

# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

### **INDIA CHINA CONFLICT- MARITIME DOMAIN- OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES**



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The current standoff on Indo – Sino LAC in Ladakh which began in May is most likely to go on for some time.

In Modern time 'Warfare' is not restricted to Land Battles. 'Warfare' encompasses overall national strength, what the Chinese had first coined as Comprehensive National Power (CNP), and therefore India must evaluate all the Strategic options and alternatives available to her.

### **Operations in Malacca Straits**

One of the options which has been debated within the Strategic Community and even debated on TV Channels is for India to use her Geographic Advantage and Naval Strength in Indian Ocean Area, specially approaches to Malacca Straits to interdict Chinese Trade and exploit what is called Chinese "Malacca Dilemma". 80% of Chinese Oil Imports and 65% of her

total trade passes through Malacca Straits and therefore Importance to China to secure this passage is beyond Debate.

Keeping in mind severe constraints and complexities of trade war fare, this article is only limited to Tactical deployment with certain Strategic Imperatives to interdict Chinese trade and should be considered only if and when the actions or activities reach much Higher step of Escalation Ladder.

Chinese trade is carried by number of Shipping Coys, e.g. Oil is transported by K Line, NYK both Japanese Coys. Kuwait oil and even American tankers in addition to their own. Their other Dry cargo in transported by MSC, PIL, PCL and Japanese shipping Companies and many more. Further the contracts are likely to stipulate delivery, specially of Crude oil and products at the Chinese Port.

SLOC through 8/9/10 degree channel and Malacca Straits are also main lines of communication for Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and all ASEAN Countries. Even if we have prior intelligence of Chinese Cargo (Not very easy to authenticate), identification at sea would be a major issue, it would very difficult for us to squeeze or interdict only Chinese trade, without affecting trade of other Nations in these sea areas. Any such action would be met with severe opposition or even backlash from other countries in the Pacific region whose trade would be adversely affected, further, Opposition from International shipping Industry/IMO should also be factored in, as Monetary cost of Shipping through these waters due to much higher Insurance payments and Extra Crew salaries will escalate so much as to make it unviable.

At higher level of escalation ladder or even as a deterrent, we have to **Think out of Box**, if we are serious about interdicting the Chinese trade.

### **Taking Battle to Chinese Backyard**

That's why, time has come to contemplate oftaking the trade war to Seas closer to China, where we will be able to target Shipping heading for

Chinese Ports with more certainty. Logistics and OTR will be an issue which will have to be focussed and factored in.

### **Logistics Support and Otr**

We must examine -- Can our conventional S/M sustain 3/4 months of Ops deployment in south and / or East China Sea, initially as goodwill visit to Vietnam/Philippines/Japan/South Korea as deterrence. Can we use logistics under 'LEMOA' Agreement with USA and use American bases in Japan, South Korea and Philippines? We should consider entering in to similar Logistics agreement with Vietnam/ Philippines or even South Korea. ACSA (Acquisition and Cross Service Agreement) with Japan is almost finalised and must be concluded and signed soonest. Logistics and maintenance team can be provided by one of the ships from SCI on loan. Akula class Nuclear attack S/M on lease from Russia could be the best asset for this deployment.

### **Maritime Air Operations**

We must also carry out feasibility of using our Maritime Orion ac with anti-ship missiles for this purpose. Of course, these will have to operate outside Chinese Coastal Air Defence Network. We must also undertake feasibility of using our Sukhoi / Mirage ac fitted with Brahmos missiles with mid-air fuelling as a surprise element. We should be able to seek help from our Quad partners to provide Intelligence and reconnaissance of these Areas. Also, with coordinated Diplomatic efforts with these nations we should put pressure on Thailand Government to shelve their Chinese sponsored KRA Channel.

### **Protection of Our Own Sloc**

We will simultaneously have to undertake Appreciation of Chinese Retaliatory action or Pro-Active operations to Interdict our SLOCs. 90% of our Trade by volume and 68% by value is through Sea. Almost 80% of our crude oil requirement is imported, 93% by Sea if one takes in to account off shore oil production and Petroleum Product Export. It would be much

easier and feasible for Chinese Navy to identify and attack Indian Shipping without adversely affecting Shipping of other Nations or International SLOCs. Shipping east of Longitude passing through Lakshadweep and North of Colombo can easily be identified as heading for the Indian Ports. Similar Geographical Situation exists on India's East Coast. However, this can also be turned in to our tactical advantage by proper planning, as India Navy will be able to operationally plan to exercise Sea control in these areas, Limited in Space and Time to Protect our Shipping

Further, Chinese Navy, would not face any serious problem of logistics or OTR as they have Naval Base at DJIBUTI, and of course can make use of Pakistani Ports. Chinese Navy will deploy their Han/Shang class Nuclear attack SMS, reducing their Logistics and OTR problem further.

We will have to prepare operational plans to protect our shipping and Trade. I am sure Contingency Plans exists and are kept updated all the time.

### **Perspective Planning**

We must deploy our MR aircraft regularly in west pacific sea areas, not only during exercises with QUAD navies but also independently. We must also deploy our Submarines during these exercises and visit Vietnamese and Japanese port to assess their OTR and repair facility requirements

In near future or even midterm, Fleet Vs Fleet engagement between our two Navies is most unlikely. It would mostly involve Offensive and unrestricted Submarine warfare and Anti-Submarine Warfare. Nuclear Attack Submarines are best suited for this kind of operations and their acquisition must be fast tracked. This would be a major factor to be considered in our Perspective Planning. We must aim to build Maritime and Air Capability to operate in South and East China Seas.

**Disclaimer:** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.