

How China’s caution in the Iran conflict shows its military limits

The churning happening all round the world is accelerating, with implications for most of the nations of the planet.

Take Donald Trump’s new war on Iran.

The serious Nikkei in Tokyo is titled: “After Iran, China faces difficult calculus on Trump, oil and Taiwan.”

The argument is that the US and Israeli airstrikes against Iran “have shuffled the global geopolitical chessboard just four weeks before the American and Chinese leaders are due to sit down together in Beijing, leaving analysts debating which side has the strongest pieces to play and whether the summit will happen at all”.

Chinese Weaponry

Recent conflicts raise other issues: How advanced is China in terms of new weaponry? Can Beijing be considered as a significant player in the near future in any serious armed conflict?

The Times of India points to an important question: “Pakistan, Venezuela & Now Iran: Why Chinese-made Weapons Keep Failing.”

It is a fact that Chinese-manufactured weaponry, considered to be cheaper, though equally effective, than its Western alternatives, “has imploded spectacularly in recent conflicts. From India dismantling Pakistan’s defences during Operation Sindoor to America’s surgical raid snatching Venezuela’s Maduro to US-Israeli strikes pulverising Iran’s shields, Beijing’s gear has proven inept. What was hyped as ‘battle-tested innovation’ now reeks of shoddy engineering, weak software, and zero real-war grit,” says the Indian daily before giving details such as Venezuelan air defences, “bloated with hype but starved of competence, registered zero intruders despite a \$2 billion investment in Chinese gear.”

But there is more. I have already partially highlighted it in this column. Where is the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at? Whom can the Chinese Army liberate or even defend today?

Apart from the fact that Beijing has been very quiet on the happenings in Venezuela and the Middle East, probably not knowing how to react (except through some verbal condemnation), China is not physically capable of countering any US or Israeli offensive, particularly due to its untested equipment.



The New CSIC Report

And then the constant purges in the PLA.

A new report called “The Purges Within China’s Military Are Even Deeper Than You Think”, published by the Power Project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), based in Washington DC, observed: “Over the last few years, Chinese leader Xi Jinping has waged an internal political war within his own military, conducting unprecedented purges of the PLA. Due to the opaque nature of China’s political system, there has not previously been a systematic assessment of these purges. To shed light on the scope and impact of the PLA purges, the CSIS China Power Project constructed the CSIS Database of Chinese Military Purges, which contains detailed information on over 100 PLA senior officers who have been purged or potentially purged since 2022.”

The conclusion of the authors was that the PLA purges are far more extensive than previously understood; it noted that since 2012, Xi Jinping “has repeatedly purged senior military leaders to root out corruption — which Xi sees as an impediment to his ambitious military modernisation agenda — and to remove political obstacles”.

The second part of this assessment is certainly more accurate. In 2023, Xi initiated a second major round of purges — “this time far bolder and more extensive than before”. And finally, at the end of 2025, Gen Zhang Youxia, senior vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), was sacked.

All this has decimated the PLA’s high command, leaving only one sitting general on the CMC, Zhang Shengmin, who was promoted to vice chairman in late 2025: “While purges of the CMC have garnered the most attention, this only scratches the surface. According to CSIS data and analysis, 36 generals and

lieutenant generals have been officially purged since 2022. The data also shows 65 additional officers are missing or potentially purged (an assessment that is made based on their absence at important meetings which they were expected to attend). This brings the total of confirmed and potential purges to a staggering 101 people,” mentioned the report.

More Corroboration

Vision Times, a media outlet providing the overseas Chinese-speaking community a source of information more accurate than the official Communist propaganda, noted the large number of absences at the recently held meeting of the National People’s Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, which, according to the publication, could indicate some serious internal strife: “While no official explanation has been provided, the unexplained absences come amid ongoing leadership reshuffles within China’s armed forces.”

It particularly names two senior military figures.

