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China's Military-Civil Fusion from Mao to Xi: A Long Roadmap

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The concept of Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) plays a vital role in determining a nation's orientation, with harmonious civil-military ties being essential for national peace and harmony. Due to their extensive democratic traditions, Western democracies have strong constitutional provisions promoting military discipline and political independence, whereas China's journey with MCF is unique. Initiated by Chairman Mao Zedong in 1956 and reenergized by Deng Xiaoping in 1982, the integration of military and civilian technologies is a key component of China's strategy. Successive leaders, from Mao to Xi Jinping, have advanced various aspects of MCF. The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) emphasises MCF as a central strategy for China, intending to boost advanced technological development and fortify China's military-industrial base to become a global superpower by 2049. Under Xi Jinping, the importance of MCF has increased, and it is now viewed as a crucial asset to bolster China's military and economic standing, particularly in light of the intensifying technological and geopolitical competition with the United States. This article examines the evolution of China's MCF throughout its leadership eras, from Mao to Xi, highlighting their shared goal of enhancing China's diversified capabilities.

Keywords: Military-Civil Fusion (MCF), Five-Year Plans, Defence and Technology, PLA.

In today's geopolitically combustible environment, nations' strategic decisions not only determine their destinies but also affect global political and economic arenas. China's Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) is one such pivotal strategy that has attracted considerable attention (Park, 2022). The MCF is primarily a strategic project aimed at closing the divide between the civilian and military sectors. It seeks to utilize the unique resources of each sector to enhance China's global standing. China's MCF can be traced back to Chairman Mao Zedong's time in power. In recent decades, as China looks to redefine its global position and expand its influence, the significance of the Great Wall has exploded. From its infancy under Mao's rule to its current vitality under Xi Jinping, the MCF has evolved from a theoretical concept into a concrete strategy. The main aim of MCF is to achieve China's aspirations as a global power to integrate its formidable industrial prowess with its expanding military might, striving for dominance in the fields of advanced technology and defence (De La Bruyère and

Picarsic, 2021).

MCF's primary objective is to strengthen China's military and economic prowess, but its ancillary effects extend far beyond China's borders. The strategy has far-reaching implications for its neighbours and adversaries, especially for India. The integration of China's civilian and military sectors may be seen as a strategy to strengthen its strategic resources and interests as China aims to enhance its global presence through programmes like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the growth of its technology industries (Rolland, 2019).This intersection of civilian and military spheres in China can represent both opportunities and challenges for India. On the one hand, it presents opportunities for technological and economic collaborations, while on the other, it highlights the need for India to adjust its defence and foreign policies in response to a swiftly evolving Chinese strategy (Tellis and Mirski, 2013).

During the initial years of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the focus of MCF was the transfer of civilian technology to the military sector. In recent years, however, the emphasis has shifted to the development of technologies with both civilian and military applications. The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) specifically emphasises the need to enhance MCF for China to achieve its long-term objective of becoming a prominent global power by 2049 (Mallick, 2022).The goals of China's MCF are transparent. The Chinese government desires to construct a military of world-class calibre, capable of projecting force beyond China's borders and deterring any potential adversaries (United States Department of State, 2020). MCF is viewed as a crucial means of attaining this objective. Understanding the nuances of China's MCF is crucial not only for perceiving the trajectory of Chinese policies but also for appreciating the shifting geopolitical dynamics of Asia. The following sections will delve deeper into the historical development, objectives, and multifaceted effects of MCF, shedding light on its significance in the current geopolitical environment (Jash, 2020).

