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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE -09

The Long View

**The PLA at 100: Purge, Power, the
Taiwan Question and the India Front**

In Conversation with

Lt. Gen. S. L. Narasimhan (Retd.)

Guest host

Prof. Ashok K. Kantha

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations
Chanakya University, Bengaluru**

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In Conversation with

Lt. Gen. S. L. Narasimhan (Retd.)

Former Member, NSAB and former Director-General, Centre for Contemporary
Chinese Studies, Ministry of External Affairs

Guest host

Prof. Ashok K. Kantha

Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations,
Former Ambassador of India to China

The Long View | Episode-9

The PLA at 100: Purge, Power, the Taiwan Question and the India Front

In Conversation with Chair Professor Ashok K. Kantha and Guest, Lt. Gen. S. L. Narasimhan (Retd.)

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"The Long View: Conversation. Context. Consequence is a flagship podcast series launched by the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair on International Relations at Chanakya University. Debuting on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary in 2026, the series provides forward-looking, India-centric perspectives on global affairs, strategic autonomy, and Asian geopolitics.

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Key Takeaways

- Anti- corruption purges in People's Republic of China have eliminated top party officials, including close associates of President Xi Jinping. These include five members of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and several other senior officials.
- Lt. Gen. S.L. Narasimhan presses that these purges will not have an effect on the lower-rank morale, and that the People's Liberation Army's fighting capability will remain largely unscathed.
- The discussion also helps break the myth of the possible 2027 'Taiwan Invasion' by China, with Lt. Gen. Narasimhan reiterating that the Chinese leadership under President Xi Jinping has never set a fixed year, i.e., 2027 for an invasion, or forced reunification of Taiwan by China.
- Prof. Kantha and Lt Gen. Narasimhan breakdown the interpretation of the 'new normal', vis-à-vis China's construction of border roads, 'amphibious' invasions, and growing cyber and state capabilities of China.

Transcribed and Edited by

Aditi Singh Kaushik

Aditi Singh Kaushik is an Intern at the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University. She is an early-career Political Science researcher specializing in International Relations. She holds an MA and a BA in Political Science from Banaras Hindu University, alongside a Diploma in International Affairs and Diplomacy. Aditi has authored peer-reviewed articles and book chapters examining wartime sexual violence, border conflict, and transnational women's resistance. Her professional institutional experience spans research roles at the European Center for Populism Studies and IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute, alongside active conference presentations on gender, climate change, and technology policy across prominent academic platforms.

Editorial Note:

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability, clarity and British English. Repetitions, fillers, false starts and obvious speech-recognition errors have been removed or corrected while preserving the substance and conversational character of the discussion. The views expressed by the participants are their own and do not necessarily represent those of Chanakya University or the Subhas ChandraBose Chair of International Relations. The opening promotional teaser has not been repeated in the main transcript.

Transcript

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA:

Welcome to this episode of The Long View, a conversation space created by the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University. On this platform, we engage in in-depth, relatively relaxed conversations on issues shaping an international order currently undergoing a period of severe flux and turmoil. It is difficult to pinpoint trends, disruptions, and continuities if one focuses solely on the daily headlines. Here, we step back to examine the issues and assess the broader consequences of developments. While we cannot ignore current and pressing events, we endeavor to situate them in the context of enduring structural factors.

For every episode, we have a distinguished interlocutor. Today, we are very fortunate to have with us Lieutenant General S. L. Narasimhan (Retd.). He is one of the leading strategic thinkers in our country, with a distinguished career of nearly four decades in the Indian Army. He served as Defence Attaché in Beijing, was the Founder Director General of the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies (CCCS) in the Ministry of External Affairs—an apex policy think tank established by the Government of India—and remains actively engaged with various national institutions. I should also mention that he has served not one, but three terms on the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB). General, we are truly fortunate to have you with us.