According to Xinhua, 152 members attended the first plenary meeting of the session, presided over by NPC Chairman Zhao Leji. Yet based on official figures, the 14th NPC Standing Committee originally consisted of 175 members. After eight members had their qualifications revoked and two resigned, the body currently has 165 members, meaning 13 were missing in action: “Observers noted that at least two PLA generals, He Ping and Zheng Weiping, currently serving as deputy directors of the NPC committee, were absent from the meeting.” Previously they held political commissar posts. Public records show that both He Ping, a former political commissar of the Eastern Theatre Command, and Zheng Weiping, who served as political commissar of the Strategic Support Force till 2020, were considered close to Gen He Weidong, till

recently CMC vice chairman, and Gen Lin Xiangyang, who commanded the Eastern Theatre Command from 2022 to 2025. Both these three-star generals had been close to Xi Jinping in the past.

Vision Times says: “Whether the latest absences signal routine scheduling conflicts, internal reshuffling, or deeper developments remains unclear. In China’s tightly controlled political environment, where personnel decisions are often announced only after the fact, such unexplained gaps tend to fuel speculation.”

The Situation on the Ground

So far, reports only analyse the senior echelons of the PLA; hardly anything has transpired from the lower ranks (major general and below). It is here that one could read the truer state of the PLA today. For example, Lt Gen Wang Kai, who served as commander of the 37th Division of the 13th Group Army during the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008 and in July 2013 became commander of the PLA 13th Group Army before being transferred as deputy commander of the Western Theatre Army in 2017, has not been seen for months. Since March 2021, he has been commanding the Tibet Military Region opposite India, and in October 2022, he was elected as a member of the 20th Central Committee.

Lt Gen Yuan Honggang served till recently as a member of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Standing Committee and Political Commissar of the Tibet Military Region. It appears that he was discreetly transferred to the Xinjiang Military Region in January 2026.

It means that today, the Tibet Military District has no commander and no political commissar (incidentally, the commander and political commissar of the Western Theatre Command are also missing). A glimpse of recent meetings in the TAR also shows that the PLA presence in these gatherings has drastically reduced; for example, during the two TAR Regional Meetings (Congress and Consultative Conference) in January, very few senior PLA officers were noticed. On February 27, a meeting of the TAR Party Committee on Military Affairs and of the First Secretaries of Tibet Military Sub-districts was held in Lhasa.

How Israel-Iran rivalry is turning from strategic to civilisational

In October 2025 I wrote the following lines in an article examining potential flashpoints in the global financial order:

“A major flashpoint in the Middle East is the conflict between Israel and Iran. For the sake of its survival, Israel is ready to take drastic steps to maintain peace and stability. The drastic steps could involve sponsoring a regime change in Iran to thwart Iran’s nuclear ambitions. Any major escalation between these countries could mean the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which would mean the choking of the oil supply chain, disrupting about 20 per cent of global oil consumption. The resultant supply-side shock would mean that the crude oil price, which is around 60 dollars per barrel, goes into the triple digits.”

At the time, the observation was meant as a warning. Today it reads more like a description of unfolding reality.

The conflict between Israel and Iran has now moved beyond covert operations, proxy warfare, and intelligence skirmishes. What is emerging is something far deeper and more dangerous than a conventional military confrontation. This is not merely a tactical contest between two states pursuing strategic interests. It is a conflict embedded in the theology, identity, and historical memory. In other words, it is a spiritual war as much as it is a geopolitical one.

Understanding this distinction is crucial because spiritual wars rarely end quickly.

Earlier confrontations in the region had the characteristics of limited tactical engagements. The short war in June 2025 was an example. Israel and the United States targeted Iranian nuclear infrastructure, bombed key facilities, and declared success with a familiar phrase: ‘mission accomplished’. The objective was narrow. Disable nuclear capabilities, reassert deterrence, and restore the balance of power.

The current situation is different.

The death of Ali Khamenei has altered the psychological terrain of the conflict. In geopolitical terms, leadership transitions often create uncertainty. In ideological systems, however, the death of a leader can transform the



conflict itself. In the Iranian worldview, Khamenei will not simply be remembered as a political leader who died in the course of confrontation. He will be elevated to the status of a martyr.

