permanently severed India's continental lines of communication with resource rich regions of West and Central Asia. Partition also complicated the territorial defence of a truncated India and the security of major industrial and population centres in the Indian heartland, challenges that have been alleviated in a post-nuclear environment, but which has also opened new challenges to Indian security.
- 26 For a recent survey of how Pakistan has used terrorist groups as an instrument of statecraft see, Testimony by Ashley J. Tellis, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace at the United States House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia*, March 11, 2010: Bad Company-Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and the growing ambition of Islamist militancy in Pakistan.
- 27 For an argument that India should realign its geostrategy to geopolitical realities (Pakistan) rather than expending resources in important but strategically less relevant and non-adjacent theatres (Afghanistan) see, Zorawar Daulet Singh, "Goodwill in Afghanistan: Geography comes in India's way", *The Tribune*, February 11, 2010.
- 28 Former Indian Navy Chief Suresh Mehta recently called for the creation of a "reliable stand-off deterrent" vis-à-vis China. Pubby, Manu, "Don't have capability or intention to match China force for force: Navy chief", *The Indian Express*, August 11, 2009.

- 29 See Note. 17.
- 30 For an official enunciation of the concept of reassurance to India's smaller neighbours see former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran's speech on "India and its Neighbours", at the India International Centre (IIC) February 14, 2005, available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2005/02/14ss01.htm>. Accessed on April 9, 2010.
- 31 Speech by former Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon on "India and International Security", at the International Institute of Strategic Studies, available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2007/05/04ss01.htm>. Accessed April 9, 2010.
- 32 Indeed, Western security literature has argued that the *stability-instability paradox* – the possibility that if both combatants expect nuclear war to be extremely costly one of them might be emboldened to take military actions just short of the nuclear threshold secure in the knowledge that the opponent will not escalate. Yet, this logic presumes that the state confronting the belligerent lacks the resolve and skill to respond via conventional force or covert options, and thus neutralizing the first-mover advantage that the belligerent hoped to profit from.
- 33 Narang, Vipin, 'Posturing for Peace? Pakistan's Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability', *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Winter 2009/10, pp. 38–78. Narang argues that Pakistan's asymmetric escalation nuclear posture (First Use) has deterred a conventional response by India to Pakistan's sub-conventional proxy war.
- 34 What this implies is that India's nuclear doctrine based on No First Use (NFU) would require an adjustment to make it more flexible in different contingencies.
- 35 This is similar to the logic that underpins China's anti-access/area-denial principle that aspires to isolate the Taiwan Straits theatre from US involvement and thereby present a *fait accompli* to the Taiwanese elite.
- 36 General K. Sundarji had famously remarked that India's nuclear deterrent was aimed principally at superpower coercion vis-à-vis India. While the bipolar age has ended, the scenario of extra-regional involvement will remain relevant until the resolution of outstanding geopolitical and ideological questions in the subcontinent (i.e. India-Pakistan dispute, India-China territorial/border dispute) and as an instrument to forestall/constrain/delay/modulate India's rise as a true regional power.
- 37 For an argument that India's development as a formidable sea power will threaten America before it threatens China, see Zhang Wenmu, 'India ruling the waves can help relieve security pressure', *Global Times*, June 28, 2010.
- 38 It should be noted that strategic communications and public diplomacy will need to find vocabulary and rhetoric that soften the substance of such aspirations.
- 39 Polmar, Norman, *The Naval Institute guide to the Soviet Navy*, Naval Institute Press, 1991, pp. 25.
- 40 This ofcourse does not suggest that "core interests" were sacrificed altogether. India's resolve to maintain its territorial sovereignty over Kashmir or preserve its nuclear deterrent and China's position on Taiwan, Tibet show that emerging powers accommodation with the unipole was not unconditional. Given the real possibility of inviting overt containment, what the emerging powers did was to play down their big power aspirations, define their security in minimalist terms, or couch them in vocabulary that would not collide with the unipole's order.