



The Future of Deterrence along the LAC

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Abstract

2020 has seen the worst Sino-Indian fracas in decades, highlighting the urgency with which India needs to overhaul its strategy for dealing with border incidents as well as its military orientation. This working paper explores the utility of a shift to an offensive, deterrence-by-punishment posture even in peacetime, rather than maintaining a reactionary deterrence-by-denial posture. To operationalise this new orientation, the three services will have to be optimised for different roles in a conflict - the Army for rapid, offensive operations at lower-levels of conflict and the Air Force for 'war-winning' battle plans that degrade the PLA's ability to fight in Tibet. Similarly, the Navy's role will be restricted to sea-denial operations during times of war, with all three services focusing on joint operations in addition to their optimised roles as the conflict escalates. This posture is recommended because it adequately balances India's economic constraints, urgent need for modernisation, and increasingly hostile threat environment; something the current strategy does not do efficiently.

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Introduction

Four months since the 15 June clash that killed several Indian and Chinese soldiers, talks continue between military commanders in Eastern Ladakh with an uncertain future for the various flashpoints in the area. Much of the situation remains unclear due to the lack of consensus on Indian and Chinese claim lines. One hopes full transparency about the events that transpired is offered a few months down the line, but the only thing abundantly clear is this: China has (yet again) taken advantage of the unsettled border to employ its infamous greyzone tactics.

Much has already been written about the future of Sino-Indian relations, rapprochement with the USA, economic and diplomatic countermeasures, etc. However, the most striking consequence of the 15 June clash is reiterating the inadequacy of India's current deterrent posture along the Line of Actual Control; the border dispute cannot be resolved without imposing costs on China. The reaction to the events this summer will have cascading effects over the next few years, considering the fresh impetus for military countermeasures vis-a-vis China. This urgent need for military modernisation, when compounded with limited resources will result in the kind of prioritisation that leaves certain projects/platforms by the wayside. Crucial as this kind of triage is, it must accept certain unpalatable truths and focus only on achievable strategies to impose costs on India's adversaries.

This paper will explore the characteristics of an optimal strategy that balances limited resources and much-needed military modernisation, while recognising that India's defence planning is fated to focus on the 'continental' threat. The first section will detail the author's understanding of India's current posture and the deficiencies therein, with the second discussing why a limited role for the navy may be inevitable. The third section will briefly detail how the Army and Air Force can be used in different levels of conflict.

Resolving the LAC

As this incident is rooted in differing claims about what 'lines' demarcate the border, one may be tempted to believe a consensus on the border would avoid clashes between the countries. This train of thought is responsible for the current standoff involving an extra Indian Army corps in Eastern Ladakh (Unnithan 2020), and what led to the first deaths resulting from hostile action along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in decades. India signed five 'confidence-building' agreements with China between 1993 and 2013, none of which are binding (Chansoria 2014). While they should be commended for ensuring peace along an unsettled border, their stagnation should equally invite

criticism. There has now been almost three decades of stasis on border talks, with China refusing to even share maps demarcating its claims (one of the first steps of resolving a border dispute). With hindsight one may understand their reluctance to do so; vague pronouncements of what constitutes the border allow a regular shifting of goalposts, such as new, unprecedented claims to the Galwan Valley after this June's clash (Krishnan 2020).

In the 32 years since Rajiv Gandhi's 'breakthrough visit' to China, there have been five non-binding bilateral agreements relating to the border dispute. Since Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003, the established 'Special Representatives' mechanism has seen 22 rounds of talks (Sandhu 2020). The numerous efforts and timespan are important specifically because neither hold any water today; the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has undertaken aggressive actions regardless of what may have been agreed upon previously. Why they have chosen to do this continues to be debated, but India's complicity cannot be ignored. Grey-zone operations, as the name suggests, especially thrive in scenarios where redlines are hazy because of factors like competing claims over an unsettled border. Letting border talks stagnate for decades has effectively assisted the Chinese by lulling India into the belief that the unsettled border is convention, and stagnant border talks were not detrimental to its interests. The bilateral dialogue India was relying on produced no concrete, irreversible measures that could ward off the present standoff. Allowing the PLA time and room to develop their own capabilities over three decades while consistently losing the initiative with respect to border incidents has only enabled Chinese salami slicing.

