

China's military spending to counter

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

CHINA'S official defence spending will rise by 11.2% in 2012, pushing it above \$100bn for the first time, the government has announced.

Beijing's defence budget has risen each year for two decades to become the world's second-biggest, behind the US. But the US budget is seven times more than the Chinese budget and has bases housing thousands of American troops across the region.

Announcing the new budget, Li Zhaoxing, an official with China's parliament, sought to calm concerns over the spending programme. "China is committed to the path of peaceful development and follows a national defence policy that is defensive in nature," he said.

China has 1.3 billion people, a large territory and long coastline, but the defence spending is relatively low compared with other major countries. But foreign experts have estimated that Beijing's actual military spending could be as much as double the official budget. The armed forces, known as the People's Liberation Army, boast more than two million personnel - the biggest military in the world.

China is developing a range of capabilities linked to the space and cyber domain in order to sidestep the overwhelming might of the US military in the Pacific region.

China recognised almost two decades ago that in the mid-term the PLA could be no match for US conventional forces. So it began working on what was dubbed "unrestricted warfare" - combining multiple methods to defeat a superior opponent.

The PLA has been running military projects mirroring these civilian acquisition ventures.

Sometimes involving dual-use technologies, the military and civilian strands have often been indistinguishable. At the same time party leaders launched adventurous civilian acquisition projects in the high-tech domain to increase Chinese competitiveness and to boost indigenous production capabilities.

China's space programme is a case in point. The recent successful docking maneuver between a Shenzhou module and the Tiangong Space station is as much a triumph for the PLA as it is for China's civilian space agency.

If the US ever intervene in a cross-strait clash or challenge China's maritime claims, Beijing would employ a pre-emptive "sea denial" strategy alongside its conventional operations - preventing US battle carrier groups operating in or near its claimed territorial waters.

Its submarine-launched ballistic and cruise missiles are now a lethal force. China's long-range nuclear weapons systems have also undergone significant upgrades and its strategic rocket force, the Second Artillery Corps, is

US dominance

very much the pride of the PLA.

One of the most pressing concerns for the US navy is the threat posed by a "carrier killer" anti-ship missile with enhanced targeting capabilities facilitated from space. China very recently launched its own Beidou Positioning System, challenging the monopoly of the US Global Positioning System (GPS).

In recent years the PLA has demonstrated impressive new capabilities at sea and in space, aimed at showcasing the success of its modernisation effort.

One of the PLA's most sensitive advances has been the secret deployment and testing of advanced anti-satellite (ASAT) and Anti Ballistic Missile (ABM) weapons systems.

Two years ago, China successfully intercepted one of its



Chinese Navy vessels during a military exercise.

own ballistic missiles as it streaked through space. This test coincided with the Pentagon's sale of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Patriot systems to Taiwan.

Some experts believe a Chinese ASAT campaign against a careful selected group of US satellites could have catastrophic effect on the US military.

This capability, combined with the potential for China to develop its own Ballistic Missile Defence umbrella, suggests that the space domain will be a new theatre for US-China rivalry.

Chinese ASAT capabilities are not exclusively reserved for "kill vehicles", like the one which obliterated an ageing Chinese weather satellite in 2007. It is now believed that the successful 2007 "kill" was in fact the third test in a series. Previous tests had demonstrated an ability to

maneuver in proximity to targeted satellites.

The obvious message is to deliver a powerful warning if Taiwan were to declare formal independence.

But Pentagon planners are now concerned that the Taiwan contingency has been eclipsed by China's broader maritime territorial claims and demands for more international space to protect the arteries feeding China's growth.

In addition to its "sea denial" and space warfare strategies, China is also expanding its conventional capabilities. The PLA Air Force in recent years has extended its ability for offshore operations, enhancing an offensive capability. It is planning an overhaul of its ageing fleet with the deployment of over 3,000 new aircraft.

For the most part China has relied on copying Russian fighter technology. However, the roll-out of the Chengdu J-20 Stealth fighter prototype raised eyebrows last year, carefully timed to coincide with a visit by the US defence secretary.

There have been some very significant developments in the deployment of Chinese submarines in recent years. Beijing possesses 10 Russian-built ultra-quiet Kilo class submarines possibly armed with 200km-range anti-ship cruise missiles.

Since 2006, when a Chinese submarine surfaced undetected within torpedo range of the US aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk, China's submarine force has regularly marauded the US Navy and its allies in the Pacific.

It is thought that China plans to build three aircraft carrier battle groups, each armed with 40 fighters, up to eight warships, three nuclear-powered attack submarines and a number of support vessels. The PLA Navy's retrofitted Varyag carrier, currently under sea-trials, will serve as a training platform.

