

## Daily Editorial Analysis 5 January 2026

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### Hubris and Caution — China's Posture As 2026 Begins

#### Context

- As 2026 begins, China presents a striking paradox: **Anxious yet assertive China**, facing deep economic and structural stresses at home while projecting growing strategic confidence abroad.
- This duality shapes Beijing's domestic governance, foreign policy, and military posture.
- For India, these shifts are further complicated by a recalibration of U.S. priorities, narrowing India's strategic space and making the management of an already difficult relationship with China more complex.

#### China's Strategic Mood Shift: From Anxiety to Assertiveness

- **Unease Over US Pressure**

- Until late 2024, Chinese strategic thinking was marked by unease over U.S. pressure, slowing growth, and geopolitical isolation.
- By mid-2025, this anxiety had largely given way to confidence.
- Beijing's strategic community increasingly believed China had stabilised its position in great-power competition, managed escalation with Washington more effectively, and gained tactical advantages in trade and tariffs.

- **Closer Alignment with Russia**

- This shift was reinforced by China's expanding influence in the Global South, closer alignment with Russia, and stabilisation of most major-power relationships, except Japan.
- Yet this confidence remains tempered by awareness of domestic fragilities and a hostile external environment.
- These tensions were evident at the Fourth Plenum and Central Economic Work Conference in late 2025, where President Xi Jinping reaffirmed national security, technological autonomy, and **the real economy as core** organising principles.

#### Economic Strain and the Turn Inward

- Despite official growth figures near 5% in 2025, China's economy remains under strain.
- Domestic demand is weak, the property sector continues to depress confidence, and deflationary pressures persist, with producer prices in negative territory for over three years.

- Productivity growth and corporate profits remain sluggish, while local governments face severe fiscal stress, limiting stimulus options.
- Rather than pivot decisively toward consumption-led growth, Beijing has reinforced **State-led technological self-reliance**, prioritising advanced manufacturing, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, green energy, and dual-use technologies.
- The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–30) underscores supply-chain insulation and **whole-chain breakthroughs** to reduce exposure to external shocks.
- Paradoxically, China’s inward turn has coincided with rising export dependence.
- The trade surplus crossed \$1 trillion in the first eleven months of 2025, as China deepened dominance across global value chains in electric vehicles, batteries, solar panels, and industrial machinery.
- This renewed export surge, widely described as **China Shock 2.0**, has disrupted both developed and developing economies and intensified global trade tensions.

## Political Consolidation and Military Assertiveness

- Domestically, 2025 saw further political consolidation under Xi Jinping. Information control tightened, ideological discipline was reinforced, and the scope of national security expanded.
- At the same time, the sacking of senior military officers exposed **persistent dysfunctions** within the party-state system.
- Militarily, the PLA continued rapid modernisation of conventional and nuclear forces.
- Emerging doctrinal shifts toward an **early-warning counter-strike posture** suggest a more risk-tolerant and assertive strategic outlook, reflecting a willingness to accept higher risks in defence of core interests.

## Recalibrated Great-Power Dynamics

- Externally, the most consequential shift was the **recalibration of U.S.-China relations** under President Donald Trump’s second term.
- The 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy reframed China primarily as an economic competitor, deprioritised the Indo-Pacific, and emphasised a more inward-looking America First approach.
- Nevertheless, rivalry persists, as demonstrated by U.S. intervention in Venezuela, which damaged Chinese interests and triggered sharp reactions from Beijing.
- The Trump–Xi meeting in Busan in October 2025 produced limited de-escalation through modest tariff adjustments and selective easing of export controls.
- These steps reflected **Transactional U.S.-China accommodation**, not movement toward a cooperative G2.

## Implications for India-China Relations

- For India, these developments are sobering. Frictions in India–U.S. ties over trade, Russia, and Pakistan have reduced Washington’s willingness to prioritise India as a strategic counterweight to China.
- Simultaneously, Beijing increasingly perceives India’s interest in stabilisation as driven by uncertainty in India–U.S. relations, reducing incentives to accommodate Indian concerns.

- India-China relations in 2025 saw cautious stabilisation without progress on core disputes. High-level exchanges arrested deterioration, but border conditions remain stable yet abnormal.
- Disengagement has not been matched by de-escalation, and buffer zones continue to limit India's traditional patrolling rights, reflecting **Grey-zone incrementalism**.

## Conclusion

- China is likely to persist with managed competition with the U.S., stabilisation combined with hardball diplomacy, intensified Global South outreach, and calibrated assertiveness along its borders and maritime periphery. Grey-zone tactics will remain central.
- For New Delhi, the path forward requires calibrated engagement, strengthened domestic capabilities, and **Asymmetric deterrence and patience**.
- External balancing remains relevant but cannot be assumed reliable in an era of selective great-power accommodation.
- India must prepare for a prolonged strategic contest with resilience and strategic clarity.

## Hubris and Caution — China's Posture As 2026 Begins FAQs

**Q1.** Why is China both anxious and assertive in 2026?

**Ans.** China faces economic and structural challenges at home while simultaneously projecting strategic confidence and expanding its influence abroad.

**Q2.** What defines China's current economic strategy?

**Ans.** China is prioritising state-led technological self-reliance and export-driven growth to offset weak domestic demand.

**Q3:** How has U.S.-China recalibration affected India?

**Ans.** It has narrowed India's strategic space by reducing U.S. emphasis on India as a primary counterweight to China.

**Q4.** Why are India-China border relations described as stable but abnormal?

**Ans.** Disengagement has occurred without de-escalation, and buffer zones continue to restrict India's traditional patrolling rights.