Martyrdom occupies a central place in Shia Islam. The historical memory of Imam Hussein at Karbala, the idea that sacrifice in the face of oppression is the highest form of devotion, shapes political psychology in Iran even today. When a leader dies in conflict with what is perceived as a hostile power, the death does not weaken the movement. It sanctifies it.

For many in Iran, the narrative will be simple and powerful. The Supreme Leader died resisting forces they consider manifestations of Shaitan, or Satan, a term frequently used by Iranian leaders to describe both Israel and the US. In such a framework, the conflict ceases to be about territory or deterrence. It becomes a cosmic struggle between righteousness and evil.

Once conflicts take on that form, compromise becomes far more difficult.

Israel’s perspective is also rooted in spiritual and historical memory. For many Israelis, particularly those influenced by religious Zionism, the confrontation with Iran is not only about nuclear weapons or regional influence. It is interpreted through the lens of biblical archetypes.

One of the most powerful of these archetypes is Amalek.

In Jewish tradition, Amalek represents the eternal enemy of the Jewish people. The biblical command to remember Amalek is not simply a historical recollection. It is a moral instruction about vigilance against forces that seek the destruction of the Jewish nation. Throughout Jewish history, various adversaries have been interpreted through this symbolic framework.

For some Israelis, Iran’s religious establishment now occupies that role.

Another important and core layer of symbolism emerges from the story of Purim. The Book of Esther recounts how Haman, a high official in the Persian Empire, plotted the destruction of the Jews. The narrative culminates with a dramatic reversal in which the Jews pre-emptively defend themselves against their enemies. According to the text, approximately seventy-five thousand people who sought their destruction were killed, and Haman, along with his ten sons, was executed.

This episode is not simply a historical tale. It has become a powerful metaphor for survival in the face of existential threat. It is not a coincidence that the strikes were conducted around Purim.

When Israel carries out pre-emptive strikes against Iranian targets, the parallels are not lost on observers steeped in this tradition. The logic is strikingly similar. If a power declares its intention to destroy you, then a pre-emptive attack on the enemy is not only allowed, it even becomes necessary for the survival of the Jewish nation and to facilitate future peace and stability.

Seen through this lens, Israel’s actions are not framed internally as aggression. They are framed as survival.

The convergence of these two narratives creates a dangerous dynamic. On one side is a state that views the elimination of existential threats as a moral and historical obligation. On the other side is a revolutionary system that interprets resistance and sacrifice as sacred duty.

Neither side sees itself as the aggressor. This is why the current conflict cannot be understood using the conventional language of strategy alone. Military

capabilities, deterrence theory, and balance of power calculations still matter. But they are operating within a deeper psychological and theological framework.

The geopolitical consequences could be profound. Iran does not exist in isolation. It sits within a broader network of alliances and strategic partnerships that include Russia and increasingly China. Both powers have reasons to resist an expansion of American and Israeli dominance in the region. On the other side stands the US, along with Israel and several Arab states that have gradually moved toward normalisation with Israel in recent years.

If mismanagement, the conflict risks evolving into a broader alignment of blocs. A scenario in which China, Russia, and Iran confront an opposing coalition of the United States, Israel, and regional partners is no longer unthinkable.

Even without such a dramatic escalation, the economic implications are enormous. The Strait of Hormuz remains the most critical chokepoint in global energy markets. Roughly one-fifth of global oil consumption passes through this narrow waterway. Any disruption to shipping traffic in the strait would create an immediate supply shock.

Energy markets are highly sensitive to such disruptions. Even the perception of risk can push prices sharply higher. A prolonged conflict that threatens the security of the Strait of Hormuz could easily push crude oil prices into triple digits. The consequences would ripple across the global economy. Inflation would reaccelerate. Central banks would face renewed pressure. Emerging markets that rely heavily on energy imports would be hit particularly hard. Financial markets would reprice geopolitical risk at a scale not seen in years.