Historical Background

The history of China's Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) offers a distinct viewpoint on the country's rise as a global superpower. MCF is a strategic initiative in China aimed at merging the country's civilian and military domains to expedite the progress of cutting-edge technology and enhance the military-industrial complex. MCF has had a long-standing presence in China since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Dreyer, 1985). The narrative spans from Chairman Mao's foundational ideals to Xi Jinping's strategic implementation. Each leader, in their own time, contributed a piece to the MCF puzzle, constructing what is now China's comprehensive future strategy (An, 2017). An analysis of the development of the concept under a variety of Chinese administrations is presented as follows for comparison:

TABLE 1: **Chinese Administrations**

Leadership	Period	Geo-Strategic Compulsions / Policy decisions	Underlying Theme of Civil-Military Integration
Mao Zedong	1949- 1954	Conflict in the Korean peninsula	The Dominance of Defence Spending within the Total Budget (30% in 1953)
	1958- 1962	Great Leap Forward (2nd Five-year plan)	Motivation for Defence Industries to Initiate Dual-Purpose Production Lines (74.5% of Defence Industry Output Comprised of Civilian Products in 1960)
	1965- 1976	Sino-Soviet Rift: Cessation of Soviet Support for China's Civil and Military Development Initiatives	Shifted Emphasis Towards Defence Manufacturing: Elimination of Civilian Production Lines from the Defence Sector and the Separation of the Defence Industry from the Soviet Framework
Deng Xiaoping	1978- 1993	Chinese Economic Reforms – Four modernisations	Economic Development Prioritized Over National Defence and Military Expansion
Jiang Zemin	1993- 2003	Following the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, Western nations imposed an embargo on military equipment sales to China. This period also saw the United States' decisive victory in the Gulf War, heralding the advent of the Revolution in Military	Need for Advanced Defence Technology Access.The breadth of civil-military integration extended past the defence industrial foundation to encompass infrastructure, logistics, education, and additional

		Affairs (RMA), along with air operations over Bosnia in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999.	sectors.Building a National Defence Technological and Industrial Ecosystem Integrated with Civil-Military Operations.
Hu Jintao	2003- 2012	Incorporation of Military-Civil Fusion into the 12th Five-Year Plan.	Development Trajectory of Military-Civil Fusion Reflecting Distinct Chinese Features.Harmonising China's National Defence Strategy Design and Formulation with Its National Development Strategies.
Xi Jinping	2012-Till Now	The 'Made in China 2025' Strategy Unveiled in May 2015.In 2016, the CCP Central Committee, the State Council, and the Central Military Commission (CMC) started the Unified Advancement of Economic and National Defence Construction.Inaugural Session of the Central Commission for Military-Civil Fusion Development on June 20, 2017.	The transition from "early-state fusion" to "deep fusion" Integrated System of Military-Civil Strategies and Strategic Competence.

Source: Military-Civil Fusion in China and Lessons for India (Dixit, 2023)

Mao Zedong's Objective

In the early years of the PRC, MCF prioritised the transfer of civilian technology to the military sector. China was struggling to develop its military capabilities and was largely reliant on Soviet Union military assistance, so this was necessary. During Mao Zedong's rule, the seedlings of the MCF were planted. Mao's "people's war" philosophy emphasised the intimate connection between the Chinese populace and the military (Kovalev, 2020). Initiated in 1956, this ideological posture paved the way for a more structured MCF in the succeeding decades. Mao believed that a country's military strength and civilian potential were intertwined and that harnessing both was necessary for genuine national power. The development of the "Two Bombs, One Satellite" programme was among the most significant examples of MCF during the Mao era. Initiated in the 1950s, this programme intended to create China's first nuclear bomb, hydrogen bomb, and artificial satellite. Following the

program's successful completion, China joined the ranks of the world's five nuclear-armed nations (Joshi, 2023).

Deng Xiaoping's Restructuring

After Mao Zedong's demise in 1976, the baton was passed to Deng Xiaoping, who in 1982 injected new life into the MCF. Recognising the need to modernise China's military and industry, Deng advocated for the incorporation of civilian technologies and innovations into the military sector. His era marked the beginning of realigning state enterprises to serve both civilian and military objectives, a crucial step towards a more organised MCF (Kobayashi et al., 1999).

China under Deng Xiaoping's leadership underwent extensive social and economic transformations. The economic development and growth rate were significantly boosted by these policies. The Chinese government maintained its emphasis on MCF. However, there was a change in emphasis from transferring civilian technology to the military to creating technologies with dual use, meaning they could serve both civilian and military purposes (Hu and Khan, 1997).