**Q5.** What strategic approach must India adopt going forward?

**Ans.** India must pursue calibrated engagement while strengthening domestic capabilities and maintaining long-term strategic patience.

**Source:** **The Hindu**

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## Security Camps, the Game-Changer in the Maoist Fight

### Context

- Maoism in India, once among the most serious internal security challenges, has been substantially weakened over the past decade.
- Violent incidents have declined sharply since 2010, and the geographical spread of **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)** has contracted dramatically.
- From over a hundred affected districts, Maoist influence is now largely restricted to a few pockets in the Bastar division of Chhattisgarh, with only three districts, Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma, classified as most affected.
- This transformation marks **a major success for the Indian state**, though the durability of peace will depend on addressing long-standing structural issues.

## Historical Roots of Maoist Expansion in Dandakaranya

- The Maoist movement consolidated itself in the **Dandakaranya region (DKR)** during the early 1980s after facing pressure in Andhra Pradesh.
- DKR's dense forests, rugged terrain, and location across multiple State boundaries made it an ideal rear area.
- More significantly, the region's tribal population had experienced prolonged marginalisation and minimal state presence.
- **Severe governance deficit** characterised the region, shaped by administrative neglect and policies that isolated tribal areas from mainstream development.
- This vacuum enabled Maoists to build parallel systems of authority and project themselves as defenders of tribal interests.
- The state's emphasis on mineral extraction, combined with tribal struggles over land, forests and water, created fertile ground for insurgency.
- Maoism thus expanded not only through armed strength but also through **the exploitation of unresolved socio-economic grievances**.

## The Security-Centric Turn and Its Impact

- The decline of Maoism is closely linked to a strategic shift towards establishing security camps in remote and previously insurgent-controlled areas.
- Despite initial local resistance, these camps gradually gained acceptance as they began delivering visible benefits.
- **Expansion of security camps** significantly increased the state's presence, improving the police-to-population ratio and limiting Maoist freedom of movement.
- Faster response times during emergencies placed insurgents on the defensive and enhanced the confidence and morale of security forces.
- Just as importantly, the visible dominance of state forces produced a psychological impact, reassuring local communities of the government's ability to provide safety and stability.
- These developments generated cumulative advantages. Improved human intelligence strengthened counterinsurgency operations, while infrastructure projects such as roads and mobile towers began to transform daily life.

- Under the protection of security camps, the civil administration expanded its reach. For many villagers, this marked the first meaningful interaction with state officials beyond the police or forest department, altering long-held perceptions of the government.

## Erosion of Maoist Capability and Appeal

- As governance deepened and security improved, Maoist influence weakened considerably. **Declining Maoist recruitment** reflected the loss of ideological appeal and organisational capacity.
- Access to weapons, ammunition and funding diminished, while numerous cadres and leaders surrendered or were neutralised through security operations.
- The shrinking support base among tribal communities underscored a critical reality: insurgencies rooted in governance failures lose relevance when those failures are systematically addressed.
- Nevertheless, military success alone cannot guarantee lasting peace. The underlying grievances that once sustained Maoism cannot be resolved solely through security measures.

## The Imperative of Structural Reform and Constitutional Guarantees

- The post-insurgency phase presents a more complex challenge. As communities emerge from isolation, rights-based demands are expected to intensify.
- Some surrendered Maoist leaders have already indicated their intent to pursue tribal causes through democratic means, signalling a transition from armed struggle to political engagement.
- **Implementation of PESA and FRA** is therefore central to the next phase. These constitutional frameworks are essential for strengthening local self-governance, protecting forest and land rights, and empowering tribal communities.
- In many regions, civil administration must effectively begin anew, rebuilding institutions while simultaneously earning public trust.
- A long-term development vision aligned with the Viksit Bharat 2047 framework can help consolidate peace.
- **Long-term inclusive development** must balance economic growth with ecological sustainability and tribal autonomy, avoiding the extractive approaches that previously fuelled alienation and conflict.

## Conclusion

- The containment of Maoism represents a **significant achievement for the Indian state**, reflecting effective coordination between security forces and civil administration.
- Yet the true measure of success lies beyond the decline of violence. Sustainable peace will depend on **translating security gains into justice, inclusion** and democratic participation.
- The sacrifices made by security forces have created a critical opening; its outcome will be determined by the **state's ability to address the structural inequities** at the heart of the conflict.

## Security Camps, the Game-Changer in the Maoist Fight FAQs

**Q1.** Why did Maoists choose the Dandakaranya region as a base in the 1980s?

**Ans.** Maoists chose Dandakaranya because its dense forests, difficult terrain, and weak governance provided strategic and operational advantages.

**Q2.** What major strategy contributed to the decline of Maoist violence?

**Ans.** The establishment of security camps in remote areas significantly reduced Maoist mobility and strengthened state presence.

**Q3.** How did improved security affect local tribal communities?

**Ans.** Improved security reassured local communities and enabled greater access to governance, infrastructure, and development services.

**Q4.** Why is military success alone insufficient to end Maoism permanently?

**Ans.** Military success alone is insufficient because unresolved socio-economic and rights-based grievances can resurface without structural reforms.

**Q5.** What role do PESA and the Forest Rights Act play in sustaining peace?

**Ans.** PESA and the Forest Rights Act help sustain peace by empowering tribal self-governance and protecting land and forest rights.

**Source:** **The Hindu**

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