Even if the aircraft carrier would likely be a prestige piece and more directed at Chinese domestic pride, the prospect of a Chinese aircraft carrier will certainly cause ripples for the broader East Asian naval balance.

China's emerging military might has especially worried its near neighbours. China has long-running territorial disputes with Vietnam, the Philippines in South China Sea and has also positioned hundreds of missiles for a potential attack on Taiwan, which it views as part of its territory.

The US promised to bolster its presence in the region last year, in a move seen as countering China's dominance. Martin Patience in Beijing says Chinese officials remain wary about growing American influence in the region, and believe Washington wants to encircle China.

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Applying the R2P to Syria

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THE brutal assault on Syria's civilian population by government tanks, mortars and rockets continues, but the world appears unable to do more than wring its hands. Is this the end of a democratic wave ushered in by the Arab Spring and the Responsibility to Protect, the R2P doctrine that the international community applied to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's threatened massacre of his citizens? Published accounts estimate more than 9000 people have fallen in the Syrian unrest, with thousands wounded and displaced while others linger in government prisons. One question that emerges is whether the global community is complicit by failing to stop the mayhem.

The Russian and Chinese opposition to UN Security Council action suggests as much, but opponents of the Syria regime still have options based on a broad interpretation of R2P. When this new century began, new thinking emerged about ways the community should respond to governments that turn on their people. Rwanda and Bosnia instigated the new era, and the slaughters that took the lives of tens to hundreds of thousands in some cases more in Sudan, Indonesia, Uganda, Cambodia, Syria and Saddam's Iraq in the postWorld War II era raised questions whether international intervention should transcend the customary law codified by the United Nations' Article 2 that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state..."

In 2005, the global community agreed that the time for change had arrived. The World Summit the largest gathering of leaders in history at a plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly endorsed the Canadian-sponsored Responsibility to Protect initiative that called upon the international community to use diplomatic, humanitarian and, through the Security Council, collective action namely, force to protect populations from "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity," and asked the General Assembly to consider the matter more fully.

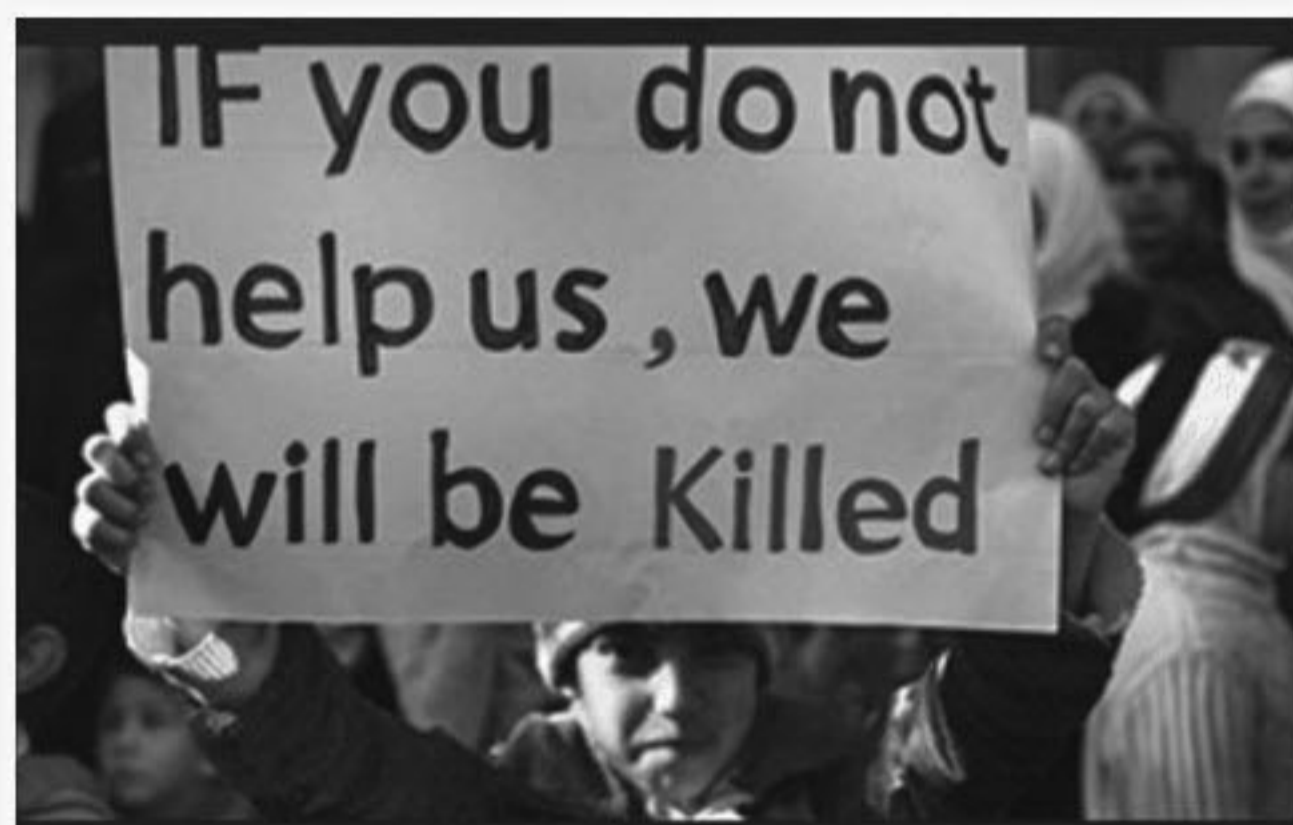
Libya marked the first test, and the international community stepped up. The Arab League led in calling for a no-fly zone to protect the country's rebelling population. Given the nod by the UN Security Council, the International Criminal Court indicted Muammar Gaddafi for crimes against humanity. The council then endorsed military action calling attention to the regime's "gross and systematic violation of human rights," and "widespread and systemic attacks" that amounted to "crimes against humanity." The seven-month war that followed translated words to action. It first generated the effective largely NATO-led air campaign to protect rebel-held Benghazi. The time bought allowed regime opponents to cobble the fighting force which, working with air power, defeated the Libyan leader.