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN

Thank you very much for having me on this podcast.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA:

What we propose to discuss today centers around the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which will mark its centenary next year in 2027. It is passing through a rather peculiar phase. The PLA has undergone very significant purges that do not seem to be abating. In fact, out of the seven-member Central Military Commission (CMC)—the highest body overseeing defense and security matters in China, chaired by President Xi Jinping himself—five members have been purged or sidelined; only two remain, including President Xi. Furthermore, the last two Defence Ministers—General Wei Fenghe and General Li Shangfu—were not only purged from the party and military, but were also awarded death sentences, albeit with a two-year reprieve.

This is the first situation we will examine. The second topic concerns the centenary goals: as the PLA reaches 2027 and looks ahead to the centenary of the People's Republic of China in 2049, certain modernization benchmarks have been set by Chairman Xi. What are those goals, and what do they mean for regional security? Third, we will address the intense speculation—emanating particularly from Washington, D.C.—that 2027 represents a critical window for China's plans to reunify Taiwan with the PRC. Fourth and finally, we will

turn to our direct border issues with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and discuss how India should posture itself.

Let us begin with the purges in the People's Liberation Army. How do you view these purges? What are the underlying drivers, has operational effectiveness been compromised, and does it impact China's military preparedness and deployments along the India–China border?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN

Thank you very much for having me on this prestigious podcast. When Xi Jinping came to power in late 2012, two former Vice Chairmen of the Central Military Commission, General Xu Caihou (徐才厚) and General Guo Boxiong (郭伯雄), were purged. That marked the starting point for an unprecedented campaign in which numerous generals and senior officials were systematically brought down.

Historically, an unwritten understanding existed within the PLA and the Chinese Communist Party: high-ranking leaders were rarely targeted while actively serving; investigations generally occurred only after they had retired and vacated office. Furthermore, the apex leader was virtually never touched—the deputy or subordinate was typically the one targeted. That paradigm shifted abruptly after Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou were purged. Xi Jinping introduced the doctrine that both 'Tigers and Flies' (打虎拍蝇 / dǎ hǔ pāi yíng) would be targeted simultaneously—'tigers' referring to senior generals and Politburo-level politicians, and 'flies' referring to lower-level cadres across the party apparatus. Millions of party officials have faced disciplinary action. What is particularly striking, however, is the sheer scale and stature of officials purged from the armed forces.

The crisis within the Central Military Commission (CMC) occurred somewhat later. Prior to that, in mid-2023, the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) witnessed an extraordinary shakeup where approximately nine senior commanders, including its top leadership, were purged in a single sweep.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA

Just to explain to our listeners, the PLA Rocket Force is an immensely powerful organ of the People's Liberation Army because it oversees both China's strategic nuclear assets and its vast arsenal of conventional ballistic and cruise missiles. Earlier known as the Second Artillery Corps (第二炮兵), it was upgraded during the 2016 military reforms into the PLA Rocket Force, introducing deliberate strategic ambiguity into China's nuclear doctrine.

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN

Correct. To understand the operational impact of these purges, one must recall the radical structural reforms instituted in late 2015 and 2016. Those reforms achieved two major structural shifts. First, they dismantled the traditional four general departments—the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Armaments Department (GAD), and General Logistics Department (GLD)—and redistributed their

supervisory powers into 15 functional offices, commissions, and departments directly subordinate to the CMC headquarters. Consequently, when CMC members or departmental chiefs are purged today, the supervisory mechanisms established in 2016 ensure that institutional functions continue under the CMC functional organs.

Second, military formations by design are engineered to function even if their higher headquarters is completely neutralized or decapitated during wartime. If a division headquarters is wiped out, the subordinate commanders and brigade structures possess the operational doctrine to maintain fighting continuity.

