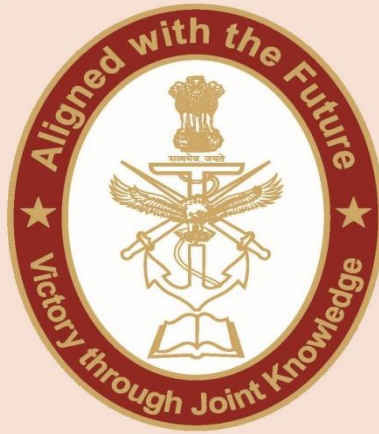


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CHINA ADVANCE ITS MILITARY MODERNIZATION GOAL TO 2027



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Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which commenced on Monday, has just been concluded on 29th October. It was being organized to discuss the 14th five-year plan for 2021-25, and a medium-term strategy named as 'Vision 2035'. Having observed the precarious internal situation in China post-COVID 19, it was very much expected that the CPC would eventually give more powers to President Xi Jinping, thereby making him an all-powerful leader. Though the domain experts/analysts on China will carry out threadbare analysis of the complete proceedings and will come out with their opinions or suggestions in the following days; the Nine Key points of the Communiqué plus 14 specific lines on 'Military' issued officially at the end of the session clearly underscore the future intent of the Party.

The whole exercise from ***“New expression of strategic layout”*** and ***“Powerful Country”*** (Point 1 & 2 respectively) to ***“Ensuring the achievement of the goal of the century-old army in 2027”*** (Point 9) not only conveys the hegemonic ambition of China and its party's relentless pursuit of the same but rather reflects the efforts to speed up the process.

Under the overall strategy to achieve “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” by 2049, the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC’s) strategy includes advancing a comprehensive military modernization program that aims to “basically” complete military modernization by 2035 and transform the PLA into a “world class” military by the end of 2049 — a goal first announced by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2017. Although the CCP has not defined what a “world-class” military means, within the context of the PRC’s national strategy it is likely that Beijing will seek to develop a military by mid-century that is equal to—or in some cases superior to—the U.S. military. China’s leaders had stressed the imperative of meeting key military transformation markers set in 2020 and 2035. 2020 marks an important year for the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as it works to achieve important modernization milestones ahead of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) broader goal to transform China into a “moderately prosperous society” by the CCP’s centenary in 2021.

In 2019, the PLA made speedy progress implementing major structural reforms, fielding modern indigenous systems, building readiness, and strengthening its competency to conduct joint operations. According to the United States Department of Defense (DoD) Annual Report to the Congress in 2020, China has already achieved parity with—or even exceeded—the United States in several military modernization areas, including: – *Shipbuilding*: The PRC has the largest navy in the world, with an overall battle force of approximately 350 ships and submarines including over 130 major surface combatants as against the U.S. Navy’s battle force of approximately 293 ships as of early 2020. Further, China is the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage and is increasing its shipbuilding capacity and capability for all naval classes; *Land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles*: The PRC has more than 1,250 ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers; *Integrated air defense systems*: The PRC has one of the world’s largest forces of advanced long-range surface-to-air systems—including Russian-built S-

400s, S-300s, and domestically produced systems—that constitute part of its robust and redundant integrated air defense system (IADS) architecture.

The plenum has proposed to speed up the modernization of national defense and the armed forces and the goal of the military is now planned to be achieved in 2027. *The party has reinforced Xi Jinping's thought on: strengthening the army, implement the military strategy of the new era and adhere to the party's absolute leadership over the people's army.* The Party has proposed to *accelerate the integration of mechanization, informationization and intelligence.*

By promoting the simultaneous improvement of national defense and economic strength, it is implied that China's economic development supports its military modernization not only by providing the means for larger defense budgets, but through deliberate Party-led initiatives such as OBOR and Made in China 2025, as well as the systemic benefits of China's growing national industrial and technological base.

The PRC is pursuing Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) Development Strategy, wherein it fuses its economic and social development strategies with its security strategies to *build an integrated national strategic system and capabilities* in support of China's national rejuvenation goals. The same has been reiterated in the Party's Communiqué: i.e., by *promoting the coordinated development of key regions, key areas, and emerging fields, optimize the layout of defense technology and industry, and consolidate military-political military-civilian unity.*

Another important goal laid down in the sphere of military is to *improve the strategic ability to defend national sovereignty, security, and development interests*, which is presumably to take care of China's current aggressive moves on both land and sea frontiers in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Though, the CCP will continue to control the People's Liberation Army (PLA), but for legitimacy of its regime, the social and economic stability are also extremely important for it. Usually, the credit for China's rapid economic progress is given to its Special Economic Zones (SEZs) but the process began with rural reforms, which brought the fruits tenyears later. Thus the success story is with the rural, which provided theworkforce to make most of the boom. Beside the Rural-Urban inequality and rising gap between rich and poor, China's workforce is also rapidly ageing. The Party is fully aware of these problems and therefore it has addressed these as key issues: *Comprehensively promote rural revitalization; and Implement a national strategy to actively respond to an aging population.*

Further, with all nations moving economically inwards, China's export oriented economic growth may no longer be sustained. Hence the CCP is seeking to *build a new development pattern and devising a new pattern of opening up.* For its economy to expand, **"Innovation"** remains crucial and is the core position for the Party. Much will depend on the future of China's relations with the United States, post-Presidential elections in November 2020, whether it is going to be 'Confrontation' or 'Co-engagement'.

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