India's approach during the border talks and incidents has been reactive and largely diplomatic, with the military playing a peripheral role in merely trying to avert Chinese land grabs. China's reputed disdain for the rule of law (Kuok 2019) and broken 'promises' (France24 2019) should indicate that depending only on China's word is short-sighted, to say the least. Ensuring that the PLA and CCP themselves reconsider initiating a standoff offers a more permanent solution to the pressing fear of *fait accomplis* in the Himalayas. This can only be achieved by India imposing actual military costs in theatres along the border.

The current strategy has revolved largely around deterrence-by-denial; which can be described as "having military forces which can block the enemy's military forces from making territorial gains" (Snyder 1960). Some scholars (Tarapore 2020) note that the Indian Army (the main service in the current fracas) is structured for an offensive doctrine focusing on deterrence-by-punishment, which can be defined as granting a territorial gain but deterring "by posing the prospect of war costing more than the value of the gain" (Snyder 1960). Though the Army may still be structured for the

same, actual operations (or the lack thereof) since the Kargil War suggest the posture is oriented towards deterrence-by-denial while promising punishment if some inchoate, indeterminate tripwire is triggered. This inconsistency exists as Pakistan's nuclear posture negates the punishment promised by India's army-centric doctrine, and because India has consistently chosen to be defensive along the LAC.

The implications of pursuing a denial strategy extend far beyond the tactical, military realm. Though its efficacy in the theatre can be debated, implementing it across the entire ~ 3500km long LAC dooms the Army to obsolescence. India currently has an estimated 225,000 troops permanently garrisoned along its China border, i.e. between 12-14 divisions (O'Donnell et al. 2020). In times of crisis, extra divisions can be introduced at great cost (Unnithan 2020). The issue is with expending significant resources in both approaches - maintaining manpower intensive divisions in/near theatres that are insufficient to deal with China independently while also rapidly deploying men and materiel through inhospitable terrain during crises. With a military that is endemically short of modernisation funds, a clear strategy that picks one orientation is required.

The Army corners most of the defence budget, with an estimated 63% of the proposed 2020-21 defence budget of ~\$65 billion going to land forces (Vaishnav 2020). ~76% of the allocated funds for the Army go to pensions and salaries (pensions at ~38.1% sap the budget more than salaries at ~37.5%). Accounting for other costs, this leaves a measly ~8.8% for modernisation (The Hindu 2020). Many claim that the allocated budget at ~2.1% of the GDP (pre-COVID estimates) is insufficient considering India's threat environment, even though India is the world's third largest defence spender (Roche 2020). Defence accounts for ~15.5% of the government's expenditure (Vaishnav 2020), and the realities of India's dire economic and social indicators make a significant funding hike unfeasible, welcome as it would be. With even senior Army leadership understanding a 1.22 million force cannot be paid and equipped with modern weaponry at the same time (Shukla 2018), one hopes a significant change is in the offing. But how will India downsize a bloated army with a defensive, deterrence-by-denial posture along the longest unsettled border in the world, against an opponent infamous for salami-slicing? The problem is exacerbated when one factors in the possibility of a two-front conflict involving India's other hostile neighbour.

This persistent issue of balancing limited funds against pressing modernisation needs will worsen as India faces off against an adversary far more powerful (economically and militarily), and increasingly hostile. This year's events have clarified the choices China has presented - acquiesce or escalate. Perhaps relying on a record of Indian reticence with respect to border incidents, the

PLA may have been surprised by what the media reported as pre-emptive action by the Indian Army in late-August (Singh 2020). While details remain unclear, such escalatory operations need to be expanded in scope and implemented across the border, even in peacetime.

The result of such an approach would not just be to bring China to the negotiating table, but also for the PLA and Central Military Commission (CMC) to seriously consider the merits of refusing to resolve an unsettled border. In terms of strategic priorities for China, the LAC lags far behind immediate threats in the maritime theatre to its East. Though the terrain and resulting rail connectivity in the Tibetan plateau makes logistics and force deployments far easier for the Chinese (Surana 2018), deploying additional divisions with extensive supply lines in every sector of the ~3500 km border also incurs huge costs, taking resources away from China's primary, maritime interests in the east.