Third, Chairman Xi has deliberately spared the theater commanders. Operational theater commanders across the eastern, southern, and northern commands have remained stable. While a former Western Theater Command commander was investigated, that occurred well after he had relinquished command and moved into a diplomatic posting. The theater commanders who directly control fighting formations have not been disrupted. What has been neutralized is the apex political and supervisory tier in Beijing, where five out of seven CMC members have been sidelined.

The most surprising purge was that of senior Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia (张又侠). General Zhang was widely regarded as Xi Jinping's close personal friend; both are 'princelings' (红二代) whose fathers were senior revolutionary comrades in the CCP. The prevailing expectation was that even if policy differences arose, Zhang would simply be allowed to retire gracefully. Seeing him placed under investigation astonished observers. While corruption is invariably the official charge—in China, disciplinary charges almost universally allege financial corruption or personal moral impropriety—corruption is rarely the sole driver. Political loyalty is paramount. If Xi Jinping harbors any suspicion regarding an individual's absolute loyalty, that leader is purged under the convenient rubric of anti-corruption.

Regarding the former Defence Ministers who received death sentences with a two-year reprieve (死刑缓期二年执行 / sǐxíng huǎnqī èr nián zhíxíng), in Chinese legal practice a two-year reprieve almost invariably means the death sentence will be commuted to life imprisonment. Operationally, the PLA's core combat capabilities remain intact. Air and naval incursions across the Taiwan Strait median line have continued unabated, and strategic

missile tests—including the recent intercontinental ballistic missile test into the Pacific Ocean and submarine-launched ballistic missile exercises—proceeded without disruption. Along the Line of Actual Control, we see no force reductions; permanent billeting, expanded airfields, hardened shelters, and heliports remain fully manned. We should not assume that political purges at the top have degraded the PLA's battlefield fighting capability.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA

A related question arises: when disciplinary action is taken against so many high-ranking figures—a report in Qiushi (求是) or related party journals noted that 88 generals had been investigated, and that tally has now crossed well over 100 generals—does this adversely



affect military morale? Furthermore, Xi Jinping has served as General Secretary and CMC Chairman since 2012. We are in 2026, fourteen years later. Why does corruption remain such an endemic challenge that dozens of top generals must continuously be purged?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN

I will address this in two parts: first regarding morale, and second on the persistence of corruption.

Regarding morale, I recall an experience while traveling in a taxi to Beijing Capital International Airport. During our conversation in Chinese, the driver revealed that he was a PLA veteran. He expressed intense disgust over the graft and corruption that had pervaded the senior military hierarchy, and was genuinely pleased that senior officers were finally being held accountable. While observers might assume purges generate widespread disaffection, among lower-level officers and the rank-and-file, there is satisfaction that corrupt seniors are facing retribution. We must be cautious before concluding that PLA combat morale has collapsed.

As for the persistence of corruption, it has often been called the world's second-oldest profession—it cannot be eliminated overnight. In an institution managing vast procurement budgets and real estate assets, corruption takes generations to root out. What is extraordinary is the sheer intensity of the crackdown. The critical takeaway for India is that despite these internal purges, PLA operational preparedness along our borders and across the Taiwan Strait remains robust. We must never underestimate their capabilities.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA

Let us turn to the PLA's modernization milestones. Next year, the People's Liberation Army reaches its centenary. Chairman Xi has established the goal of transforming the PLA into a 'world-class military' (世界一流军队) by 2049, when the People's Republic of China marks its centenary. What specific benchmark did Xi Jinping set for 2027, and how does it connect to the 2035 and 2049 targets?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN

To comprehend the timelines, we must examine two successive sets of strategic roadmaps. Under President Hu Jintao in the 2006 Defence White Paper, the modernization trajectory was structured around three target years: 2010, 2020, and 2050. When Xi Jinping consolidated power, this framework was recalibrated to 2020, 2035, and 2049, with 2035 serving as the vital midway checkpoint.