The development of the "863 Programme" during the Deng Xiaoping era was one of the most significant examples of MCF. This programme was initiated in 1986 to enhance China's biotechnology, information technology, and new material capabilities. The programme was effective and contributed to China's rise as a technological superpower (Chen, 2023).

The Development of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao

The MCF was further expanded under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao's regime after Deng's fundamental reforms. During their respective terms in office, a concerted effort was made to integrate cutting-edge civilian technological advances with military applications. During this period, China's private sector saw significant growth and started to have a more prominent position in the country's Defence industry. This led to the establishment of public-private partnerships under the MCF (Military-Civil Fusion) framework, marking a new era (Sahoo, 2023).

The "973 Programme" was one of the most significant examples of MCF during the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras. This programme was launched in 1997 to enhance China's capabilities in critical technologies, including aerospace, information technology, and new materials. The programme was effective and contributed to China's continued technological advancement (Stone and Wood, 2020).

Xi Jinping's Vision Realisation

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, MCF has taken on a pivotal position in China's strategic planning. Xi sees the MCF not only as a tool for Defence and economic growth but also as a way to realise China's "great rejuvenation." The inclusion of military-civil integration within Xi Jinping's reform plan serves to confirm its crucial position in the overall modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and China's broader imperative for national security (Jash, 2021).

Under his direction, the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans incorporated MCF as a central strategy, signifying its utmost significance. The era of Xi has witnessed the most aggressive efforts to merge the defence and commercial sectors, to leverage China's flourishing tech industry for military advancements (Rana, 2021).

Xi Jinping published a policy document entitled "Deepening the Reform of National Defence and the Military" in 2015. This document outlined several reforms intended to bolster China's military and promote MCF. Xi speaking to the Central Commission for Military-Civil Fusion Development on June 20, 2017, stated "We must accelerate the formation of a full-element, multi-domain, and high-return military-civil fusion deep development pattern, and gradually build up China's unified military-civil system of strategies and strategic capability" (Dixit, 2023).

The Advancement of Artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing are crucial elements of Xi Jinping's MCF strategy. These technologies are deemed indispensable to China's military modernization initiative (Jinping, 2021). The evolution of the MCF from Mao to Xi is a map of China's evolving strategic philosophy. It paints a picture of a nation that has steadily and deliberately built on the concept of fusing its civilian and military strengths, culminating in a strategy that aims to place China at the apex of global power dynamics (Schurtz, 2019).

MCF: The Concept, Components, and Management Systems

MCF is a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) national policy to combine the development of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the national economy and technical innovation. MCF intends to use the civilian sector's resources and capabilities to speed the PLA's modernisation while simultaneously utilising the PLA to promote the development of essential technologies and industries (Mallick, 2022). Its fundamental goal is to break down boundaries between these two industries, enabling for seamless collaboration and resource exchange. The ultimate goal is to utilise breakthroughs in civilian areas to boost military capabilities and vice versa, assuring efficient resource utilisation to amplify national might (Ghatak, 2023).

The MCF plan, which is being implemented by China, is not just the merging of military and civilian spheres of activity. It is a multi-faceted strategy that is founded on all-encompassing components that cover the technological, economic, industrial, and geopolitical spheres. By gaining an understanding of these components, one can obtain a comprehensive view of the complexities of China's MCF (The Soufan Center, 2020).

Technical Integration: The seamless integration of civilian technical breakthroughs with military applications is at the core of the Modern Combat Footprint (MCF). Whether it is artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, or advanced manufacturing, the goal is to make sure that technologies made in the civilian sector can be quickly accepted and modified for use in the military. The military can make rapid breakthroughs because of this integration, which eliminates the need for the defence industry to begin from square one (Joshi, 2017).