The face-off in 2020 occurred because China found it convenient to prod at India's defences, whatever the reason may be. Even after both sides de-escalate, India must take the initiative after a brief span and undertake numerous small-scale offensive actions of its own. This would force the PLA to re-deploy its forces and extend resources into supply lines at a time *inconvenient* for China, when it might rather be invested in other actions to its east. Doing this repeatedly at identified inconvenient times incurs real and *opportunity costs* for China, to further incentivise border negotiations. The current approach relies on forces arrayed along the border, holding Chinese troops at bay, and only incurring costs on enemy troops in certain, localised situations (like the Galwan clash). This purely defensive tactic leaves China with the steering wheel in the bilateral relationship, choosing to lower or increase pressure along the border when it suits Chinese interests. Only the offensive approach referred to earlier can prompt China to take stock, limit aggressive action, and attempt to mediate a common understanding of the LAC because not doing so invites regular, offensive actions by India that distract from its core strategic interests. The military's role in the Sino-Indian relationship has to be expanded beyond a force that merely mitigates Chinese aggression to an integral, offensive aspect of India's foreign policy.

Fears abound of such an approach inadvertently escalating localised border skirmishes to an all-out war between the two countries. Gray zone operations rely precisely on this fear, tempting recipient states to push the problem a few years down the line in the hope of holding a more favourable position then. This further emboldens the aggressor to increase the scope of hostilities, salami-slicing, and *fait accomplis* until the recipient state is forced into a situation so unfavourable that acquiescence is the only viable option. Additionally, war remains unlikely as long as India

maintains a balance of military power that deters China - while China may field the more powerful military; India's military can be an effective deterrent by maintaining the capabilities to cause sufficient damage to China's aggregate power even if ultimately defeated. Following a carrot-and-stick approach, the costs of war for China are outweighed by incentives that provide relief from the *opportunity costs* incurred by Indian offensive operations, which only require mutual concessions of inhospitable, under-developed land along the LAC. The three services hence have to optimise budgetary constraints, relative power, and credible capabilities to impose deterring costs on China while also hindering the PLA's strategies enough to force a border negotiation.

A Limited Maritime Role?

India's threat environment presents tough decisions for policymakers in prioritising certain projects, and the Indian Navy will likely bear the brunt of cuts, whether under the current posture or after a shift to deterrence-by-punishment. This is indeed unfortunate, as the Navy has distinguished itself among the three arms in terms of indigenous production, even though various issues still need to be resolved (Singh et al. 2020). The issue is rooted in geography; much as how the PLA Navy remains a top priority for China because of perceived threats and interests in the East and South China Seas. Though India has an extremely favourable maritime geography, the primary threats it faces are concentrated in its northern reaches. Unlike the other two services, the Navy is far from adequately equipped to impose costs on core Chinese interests in a timely manner and across levels of escalation, considering the relative strengths of the PLAN and Indian Navy.

Some commentators have remarked India should commence naval deployments in the South China Sea to 'hurt China's interests elsewhere in its contested neighbourhood where it is vulnerable' (Pai 2020). Though such operations should undoubtedly be pursued (alone and with Quad/ASEAN nations), one must remain realistic about their deterrent value. Signalling/posturing with such deployments is only effective when the implicit threat of escalation is actionable and credible. India is several years, if not decades away from credibly fielding an expeditionary maritime force capable of taking the fight to China's backyard in wartime, something even the US Navy is wary of (MDAA 2018).

Various scholars have attributed the ideas of Alfred Mahan to the PLA Navy's modernisation; i.e truly great powers have to achieve maritime dominance. Though the validity of such concepts in the PLAN continues to be debated (Latham 2020), China's maritime geography and perceived threat environment has ensured the bulk of modernisation resources are devoted to naval modernisation and anti-access/area-denial capabilities for the PLARF (Yeo 2020). The past three

decades in China are a good example of a national security strategy identifying key threats to national interests, designing a roadmap to mitigate these threats, and implementing the appropriate steps. India similarly needs a hard look at identifying security threats in the mid-to-long term, while factoring in the relative strengths of its adversaries.