Originally, the PLA was tasked with achieving two foundational goals by 2020: 'mechanization' (机械化 / jīxièhuà) and 'informationization' (信息化 / xìnxīhuà). Mechanization refers to the comprehensive upgrading of armored fighting vehicles, motorized divisions, and modern conventional platforms. Informationization entails integrating the electromagnetic spectrum, digitized command systems, and secure

communications—a priority spurred by China’s observations of U.S. operations during the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

However, the sweeping 2016 reforms—which dismantled the four general departments and established theater commands—caused major transitional friction. Chairman Xi personally drove these ‘above-the-neck’ (脖子以上 / bózi yǐshàng) and ‘below-the-neck’ (脖子以下 / bózi yǐxià) restructuring efforts, which inevitably delayed the full realization of the 2020 modernization milestones.

Consequently, at the Fifth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee in October 2020, Xi Jinping articulated a centenary goal for 2027: the PLA must accelerate its modernization to complete basic mechanization and informationization, while advancing ‘intelligitization’ (智能化 / zhìnénghuà)—the application of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and big data to military operations, as formally outlined in China’s 2019 Defence White Paper.

The 2027 milestone was therefore designed to complete delayed foundational modernization goals. The 2035 checkpoint requires full modernization across all military branches, while 2049 requires the PLA to possess the capability to fight and win wars globally. However, Western observers misinterpreted the 2027 benchmark. In early 2021, Admiral Philip Davidson, then Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, testified before the U.S. Senate that China had set 2027 as a timeline to invade Taiwan. This popularized the phrase ‘Davidson Window’. In reality, no Chinese leader, including Xi Jinping, has ever declared 2027 as an operational deadline for invading Taiwan. It remains an institutional modernization milestone.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA

Indeed, Admiral Davidson’s testimony created considerable alarm, though analysts subsequently recognized that Chinese leadership had not designated 2027 as a firm invasion date. Nevertheless, following former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taipei in August 2022, Beijing significantly escalated military coercion. PLA aircraft and naval vessels routinely cross the Taiwan Strait median line, breach Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), disregard historical conventions surrounding offshore islands like Kinmen (Quemoy) and Matsu, and stage joint encirclement exercises.

China is executing aggressive gray-zone operations, similar to its actions in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and along our northern borders. Looking ahead—especially toward potential political triggers such as the January 2028 Taiwanese presidential elections if the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) retains power—what coercive options does Beijing have short of a high-risk amphibious invasion?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

An amphibious invasion of Taiwan is an extraordinarily complex undertaking. When the conflict in Ukraine erupted, some commentators speculated that China would immediately march into Taiwan. Those who study military history recognized that rolling across an open



land border is fundamentally different from staging an assault across 150 kilometers of open water. An amphibious assault across the Taiwan Strait would represent the Normandy D-Day landings many times over.

If we examine China's coercive escalation ladder, several options exist short of an all-out assault:

1. Maritime Quarantine / Selective Interdiction: This represents the lowest rung. Chinese coast guard and maritime militia vessels could intercept, inspect, or impound commercial or resource cargo headed for Taiwanese ports, creating acute economic pressure and forcing political negotiations without firing a shot.

2. Coercive Naval and Aerial Blockade: Demonstrated during the August 2022 exercises following Pelosi's visit, China established six declared exercise zones encircling Taiwan. However, sustaining a comprehensive blockade is fraught with risk. Taiwan manufactures approximately 70% of the world's advanced semiconductors through TSMC. Any blockade that chokes off global semiconductor supply chains would devastate the global economy, making it impossible for the international community to remain passive.

3. Seizure of Outlying Islands (Kinmen and Matsu): Taking Kinmen or Matsu would be militarily straightforward and provide potent political signaling. Kinmen lies merely a few kilometers off the coast of Xiamen and maintains close economic and social ties with the mainland.