Synergies in the Economy: The MCF strategy also looks at the possibility of building economic routes that are beneficial to both the defence industry and the civilian industry. The MCF method seeks to increase efficiency and minimise redundancies by pooling resources, reducing the costs of research and development, and optimising supply chains, among other things. Not only do these synergies assure the health of the Chinese economy, but they also position the country to be more robust in the face of changes in the global economy (Bitzinger, 2021).

The Development of Infrastructure: The establishment of infrastructure that may be used for several purposes is of great significance. Ports, highways, and railroads

are constructed to meet the needs of both the civilian and military domains. These infrastructure projects, often associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), provide China with strategic advantages and operational adaptability during both peaceful and conflict situations. A significant number of these initiatives are already in progress (Chaudhury, 2021).

Industrial Collaboration: Within the framework of the MCF paradigm, there is an aggressive push for industrial collaboration between state-owned corporations, private businesses, and the defence sector. This ensures that developments made in one field can be efficiently used in another. For instance, a technological breakthrough made in a private technology firm can be rapidly incorporated into a military application. This helps to keep the defence industry at the forefront of technological innovation (McCauley, 2019).

Policy and Regulatory Frameworks: China has built an extensive web of policies and laws that support the fusion of military and civilian sectors to make MCF a realistic reality. This was done to make MCF a practical reality. These frameworks guarantee that goals are aligned, give incentives for collaboration, and produce an ecology that is conducive to the growth of MCF (Department of Defence, 2021).

A Tool for Global Strategy: MCF is not just used as an internal policy but also instrumental in functioning as a global strategy. China has positioned itself to project power, shape global standards, and protect its interests in international arenas by merging its military and civilian assets. As a result, the MCF is no longer merely a home effort but rather a fundamental component of China's foreign policy (Can and Vieira, 2022).

The MCF is about more than just combining two different industries. It is a comprehensive plan that takes into account several different aspects and employs a coordinated approach to accomplish China's overarching objectives. From Mao's fundamental principles to Xi's vigorous execution, each leader has recognised and expanded upon these components, making MCF a distinguishing feature of China's path to global pre-eminence. This has occurred from Mao's foundational concepts up to Xi's aggressive implementation (Scobell, et.al., 2020).

The success of China's Military-Civil Fusion (MCF) is not only dependent on the overall strategy that the country employs; rather, it is significantly dependent on the effective management systems that the country employs. These systems make certain that the fusion is implemented without any hiccups, monitor its progression, make sure that resources are used effectively, and adjust the approach as required. A convoluted hierarchy of Chinese institutions and policies is in charge of directing the MCF strategy. The system was developed to foster cooperation between the military and civilian sectors, as well as to ensure that the military had access to the most up-to-date technologies and resources (Xinhua, 2017).

Controlled From a Central Location: The Central Commission for Military-Civil Fusion Development (CCMCFD) is the highest-level body that is tasked with the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of MCF. President Xi Jinping serves as the chairman of the CCMCFD, which also comprises other senior leaders from the government, the military, and industry (Mallick, 2022). The CCMCFD has organised several sub-commissions and working groups to concentrate on particular aspects of the MCF, such as the transfer of technology, the development of industrial cooperation, and international cooperation. Additionally, to put MCF policies into

effect, the CCMCFD collaborates extensively with other government organisations, including the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Because of this centralised approach, the MCF strategy can maintain its consistency across a wide variety of industries and geographic areas (Zemin, 2021).

Coordination on a Regional Scale: Due to the sheer size of China, regional coordination centres play an extremely important part. These centres tailor the central MCF guidelines to the circumstances of the local area to ensure effective execution while taking into account the particularities of the various regions. They serve as conduits for communication between the central leadership and the many local industries. Take for instance China's Central Military Commission (CMC), which holds the position of senior military authority in that country. It is in charge of determining the PLA's long-term strategic goals and supervising the organisation's progress towards those goals. Second, the General Armaments Department (GAD) is in charge of the production of new weaponry and the acquisition of new equipment for the People's Liberation Army. Third, the National Defence Science and Technology University (NDSTU) is a preeminent institution when it comes to the education of scientists and engineers in the military. The China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) is a government-owned entity responsible for designing and manufacturing products for China's space programme. This brings us to our fourth point (Jintao, 2007).

