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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Preparing India for China's Missile Challenge

 **THE HINDU**

30 June 2026

SECURITY & DEFENCE**GS3**

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Preparing India for China's Missile Challenge

 **The Hindu** 30 June 2026 **GS3**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If deterrence is about the fear you can credibly create, does India's scattered missile inventory frighten Beijing, or does only a unified rocket force do that?"

Source: [Original editorial](#) 

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

China's **PLA Rocket Force (PLARF)** is a distinct service arm with the world's largest land-based missile arsenal, capable of holding Indian airfields, depots and command nodes at risk along the Line of Actual Control, including in **Aksai Chin and along Arunachal Pradesh, both integral parts of India**. India's own missiles are capable but scattered across services. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **defence, deterrence** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/deterrence/>) **and higher-command reform**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

China's conventional missiles, massed under a single Rocket Force, give it a coercive edge India's dispersed assets cannot match. India holds strong systems, BrahMos, Pralay, Pinaka, but no unified command to plan and mass strikes. The answer is an **Integrated Rocket Force** under unified command for high-volume conventional precision strikes, keeping deterrence credible below the nuclear **threshold** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/threshold/>).

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
PLARF	China's dedicated missile service, 40+ brigades	Depth, dispersal and volume India lacks
Conventional deterrence	Deterring war with non-nuclear force	Stops coercion (https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/coercion/) without nuclear signalling
Integrated Rocket Force	Proposed unified Indian missile command	Consolidates BrahMos, Pralay, Pinaka
Coercion gap	China's ability to threaten at scale	The problem the IRF is meant to close

THE ANALYSIS: WHY UNIFICATION BEATS DISPERSAL

- 1 **China's advantage is structural.** A single Rocket Force with 40+ brigades gives massed, mobile, high-volume strike capacity.
- 2 **India's assets are scattered.** BrahMos, Pralay and Pinaka sit across services with no single command to plan and mass fires.
- 3 **Dispersal deters weakly.** Deterrence needs concentrated, credible, deliverable firepower, not capability spread thin.
- 4 **Stay conventional.** A non-nuclear rocket force answers coercion below the atomic threshold, keeping escalation controllable.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), a distinct service arm with over 40 brigades and the world's largest land-based missile arsenal; systems include the DF-series and hypersonic cruise missiles. India's systems: BrahMos (supersonic (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/supersonic/>) cruise), Pralay (short-range ballistic), Pinaka (multi-barrel rocket). Reform context: theatre commands / integrated theatre commands; Chief of Defence Staff; Department of Military Affairs. Concept: conventional deterrence; escalation below the nuclear threshold; strike depth. India's stand: Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh are integral parts of India.

THE DEBATE

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Argument for the IRF: A unified rocket force consolidates dispersed conventional missiles into massed precision fires, closing the coercion gap and deterring China below the nuclear threshold.

Argument against a new arm: It risks duplication and a costly bureaucratic layer; jointness could instead be achieved by integrating existing assets under theatre commands.

Balanced verdict: Raise the force, but wire it into theatre commands rather than building a standalone empire. The need is concentration of fires, not another silo.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

Owning weapons is not the same as being able to use them decisively. When you assess deterrence, separate the inventory (what exists) from the command architecture (who can mass and deliver it). India's problem is less what it has than how it is organised. This "assets versus command" lens applies to disaster response, cyber defence and policing too.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

China's unified Rocket Force -> massed conventional missiles -> coercion along LAC -> India's dispersed assets deter weakly -> raise Integrated Rocket Force -> unified command + high-volume precision strikes -> credible conventional deterrence below nuclear threshold

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Raise the Integrated Rocket Force** under a single command, aligned with theatre commands.
- ② **Scale production** of BrahMos, Pralay and Pinaka to build strike depth and volume.
- ③ **Invest in the kill chain:** surveillance, targeting and secure communications to make fires credible.
- ④ **Keep it conventional** to reinforce deterrence below the nuclear threshold and preserve escalation control.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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Use this to argue that India's missile challenge is a command-and-organisation problem as much as a hardware problem, and that an IRF answers it.

"To deter a rocket force, you may need a rocket force."

PLARF; BrahMos; Pralay; Pinaka; Integrated Rocket Force; theatre commands; Chief of Defence Staff.

How should a democracy weigh the cost of a new military arm against the security it buys? Where does deterrence end and an arms race begin?

UPSC has asked about defence reforms, theatre commands and India's security challenges from China. This editorial connects those to conventional deterrence.

higher defence reform, LAC standoff, indigenous missile development, escalation management.

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion>), *ORF* (<https://www.orfonline.org>), *CSIS Nuclear Network* (<https://nuclearnetwork.csis.org>)

Source: Preparing India for China's Missile Challenge — Ujjari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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China's large and expanding conventional missile arsenal, held under the unified PLA Rocket Force, gives it a coercive edge along the LAC that India's dispersed missile assets cannot adequately deter; India should raise a dedicated Integrated Rocket Force under unified command for credible conventional deterrence.

 **SUPPORTING**

- The PLA Rocket Force is a distinct service arm with over 40 brigades and the world's largest land-based missile arsenal, giving China depth, dispersal and volume India cannot yet match.
- India's conventional missiles, BrahMos, Pralay, Pinaka, sit across separate services without a single command to plan, mass and deliver strikes, diluting deterrent effect.
- A unified Integrated Rocket Force would consolidate these systems, enable high-volume precision strikes and close the coercion gap without resort to nuclear signalling.

 **COUNTER**

Sceptics argue a new service arm risks duplicating existing capability, adding a costly bureaucratic layer when jointness could be achieved through better theatre-command integration of assets India already holds.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Raise the Integrated Rocket Force under a unified command, matched to theatre commands, expand BrahMos, Pralay and Pinaka production, invest in surveillance and targeting, and keep the force conventional to reinforce deterrence below the nuclear threshold.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

"China's conventional missile superiority poses a coercion problem India cannot answer with dispersed assets." Discuss the case for an Integrated Rocket Force. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Deterrence rests on credible capability, not intentions. China's conventional missile arsenal, held under a single Rocket Force, lets it threaten Indian airfields, logistics and command nodes at scale, a coercion India must answer on its own terms.

BODY

The strategic gap is real. The PLA Rocket Force is a distinct fourth service arm with over 40 brigades and the largest land-based missile inventory in the world, mixing ballistic, cruise and hypersonic systems for both nuclear and conventional roles.

This gives Beijing depth, mobility and sheer volume that can hold Indian assets at risk across the Line of Actual Control, in territory including Aksai Chin and along Arunachal Pradesh, both integral parts of India. India possesses capable systems, BrahMos, Pralay and Pinaka, but they are spread across the three services without a single command to plan, mass and sequence strikes.

Dispersed assets deter weakly. The proposed Integrated Rocket Force would consolidate these conventional systems under unified command, enabling high-volume precision strikes against military targets and closing the coercion gap without reaching for nuclear signalling, which keeps deterrence stable below the atomic threshold.

The counter-view, that a new arm duplicates capability and adds bureaucracy, is best answered by aligning the force with theatre commands rather than treating it as a standalone empire. The deeper point is that conventional deterrence is now a numbers-and-command problem: to deter a rocket force, you may need a rocket force.

CONCLUSION

India cannot match China missile-for-missile overnight, but it can concentrate what it has under one command. An Integrated Rocket Force turns scattered capability into credible conventional deterrence, and does so below the nuclear line.


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