Success seemed to herald a new era in global politics, one putting dictators on notice that they could not get away with murder. But many wondered if the principle could survive the test of time.

The world did not have to wait long. While attention focused on Libya, unrest in Syria boiled over into demon-

strations that threatened to topple the Assad regime. The government responded with increasing force before a horrified world television audience.

As in Libya, the Arab League took the lead to push back. It suspended Syria from the body, prohibited travel of designated Syrian officials to Arab states, froze Syria's government assets abroad, and halted transactions with Syria's central bank and commercial exchanges with the government while calling for President Bashar al-Assad to step down. The United States, the European Community and others joined exercising diplomatic and economic sanctions. Collectively these measures suggested that R2P indeed was alive. But as implemented they proved insuff-



ficient to halt the violence.

Both China and Russia vetoed a watered-down version of the Libya resolution. The Kremlin claimed repetition of even UN sanctions, let alone military action, would ill serve peace and be a slippery slope to an illegitimate overthrow of a government.

Of course, there is more to the story. In Moscow's case it is not simply its longstanding supportive relationship with the Assad regime that allows it to port its Mediterranean fleet in Tartus. Of greater concern, and this includes China as well, the Kremlin undoubtedly fears that application of R2P to Syria could blow back someday. After all, both the authoritarian rulers in Moscow and Beijing fear future serious domestic tensions at home. They would like to prevent any precedent for international intervention in their domestic situation.

Does this pull the rug from Responsibility to Protect in

Syria? Not really. The doctrine's authors anticipated council roadblocks and concluded that in event the body failed to "discharge its responsibility in conscience-shocking situations crying out for action, then it is unrealistic to expect that concerned states will rule out other means and forms of action to meet the gravity and urgency of these situations."

The "other means" do not require repetition of the Libya intervention. Neither the West nor the Arab League has the stomach to mire themselves in the potential quagmire that Syria's sectarian and ethnic divisions pose. Rather Syria requires that the League and allies apply a more nuanced approach in addition to enforcement and strengthening of economic and diplomatic sanctions.

On February 16, 2012, the General Assembly gave momentum in its 137 to 12 vote the 12 opponents included Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe joining China and Russia supporting the Egyptian resolution that called upon the Assad regime to halt its crackdown and comply with the Arab League's demand for a transition of power.

But the resolution was no action plan and neither did one come from the 60-plus nation "Friends of Syria" February meeting in Tunisia. That gathering ended with a lame call for the Syrian government to "immediately put an end to all human rights violations and attacks against civilians."

Nonetheless there remain modest R2P steps much of the international community can endorse under the umbrella Arab League to stop the slaughter:

·The League should restate its January 22, 2012, call for Assad to step down to include other key members of the ruling clique. After all, any regime is more than its leader.

·Syria's foreign opponents should use the airwaves in a propaganda war to offer amnesty to Syrian forces who lay down arms or defect to the rebel side by a date certain to avoid prosecution for crimes against humanity.

·Syria's armed resisters should receive military aid and training sufficient to combat the government's infantry, armor and helicopters.