Platforms for Collaboration Across Multiple Sectors: Platforms for joint work have been put in place to facilitate genuine integration between the civilian and military spheres. These platforms make discussion, the sharing of ideas, and collaboration on projects easier, hence facilitating the smooth transfer of technologies and resources between different industries (McCauley, 2019).

Mechanisms for Monitoring and Receiving Feedback: Robust monitoring techniques are an essential component of the management system for the MCF. The progression of MCF projects is monitored in real time using a distributed system of reporting applications and analytical software. This real-time input makes it possible to make adjustments right away, which ensures that the MCF strategy will continue to be adaptable and sensitive to the ever-changing environment (Ho, 2020).

Distribution of Resources and Various Financial Systems: The merging of the military and civilian sectors will require one-of-a-kind financial management strategies to be financed. These systems rank the projects in order of importance, distribute the cash, and ensure that resources are utilised to their full potential. In addition to this, they offer incentives to private businesses so that they will actively participate in MCF projects (US, Department of Defence, 2023).

Administrative Oversight of Intellectual Property (IP): The administration of intellectual property (IP) has become an increasingly crucial role as a result of the integration of civilian technologies and military uses. There are mechanisms in place to guarantee that intellectual properties are safeguarded, and disseminated appropriately and that rights and royalties are demarcated unmistakably. This not only protects innovations but also increases stakeholders' levels of trust in one another.

Collaboration and Supervision on an International Scale: Management systems now extend to multinational cooperation in recognition of the global consequences

of MCF. These mechanisms guarantee that foreign collaborations correspond with MCF goals and that any transfer of technology or knowledge adheres to global norms and conventions. Additionally, they ensure that any technology or knowledge that is transferred is safe (US, Department of Defence, 2020).

MCF: Traditional and Non-Traditional Domains and Their Implications on India

Since its inception, China's MCF strategy has encompassed both traditional and non-traditional domains. Non-traditional realms incorporate a broader range of fields, such as technology, economics, and cyberspace, as opposed to the traditional realms' focus on military and defence-related issues. Given India's geographical proximity, historical ties, and regional ambitions, the convergence of these domains under the MCF umbrella has profound implications for neighbouring countries, most notably India (Segal, 2012).

Traditional Domains

Defence and Military Technologies: China has rapidly incorporated civilian technological innovations into its military apparatus as part of the MCF. This includes sophisticated weapons, communication systems, and surveillance technology. A technologically proficient and constantly evolving PLA poses a threat to India's military preparedness. This necessitates that India maintain technological superiority and perpetually modernise its armed forces (Stone and Wood, 2020).

Infrastructure Development: Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) involve the development of infrastructure that can serve both civilian and military functions. Infrastructure initiatives in India-adjacent regions, like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), may serve dual purposes. They pose strategic challenges for India and necessitate a cautious re-evaluation of its own infrastructure and border management (Rana, 2021).

Non-Conventional Domains

Domains of Technology and Cyberspace: The MCF promotes the integration of civil technology sectors with military cyber operations. This includes AI, quantum computation, and cyber capabilities advancements. The combination of China's civilian tech industry and military cyber operations raises concerns regarding cyber espionage and possible cyberattacks. India must strengthen its cyber defences and invest in cutting-edge cyber research to combat potential threats (Joshi, 2023).

Space and Satellite Technologies: China's commitment to fusing its thriving space sector with defence applications is clear. India's space assets may be impacted by the military of space due to China's technological achievements. India could have to strengthen its space defence capabilities in retaliation (Lal, 2021).

Economic and Trade Strategies: The MCF promotes the integration of economic and geopolitical objectives, utilising trade routes, markets, and resources for strategic advantage. China's growing economic power in the area poses a potential danger to India's commercial interest. This may necessitate India to pursue alternative trade alliances and diversify its economic reliance (Singh, 2022).