4. Full Amphibious Invasion: This remains China's most difficult option. To invade Taiwan, the PLA must land massive ground forces and sustain them across the strait. Even factoring in China's civilian roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) vessels, the PLA Navy's sealift capability is currently limited to transporting roughly 8 to 10 combined-arms brigades, supported by airborne lift for 2 to 3 airborne brigades. This force is insufficient to conquer a fortified island of 23 million people. Furthermore, amphibious operations are heavily constrained by monsoon seasons, sea states, and limited landing beaches.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA:

Let us explore the scenario of China seizing an outlying island like Kinmen or Matsu. Kinmen has strong mainland connections. If China occupied Kinmen, global supply chains would not be disrupted in the way a total blockade would cause. In that circumstance, is there any compelling incentive for the United States to intervene militarily?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

The United States is highly unlikely to intervene militarily over Kinmen or Matsu. Washington has deliberately maintained 'strategic ambiguity' regarding Taiwan's defense. Even when President Joe Biden stated on several occasions that U.S. forces would defend Taiwan, the White House press office walked back those comments within hours. Given current domestic and international entanglements, the U.S. would not commit military forces over an offshore island like Kinmen.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA:

What are the direct strategic stakes for India in the event of a Taiwan crisis or full-scale conflict?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

There are two primary dimensions India must weigh:

First, the Line of Actual Control: Could China initiate hostilities against India simultaneously, or turn toward India after a Taiwan campaign? In July 2013, a Chinese nationalist website (Wen Wei Po) published an article titled ‘Six Wars China Will Fight in the Next 50 Years’, listing a war to reclaim Taiwan first, and a war over ‘South Tibet’ (Arunachal Pradesh) third or fourth. However, the PLA views Taiwan as an internal renegade province, whereas it views India through a sovereign geopolitical lens. Having witnessed Indian Army combat prowess in Kargil and during recent border standoffs, the PLA respects India’s military professionalism. Chinese planners recognize that engaging India requires massive, full-scale operations. China possesses sufficient force structure in its Western Theater Command to maintain pressure on the LAC regardless of events in Taiwan, meaning India cannot afford to lower its guard.

Second, maritime and commercial interests: Approximately 50 to 55 percent of India’s international trade transits through the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait. A conflict in the Taiwan Strait would create acute shipping disruptions, trade diversions, and economic volatility. India’s vital interest lies in safeguarding freedom of navigation and overflight across these critical sea lines of communication.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA: Turning to the long-term strategic horizon, we are here in Bengaluru attending the first edition of the China Forum, which convened 25 leading Indian China scholars, former diplomats, and military practitioners. A central theme was ‘asymmetric deterrence’. Given the stark asymmetry between India and China—China’s GDP is over five times larger than India’s, and its defense spending exceeds ours fourfold—how should India conceptualize asymmetric deterrence over the next decade?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

When two adversaries possess asymmetrical economic and military capacities, the weaker side cannot attempt symmetric, platform-for-platform matching. Trying to mirror China tank-for-tank or jet-for-jet would be financially ruinous and technologically unviable. Instead, we must take inspiration from strategic history, including China’s own doctrinal evolution.

In the early 1990s, when China faced a militarily superior adversary, it formulated the ‘War Zone Campaign’ (战区战役 / zhànqū zhànyì) doctrine. This concept aimed to exploit a short operational window to strike deeply and secure a decisive political victory rather than attempting broad territorial conquest. Similarly, in Ukraine’s defense against Russia and Iran’s resistance against U.S. power, weaker powers imposed disproportionate costs by



operating in ways the stronger side did not anticipate.

For India, asymmetric deterrence rests on several core pillars:

1. Exploiting Defensive Terrain: Along our northern borders, the topography transitions from the flat Tibetan plateau on the Chinese side into rugged, ravenous, heavily forested, and high-altitude mountainous terrain on our side. While terrain complicates our infrastructure construction, it provides immense natural advantages for defensive warfare.