·The United States and others must lobby Russia and China to support R2P impressing that they are on the wrong side of history with consequences that will diminish their political and economic interests in the region for years to come.

·Foreign mediators should help mold the divided Syrian opposition into a united internationally recognized interim government in waiting prepared to lay the foundation for legislative elections and constitution building learning from the difficulties Libya and Egypt have encountered for a new democratic Syria once the current government falls.

What's at stake in Syria is more than Damascus' future. Successful application of R2P will make a statement that Libya was not a fluke. It will send a message: For governments that murder their people to stay in power, the international community will assure that the survivor will be not the regime but the people.

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Myanmar and the West: Economics of politics

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AFTER decades of isolation, Myanmar is again on the international radar. A series of high-level interactions with Western dignitaries including the US Secretary of State and the British Foreign Minister are indicative of this. While democracy in Myanmar is still in an embryonic stage, the international community seems to have opened its arms to the government of Myanmar. With the US indicating a withdrawal of economic sanctions against Myanmar in the near future, the biggest questions that come to mind are: Why now, and what next?

Why now?

Myanmar's efforts at democracy are now gaining legitimacy internationally, primarily because of Western economic interests. Myanmar is a resource-rich country and the West's loss since the sanctions has been China, Thailand and India's gain. Since the 1990s the Western world's economic engagement with Myanmar has been limited to humanitarian aid. Despite Myanmar's abundant natural resources and resulting economic and investment opportunities, economic sanctions meant the West could not take advantage of it. Now, with a democratically elected civilian government led by President U Thein Sein having assumed office, the international community is rushing to this potential goldmine of investment opportunities.

Post the global financial meltdown, financial bailouts, fiscal austerity measures and freezing salaries have become an accepted norm for the Western world, especially EU countries. With declining employment rates and increasing national debts, Myanmar could come as a blessing in disguise in terms of investment opportunities. Myanmar is endowed with natural resources, but lacks the technology to capitalize and process this strength. The West is now indicating its willingness to provide Myanmar with the technical know-how in return for cooperation.

In recent months, Myanmar has gone for many reforms including in the banking sector, liberalization of economic and financial activities, the operation of trade unions, eased media and censorship laws, reconstitution of the National Human Rights Commission and greater internet access. These reforms indicate an inclusive approach in the path to progress. These developments can also be seen as confidence-building measures which increase the country's legitimacy on the international front. Personal banking is coming up in a big way in Myanmar and as a result, many international banks are already setting up branches.

Access to the Bay of Bengal is another important aspect of this renewed interest. If the Chinese infrastructure projects continue to grow at their current pace in Myanmar, China gaining a viable corridor to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean and bypassing the Malacca Straits is a very plausible scenario which is worrisome for the rest of the world. Myanmar is however showing subtle signs of moving away from the preponderant Chinese influence. The suspension of (the Chinese-funded and built) dam on Myitsone River is indicative of this as is Myanmar's willingness to also cooperate with countries other than China.

The West's poster girl for Myanmar's pro-democracy movement for over two decades, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has also been a factor for this change in the attitude of the international community. Post her release from an extended house arrest sentence in January 2011, and after President Sein's talks with her, the constitution was amended to allow her to contest the upcoming by-elections. This gesture by the Myanmar government has gone a long way in addressing the West's concerns. President Sein seems to have understood that Suu Kyi is the key to court Western investments and has therefore undertaken every measure to accommodate the pro-democracy leader. The gradual release of political prisoners also served this end.

What next?

Myanmar's efforts at improving its image internationally are gaining ground with many regional groupings and organizations granting it legitimacy and acceptance. Its election to the ASEAN chair for 2014 has brought a promise for greater engagement with member countries and the US. The GMS initiative also held its summit in Myanmar in December 2011 which contributed to expanding its trade relations with member countries. This is evident with the upward swing in Myanmar's overall economic situation with its currency, the Kyat, becoming 25 per cent stronger due to capital inflows since the beginning of 2010. The possibility of President Sein's government reaching peace agreements with the ethnic armed groups has also generated a fair amount of confidence in international investors towards securing and safeguarding investments.

Myanmar's head of the newly inducted economic advisory board, U Myint, recently said, "Myanmar is a rich country with poor people." So far, neither the West nor Myanmar has gained anything fruitful from not engaging. In fact, the West's treatment has only pushed Myanmar closer to China over the last two decades. This has been problematic given China's rise being viewed as a menacing phenomenon. Now, with Myanmar opening up to economic liberalization and privatization, Western attempts can be viewed as a form of neo-liberalism. While there is no denying that politics and economics in the contemporary sense are inseparable, the long-term ramifications of this shift are profound.

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