Reiterating the issues mentioned earlier regarding India's limited modernisation resources, a clear-eyed national security strategy is sorely needed to identify what should be prioritised, even if that means preparing for the mid-term and leaving long-term scenarios on the drawing board. For instance, the Indian Navy should not be structured taking into account Mahanian concepts of 'great powers' and 'maritime dominance', but only what adequately addresses threats over the next few decades. The issue inherent in planning a force structure to be deployed several years in the future is that one often forgets the adversary will also continue to grow, innovate, and develop. Even if a miraculous turnaround is affected in India's defence ecosystem, China's military will remain several years ahead. Even if India somehow outstrips China in modernisation expenditure (an unlikely prospect), China's continuing expenditure on top of its qualitative and quantitative edge will see several decades pass before some kind of equivalence is achieved. The goal therefore is not to match the PLAN ship for ship, missile for missile, but identifying postures, capabilities, and plans that negate the PLAN's strengths.

Similar to the PLA's own measures to negate US military superiority in East Asia, India must capitalise on what has been described as the 'third-mover' advantage in offensive systems rather than defensive systems (Dougherty 2019). Instead of planning to 'catch up' with China in some way or harbouring dreams of sustaining operations in China's backyard, such a strategy would be focussed merely on denying the Indian Ocean to the PLAN and negating the advantages of existing logistics' bases in the region.

This kind of navy, structured and armed primarily for sea denial against the PLAN will largely be used in a scenario of war, rather than low-level hostilities or for bargaining during crises along the LAC. Analysts have long praised India's maritime geography and ability to strike against China's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), and some have even suggested posturing in the Strait of Malacca in response to China's actions along the border. Though China's maritime trade will undoubtedly be targeted during war, interdicting Chinese ships at lower levels of conflict is an extremely difficult proposition that is easily defended against, and a tactic that doesn't immediately impose costs (Shrikhande 2020b).

This leaves very few options available for the Indian Navy to play an active *offensive* role in situations like the current standoff at the borders. Though maritime dominance and sea control have undeniable deterrent effects even for small-scale hostilities (the US Navy and its carrier battle groups are the world's most effective implement of power projection), this kind of deterrence can only be established by the infusion of vast sums of money and state-of-the-art equipment. India has neither, and even US capabilities are blunted by innovative work-arounds. Currently, the PLAN's Indian Ocean deployments are constrained by the logistics required to sustain ships for lengthy periods. This will likely change as China consolidates various support bases from Djibouti to Gwadar (Singh, Abhijit 2020), and also bolsters the defences at each base to guard against strikes in time of war. The limits of Indian naval modernisation, the strength the PLAN can bring to bear in the Indian Ocean, and the ability of India's current (and future) naval forces adequately defending against Chinese assets have to be considered simultaneously when defining a role for the Indian Navy. Economic constraints, India's threat environment, and the relative strength of the PLAN together leave the Navy no choice but to be focussed entirely on sea denial operations in the IOR during war, and a limited defensive posture to guard against Chinese aggression during small-scale hostilities.

That said, the urgency with which the Indian Navy needs funds cannot be understated. Even for a sea denial orientation, vast resources are required for modernisation; India's ageing submarine fleet needs replenishment far beyond current piecemeal efforts and the INS Vikramaditya and Vikrant promise to be expensive, vulnerable platforms without the addition of better carrier aircraft and defences. India's destroyers and frigates are also significantly under-armed when compared with the PLA's multi-role Type-052D, 054A, and 055 vessels in terms of VLS cells and variety of armaments. As significant costs have already been incurred in developing two aircraft carrier platforms (traditionally associated with sea control), continued modernisation has to orient current platforms and postures towards sea denial even for capital ships (Shrikhande 2020a). Among the various changes required, foremost would be expanding the inventories of armaments on each ship (in terms of quantity and variety both), and continuing to improve the sensors on each class of ships. The former can be bolstered by India's successful indigenous missile programme and the latter by defence ties with technologically superior countries.

Altogether, modernisation efforts must not fall prey to 'mission creep' in terms of a maritime strategy of sea denial. Though one may be tempted to branch out and develop platforms for sea control or plan a 200 - ship Navy with power-projection aspirations, such actions will invariably cause problems with funding over time (Gurung 2019). Adhering to a strict force posture creates an

optimised force for one purpose (sea denial during war/defence during fragile peace), rather than aspiring for ambitious postures whose efficacy against China is limited.

Continental Operations

Several analysts have pointed out the fallacy of focusing on a ‘continental’ strategy and not developing appropriate maritime capabilities. (Jacob 2020). Ironically, India’s desire to break free from a narrow view of ‘continental’ security and embrace power projection in the Indian Ocean is the very stimulus that reiterates the need for strong defences along two hostile borders (Rej 2020). The rationale behind developing a blue-water navy is undeniably valid for a rising power, but this paper advocates a continental approach only because of the realities of India’s threat environment and economic constraints.