2. Cyber, Space, and Electronic Warfare: India must invest heavily in non-contact, high-leverage domains. In modern warfare, space dominance is decisive. India demonstrated anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities in 2019 (Mission Shakti), but China has surged ahead in kinetic energy weapons, hypersonic glide vehicles, and co-orbital systems. Expanding our capabilities in cyber warfare, counter-space systems, and electronic warfare allows us to impose severe costs without astronomical expenditures.

3. Multi-Domain Operations (MDO): Future conflict will blend conventional maneuvers with cyber, space, electronic warfare, and information operations. Operating effectively across all domains levels the playing field against a numerically superior adversary.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA:

While asymmetric defense is vital, what happens if China pursues limited, salami-slicing land grabs along the LAC—seeking incremental gains in Arunachal Pradesh (which Beijing claims as ‘Zangnan’ or South Tibet) or Ladakh? In India’s domestic political environment, even minor territorial losses carry intense political repercussions. Can India rely strictly on defensive posturing, or must we maintain credible offensive quid-pro-quo options?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

An attacker initiating hostilities almost invariably makes initial tactical gains because of concentrated offensive weight. Standard military doctrine dictates that every defensive formation must formulate proactive offensive counter-plans. When enemy positions stabilize, the defender executes offensive quid-pro-quo counter-thrusts across another sector of the front.

Securing enemy territory provides essential bargaining leverage when ceasefires are negotiated. A classic historical precedent occurred during the 1965 war, when the Indian Army captured the Haji Pir Pass, providing critical leverage at the negotiating table. Within the Indian Army, defensive formations possess designated offensive components.

Furthermore, India maintains dedicated offensive strike formations—including two strike corps oriented toward the western borders and one dedicated strike corps (XVII Mountain Strike Corps) oriented toward the northern borders. Even within a defensive strategic posture, offensive operational capability is an indispensable component of deterrence.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA: This brings us to the ground reality in Eastern Ladakh following the Chinese incursions of summer 2020 and the Galwan Valley clash on June 15–16, 2020.

After prolonged negotiations, disengagement was achieved at multiple standoff points, concluding with the October 21, 2024 agreement regarding Depsang and Demchok. However, we have seen no subsequent progress on troop de-escalation or de-induction. We are now in the sixth consecutive year of heightened military deployments. Is this armed coexistence becoming a quasi-permanent 'new normal' along the border, and what are its broader strategic implications?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

Following the 2020 Galwan crisis, India consistently demanded a structured, three-stage normalization sequence: Disengagement, De-escalation, and De-induction. While the initial disengagement took over four years to finalize in October 2024, China utilized that interim period to construct extensive permanent infrastructure across the Tibetan plateau and Aksai Chin.

Opposite Eastern Ladakh alone, China has built approximately 500 kilometers of strategic highways and feeder roads, extended runways at regional airbases (such as Ngari Gunsang, Hotan, and Kashgar), constructed hardened aircraft shelters, established surface-to-air missile sites, built heliports, and developed permanent climate-controlled billeting for tens of thousands of troops. What began as temporary tactical deployments in 2020 has crystallized into permanent forward posturing. India has responded by matching Chinese infrastructure, deploying mirror troop formations, and fortifying its defensive line. In the absence of sustained diplomatic breakthroughs through the Special Representative (SR) mechanism or the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), this forward deployment represents a durable 'armed coexistence' that will persist for the foreseeable future.

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA

External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar noted in Parliament in December 2024 that the border arrangements were of a limited and temporary nature. Yet, nearly two years later, de-escalation talks remain stalled. Why is progress so slow, and what does this land-border tie-down mean for India's maritime posture in the Indian Ocean?

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

The primary obstacle preventing de-escalation is the profound breakdown of strategic trust following the 2020 violations of bilateral border peace agreements. Until military commander talks and diplomatic mechanisms establish enforceable verification protocols, neither side is willing to thin out forward troops.