In many ways the world has been fortunate that the Israel-Iran confrontation remained contained for so long. For decades the conflict existed largely in the shadows through intelligence operations, cyber warfare, and proxy battles in places like Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. That era may now be ending. History offers many examples of conflicts that began as strategic disputes but evolved into existential struggles once identity and belief became intertwined with geopolitics.

Nepal’s ballot revolt: Voters seek change after years of political musical chairs

March 2, the last day of campaigning for the March 5 elections, also coincided with Holi celebrations, mostly in the vicinity of temples. On March 4, election booths were set up with police—discredited during the ‘GenZ Andolan’ last September 7-8—and not the army, as many had predicted. Army Quick Reaction Teams are patrolling the area but have declined to be deployed around booths or transport ballot boxes to designated counting centres.

March 5 was the quietest day, as the use of vehicles, except those on election duty, has been banned. This did not happen in the last 2020 national elections, which I witnessed. This month, I was privy to the campaigning, house-to-house vote-seeking, and the actual casting of votes in the Kaski 1 and 2 constituencies of Gandaki Province near Pokhara.

The mood of the people across the country is to reject the old, traditional parties such as the Nepali Congress, CPN UML and CPN Maoist for their failure to eliminate corruption and provide jobs and good governance. Three prime ministers—Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Oli and Prachanda—have played



musical chairs for the post. Frustrated with their record, people want change and development, including economic stimulus.

About 1,500 youth leave Nepal daily seeking greener pastures, and 8 to 9 million Nepalis abroad have become the mainstay of the economy through remittances of around \$10 billion, roughly equivalent to the country’s foreign exchange reserves.

Outside the polling booth of constituency Kaski 1, located in a high school building along the Pokhara–Kathmandu highway, people were queuing from 7 am to vote in the mixed electoral system — 165 seats through First Past the Post (FPTP) and 110 through Proportional Representation (PR). From my conversations with voters who

were willing to share their preference for candidates and parties, I gathered that an overwhelming majority were likely to vote for the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) in PR regardless of familiarity with the candidate. The direct election candidates were Tilak Rana Bhat from NC, Bain Bahadur Adhikari (UML), Ganesh Poudyal (RSP) and Rajkaji Gurung (NCP, former Maoists).

There is a world of difference in style and substance between NC and RSP candidates. The NC lot appear ageing and lacking in ‘josh’, whereas RSP candidates and campaigners were youthful and spirited, ringing the ‘ghanti’ (bell, the party symbol). Twenty-eight of their candidates are PhD holders, and RSP supporters

abroad have urged their friends and relatives to vote for the bell. Three high-profile contests include KP Oli versus Balen Shah in Jhapa; NC’s new president and prime ministerial face, Gagan Thapa, against RSP’s Amrith Singh in Sarlahi; and RSP’s Swarnim Wagle against NC’s Govind Bhattarai in Tanahu 1 (Bhattarai lost to Wagle in 2022). Buddhiman Gurung of Lame Ahal says traditional voting patterns have changed: families are split, with female spouses more likely to vote for RSP and for change. By 5 pm, the gate to the high school voting booth in the Kaski 1 seat was sealed. A 60 per cent voter turnout — compared with 62 per cent in 2022 — was recorded. Leads and trends will not be known until the evening of March 6, as two sets of votes have to be counted manually. RSP, which made its debut in 2022 with 21 seats, is likely to become the single largest party, not far from the majority figure of 138 in a 275-member legislature. Former rapper and Kathmandu mayor Balen Shah, a Madhesi by birth, could be the new prime minister of Nepal.