India’s current Chief of Defence Staff is quoted as mirroring this view, advocating for a ‘strong Army supported by a capable Air Force’ and a Navy optimised for defence, not expeditionary capabilities (Pandit 2020; Peri 2020). However, this continuing focus on land forces being the mainstay of one’s deterrent has ramifications for modernisation across the three services, especially if the Army is used only for deterrence-by-denial. This section briefly introduces the idea of the Army and Air Force being optimised for different levels of conflict, with each successive rung of the escalation ladder increasing joint operations between the two.

The history of cooperation between the two services has been fraught; as reflected even in the CDS’s statement, the Army has espoused close air support as a core tenet for the Air Force which the latter chafes at (Tellis 2016). But if one plans and develops a strategy for the current threat environment, the Air Force is better suited for ‘war-winning’ operations as compared to the Army. As remarked earlier, the Army *promises* deterrence-by-punishment within an orthodox offensive doctrine (Tarapore 2020). In *practice*, the Army’s ~12 divisions arrayed along the border act as an expensive defence against Chinese aggression, employing manpower-intensive resources for deterrence-by-denial. Even if the current force structure was utilised for deterrence-by-punishment, does such a posture accurately reflect relative strengths and political will? Does the Indian security establishment seriously plan for war scenarios where Indian divisions take the fight into Tibet and occupy swathes of Chinese territory? Do assessments of the PLA’s capabilities indicate India can successfully carry out such operations and hold onto territory? The relative balance of military power, favourable terrain and infrastructure on the Chinese side, and trajectory of military modernisation in both countries answer with a resounding no.

It can be argued that numerous divisions signal the costs of a full-scale war to China, effectively limiting the appetite for much escalation. This is fallacious, because as in the example of naval operations in the South China Sea, posturing/signalling resolve only works best when the promised threat is credible. If Indian and Chinese assessments concur about the inability of Indian land forces making territorial incursions and sustaining operations on Chinese soil, India's negotiating position (and the military's deterrent value) stands diminished from the first step of the escalation ladder.

The exorbitant costs of maintaining these divisions close to the LAC, as well as their diminished deterrent value can both be addressed by practicing deterrence-by-punishment with a mobile Army. This posture can be employed by a lesser number of divisions held further back from the border, but with excellent ISR and mobilisation capabilities (Dougherty 2019). Instead of only preventing Chinese incursions, the focus should instead be on rapid mobilisation to occupy Chinese territory elsewhere, affecting numerous shallow thrusts and horizontal escalation. As mentioned earlier, the deterrent value of this approach is not premised on the number of troops deployed for theatre defence, but the PLA incurring *opportunity costs* due to unprovoked, offensive actions by India, especially in a theatre China considers a secondary strategic concern (Fravel 2020).

As one moves up the escalation ladder, operations by mobile land forces can be gradually augmented with air operations, where India is believed to maintain a qualitative advantage over the PLAAF. One would use the IAF for targeting increasingly important 'centres of gravity' in Tibet, i.e. the nodes of industry, communications, power, logistics, etc that can sustain war against India. This would call for renewed study of various airpower theorists such as John Warden, among others, who advocated for the precise application of airpower against key targets to win wars, rather than merely support land forces. (Olsen 2015).

The rationale of airpower playing a central role in a war with China is two-fold, one of which is that planning for air-centric operations and precision strikes ensures a narrow focus of only destroying China's war fighting abilities, and not preparing for large captures of territory (a force posture that would continue to sap the military's modernisation funds). The second is that India must bolster, capitalise on, and vastly improve its capabilities in the only sphere in which it holds a qualitative advantage over China (Subramaniam 2020). Continuing to pump resources into ground forces with the current posture is wasted, as their efficacy in a large-scale conflict with China is limited. Though the Navy can still hold its own against PLAN armadas in the Indian Ocean, this is possible only because of the supply chains involved for China (which may be negated by mushrooming Chinese bases in the region). The PLAN holds a significant qualitative advantage

over the Indian Navy, which will likely widen considering the importance of a blue-water navy in China's strategic calculations. If the Air Force is the only service boasting an edge with China, it should be the focus of modernisation, rather than reinventing the wheel with other services.