Regarding the maritime dimension, while China forces India to commit substantial budgetary and manpower resources to its land frontier, the PLA Navy (PLAN) faces severe structural constraints in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). At any given time, China maintains roughly 8 to 11 naval vessels in the Indian Ocean. These consist primarily of two three-ship task groups rotating through Gulf of Aden anti-piracy escort missions, accompanied



by occasional research vessels or port-call surface combatants. The PLAN currently lacks permanent overseas bases, logistical depth, and carrier-based maritime air cover in the IOR, rendering it incapable of challenging the Indian Navy in our home waters.

The Indian Ocean will remain a vital maritime theater, with the Malacca Strait serving as a critical strategic choke point. India's development of strategic infrastructure—such as the Great Nicobar port project—reinforces our geographic advantage. However, this balance could shift by 2035, when China aims to complete full military modernization and project expeditionary carrier battle groups globally. Until then, India must utilize this window to build comprehensive national power. As Deng Xiaoping once famously counseled: 'Hide your capabilities and bide your time' (韬光养晦 / tāoguāng yǎnghuì).

PROF. ASHOK K. KANTHA:

We will conclude our conversation on that profound and sober note. General Narasimhan, known widely as a true 'thinking general' who has shaped policy at the highest levels and led

India's premier think tank on China, has provided extraordinary clarity on these vital strategic issues. General Narasimhan, thank you very much for sharing your insights on The Long View.

LT. GEN. S. L. NARASIMHAN:

Thank you very much for having me on the podcast. It was a pleasure.

Summary

In this episode of The Long View, Prof. Ashok K. Kantha speaks with Lt. Gen. S. L. Narasimhan (Retd.) about the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the continuing 'anti-corruption's purge of senior military leaders, the significance of the PLA's 2027 centenary, and the implications for India. The conversation also focuses on China's ambitious modernization projects, aimed to reach significant milestones in the upcoming years.

(2027, 2035 and 2049). The discussion then touches upon the potential capture of outlying islands of Kinmen and Matsu by the PLA, and whether the USA would intervene militarily if a situation of this nature arises. The final sections focus on India's asymmetric deterrence, offensive strike capabilities, including cyber and counterspace warfare, and the growing importance of the Indian Ocean

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Episode 09

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About the Guest

Lt. Gen. S.L. Narasimhan (Retd.) is a former infantry officer in the Indian army, and a leading strategic thinker on China. During his distinguished military career, Lt. Gen. Narasimhan has served as a company commander with the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka. He has also served as a distinguished member of India's National Security Advisory Board for three consecutive terms. As the first director-general at the Centre for Contemporary China Studies, Ministry of External Affairs (Govt. of India), Lt. Gen. Narasimhan has been widely involved in research and public discussions on China, emerging military technologies and India's national security.

About the Host

Prof. Ashok Kantha is the Chair Professor of the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations at Chanakya University. A career diplomat with over 38 years of experience, he served as India's Ambassador to China (2014–16), Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and Malaysia. He is a former Director of the Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi, and has held several senior positions dealing with China and India's neighbourhood. A specialist on China and South Asia, he was also the lead Indian negotiator for key agreements with China on the boundary question and military confidence-building measures.

Transcription Note: Audio transcribed using HappyScribe and edited by Aditi Singh Kaushik, Non-Resident Fellow at Subhash Chandra Bose Chair on International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru.

About the Chair

The Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations is a pioneering initiative that brings a distinctive Indian perspective to bear on the dynamic complexities of 21st-century international relations. Anchored in the country's strategic culture, its mandate is to support India's rising trajectory in global affairs through innovative thinking and rigorous inquiry. The Chair seeks to foster interdisciplinary scholarship, equip advanced learners and researchers with expertise across key domains of international relations, develop an Indian conceptual vocabulary for IR discourse, and build partnerships and a collaborative community dedicated to advancing knowledge and policy innovation. An initiative of the School of Law, Governance and Public Policy, Chanakya University, the Chair focuses on Asia, with special priority given to India's neighbourhood.





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