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APPENDIX-IV-A [SEE PROVISION TO RULE 8(6)] SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower/s and Guarantor/s that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/ charged to Truhome Finance Limited (formerly Shriram Housing Finance Limited), the Symbolic Possession of which have been taken by the Authorized Officer of Truhome Finance Limited, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is" and "Whatever there is" basis for recovery of the balance due to Truhome Finance Limited from the Borrowers And Guarantors, as mentioned in the table. Details of Borrowers and Guarantors, amount due, Short Description of the immovable property, reserve price and earnest money deposit and date of inspection are also given as:-

Name of Borrowers/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/Mortgagers	Amount of Recovery and date of Demand Notice	Reserve Price (Rs.) & Bid Increment	Date & Time of Auction	Contact Person Details – (AO and Disposal team)
1. Patel Sunilkumar Gandabhai And 2. Patel Dipikaben Sunilbhai All Residing At:-A-203, Saral Heights, Near Shridhar Palace, Opp. Radhe Skyline, Nana Chlodda, Ahmedabad-382330 Also At:-Flat No. D-402, Fourth Floor, Tower D, Shreeji Gold, Opp. C.K. Prajapati School, Laxmipura Road, Laxmipura, Vadodara – 390016 Also At:-Flat No. D-403, Fourth Floor, Tower D, Shreeji Gold, Opp. C.K. Prajapati School, Laxmipura Road, Laxmipura, Vadodara – 390016 Also At:-@ JBS Pumps, 14, Ganesh Estate B/H B.R. Industries, Naroda Road, Memco, Ahmedabad – 382345 LAN:- SHLHAHEA0000808	Demand Notice Date: 10/12/2025 Rs.56,74,409/- (Rupees Fifty Six Lakh Seventy Four Thousand Four Hundred Nine Only) as on 09-12-2025 under reference of Loan Account No. SHLHAHEA0000808 with further interest at the contractual rate, within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice	Rs. 67,96,800/- (Rupees Sixty Seven Lakh Ninety Six Thousand Eight Hundred Only) Bid Increment: Rs. 10,000/- and in such multiples. Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (Rs.) Rs. 6,79,680/- (Rupees Six Lakh Seventy Nine Thousand Six Hundred Eighty Only) Last date for submission of EMD : 09th April, 2026, Time 10.00 a.m. to 05.00 p.m.	10- APR- 2026 Auction Time: 11.00 A.M. to 01.00 PM	Debjyoti Roy – 98747 02021 Sandeep Mahajan - 99989 44955 Property Inspection Date: 12.03.2026, Time.11 AM to 1 PM

Description of Property

Property No.1: Flat No. 402, built-up area measuring 944.00 sq. ft., located on the Fourth Floor of Tower D in the scheme known as "Shreeji Gold", situated at: R.S. No. 255, C.S. No. 3883, Village Gorwa, Taluka & District Vadodara, Registration District Vadodara and Sub-Registration District Vadodara. Boundaries: East: Flat No. 401, West: Building O.T.S., North: Building O.T.S., South: Society Internal Road
Property No.2: Flat No. 403, built-up area measuring 944.00 sq. ft., located on the Fourth Floor of Tower D in the scheme known as "Shreeji Gold", situated at: R.S. No. 255, C.S. No. 3883, Village Gorwa, Taluka & District Vadodara, Registration District Vadodara and Sub-Registration District Vadodara. Boundaries: East: Flat No. 404, West: Building Margin, North: Laxmipura Main Road South: Building O.T.S.

1) For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer the website of Truhome Finance Limited (Formerly Shriram Housing Finance Limited) website.
2) The intending bidders have to submit their EMD amount to be deposited by way of RTGS/NEFT to the account details mentioned herein below: BANK NAME: AXIS BANK LIMITED BRANCH: BANDRA KURLA COMPLEX, MUMBAI BANK ACCOUNT NO. Current Account No. 911020045677633 IFSC CODE: UTIB0000230.
3) The mortgagors/borrowers are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest before auction, failing which secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.
4) Please note that the secured creditor is going to issue the sale notice to all the Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Mortgagors by speed/ registered post. In case the same is not received by any of the parties, then this publication of sale notice may be treated as a substituted mode of service.

Place : Vadodara
Date : 07-03-2026

Sd/- Authorised Officer- Truhome Finance Limited (Formerly Shriram Housing Finance Limited)