This is an advantage that is steadily eroding, and one the PLA has already worked towards mitigating. Tibet is home to a multi-tiered, large network of air defence systems that can pose a serious threat to IAF operations against China (Singh M. 2020). India's Electronic Warfare capabilities have an uncertain future, with various indigenous options being considered for sensor and jamming needs to overcome air defences (Panag 2020; Shukla 2018). The Chief of Air Staff has recently remarked 42 squadrons remains a distant dream, and even 36-38 squadrons by 2030 would be an achievement (Singh, Angad 2020). The focus on consolidating this advantage has to revolve around large-scale procurement of stand-off precision weapons (which is already underway), developing a large fleet of airborne surveillance assets, and expanding the IAF's almost non-existent fleet of refuelling tankers, among others (Singh 2019; Subramaniam 2020). A better-equipped, better-funded Air Force is a better fit for India's requirements in a conflict with China, invalidating the need to equip ~225,000 men with modern equipment for a doctrine that has limited utility at all levels of conflict.

Conclusion

The three services therefore have vastly different roles to be optimised at each rung of escalation, with an emphasis on joint operations as hostilities increase in intensity. The Navy's role in lower levels of conflict will be to deny the PLAN opportunities to posture or threaten Indian interests, and ensuring sea-denial in event of war between the countries. The Army, during and after downsizing, will be the primary actor for low-level hostilities and greyzone tactics along the LAC, and will be used only in an *offensive* role, even in peacetime. The Air Force's supporting role will only be restricted to the initial stages of a conflict, and be the focus of war-winning operations as hostilities escalate. During this period, the Army's focus on mobility will see it deployed only against key infrastructure in the Western Theatre Command that *requires* occupation, with the rest being the target of disabling IAF strikes. Our military strategy cannot plan for occupying land in an effort to extract concessions/favourable resolutions (Tarapore 2020), as such strategies continually drain resources and are unlikely to succeed against the PLA. Instead, a realistic view of India's ability to wage war allows one to focus on achievable objectives (like hampering the PLA's ability to wage war in Tibet and the IOR), and accordingly shifts the focus of war-winning actions from an Army used primarily for theatre defence to an offense-oriented Air Force and Navy.

This working paper sought only to argue for a broad shift in India's military orientation, and hence focussed on the mainstay of the Armed Forces - the three capital-heavy and manpower-intensive services. The importance of the space, cyber, and missile domains of the military cannot be overstated, and require far more attention than what they currently receive. However, they cannot operate or win conflicts in isolation; and the slow pace of modernisation will ensure the three services remain the main implements of India's deterrent. This paper therefore only discusses the first steps to be taken in order to field a well-equipped, credible deterrent against Chinese aggression of all kinds. Similarly, the nuclear dimension has not been explored because of the relatively low-risk of nuclear weapon use in the initial stages of a conflict (unlike with Pakistan). However, worsening nuclear dynamics between China and the US should be followed carefully, because the cascading effect on capability development in China and India holds the risk of inadvertent escalation during wartime.

Also of note is the role other countries play in this dyad - India's pressing need to form closer ties with the USA, Japan, Australia, Vietnam, and Taiwan in all spheres of enhancing security undoubtedly influences tensions between China and India. Similarly, the very real possibility of fighting a two-front war with China and Pakistan has always had bearings on India's strategic posture and military doctrine. The broad recommendations outlined in this paper are merely the first steps towards improving India's deterrent against both hostile neighbours, and should be undertaken in conjunction with increased defence and intelligence cooperation involving the Quad, ASEAN, and Taiwan.

Even with an improved military, moving beyond allaying China's concerns and actively adopting an offensive doctrine depends entirely on the political will to do so. India's public messaging even after the Galwan clash seems to tiptoe around Chinese sensitivities (a reminder here that 'strategic autonomy' is non-existent if India does not have the 'autonomy' to undertake certain actions out of fear of Chinese reprisals). Improving the ability of India's military to play a decisive role in foreign policy rather than simply act as a buffer will not immediately inculcate the political will to stand up to China. However, fresh alternatives to successfully deter Chinese aggression can share a symbiotic relationship with political will for offensive operations; both can draw strength from each other and grow concurrently. Incorporating deterrence-by-punishment along the LAC and reorienting the three military services would hence be the first steps taken to strengthen India's conventional deterrence.

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