Information and Propaganda Warfare: MCF also includes the utilisation of media, communication channels, and digital platforms to promulgate narratives that align

with China's strategic objectives. India must be wary of information warfare, ensuring that its narratives are safeguarded and that it can counter any disinformation campaigns effectively (Zhang, 2019).

The MCF of China, which encompasses both traditional and non-traditional domains, confronts India with a multifaceted challenge. India's first step in formulating comprehensive strategies to protect its interests, ensure regional stability, and position itself effectively in the evolving Asian geopolitical landscape is to recognise and comprehend these implications.

India's Integration of MCF and Insights from the Chinese Approach

India, with its long and illustrious history, powerful democratic framework, and technological prowess, has the potential to construct its own MCF by drawing inspiration from the Chinese model and adapting it to India's specific circumstances while incorporating the lessons it has learned from China. The integration of the military and civilian sectors is not simply about defence; rather, it is about capitalising on the assets of both sectors to advance the strategic prominence of the nation. India has the potential to develop a model for the MCF that will serve as a guiding light for other democracies if appropriate preparation is undertaken (Dixit, 2023).

Centralised Strategy: China's approach to MCF-related decisions and policies is characterised by centralization. With its diverse and federal structure, India could consider establishing a centralised MCF body or task force.

Long-Term Vision: The Chinese MCF is not merely concerned with short-term gains; it is attached to its long-term vision of becoming a global superpower by 2049. India can integrate its MCF strategy with its long-term geopolitical and economic objectives by following China's example.

Infrastructure Development: China invests significantly in infrastructure, which facilitates the integration of the military and civilian sectors. India can increase its infrastructure investments to create logistics and supply chains that are advantageous to both sectors.

Research and Innovation: The emphasis on research and innovation is one of the pillars of China's MCF. With India's robust IT and software industry, there's potential to channel this expertise into defence and military applications.

Balancing Act: While the fusion is advantageous, China's approach sometimes causes companies to be perceived as state actors. India must strike a balance that allows the private sector to collaborate with the military without jeopardising its independence or international credibility.

Conclusion

China's journey towards MCF, which began during the reign of Mao Zedong and continued under Xi Jinping, is evidence of the country's unwavering dedication to integrating its military and civilian technical spheres. This dedication can be seen in China's MCF journey. China's approach to nation-building and strategic progress is distinctive in comparison to that of Western democracies, which have generally relied on clear boundaries between military discipline and political independence. The Primary Objective of MCF is to build a comprehensive system of strategies and

strategic capabilities that cover the both military and civilian sectors. This entails incorporating the many elements of the MCF Strategy with other important national strategic initiatives, to create a cohesive, robust, and all-encompassing national system of strategies. In contrast, China has chosen the route of integration, indicating its distinctive strategy for advancing strategically. Although different Chinese leaderships have had different political and economic priorities, they have all acknowledged the significance of the MCF as a crucial tool that helps improve not only the country's military might but also its scientific and economic capabilities (Kumar, 2023). The MCF strategy has been advanced under Xi's administration by massive changes to the defence industrial base that his predecessors were unable to accomplish. With the help of MCF, Xi aims to bolster China's strength by using the assistance of MCF, particularly in strengthening the PLA. This approach is closely tied to China's geopolitical goals of safeguarding and advancing its national interests. Ultimately, the MCF strategy was seen as a crucial component of the PRC's objective to transform into a "great modern socialist country." This objective encompasses the advancement of a "World-Class Military" and the aspiration to become a global leader in science and technology. This has been the case even though these leaders have recognised the worth of the MCF in different ways. China's emphasis on MCF highlights its intentions to be a powerful global player by the year 2049, which is set against the backdrop of shifting global dynamics, most notably the intensifying competition with the United States (Joshi, 2023). The progression from Mao to Xi demonstrates a nation that, despite the changes that have occurred within its borders and the pressures that have come from beyond, has remained steadfast in its goal of maximising the potential of its combined military and civilian strengths for the sake of national renown.

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