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MILITARY

China Amends Military Conscription Law to Draw and Retain Talent

The 23rd session of 11th National People's Congress, China's legislature which works under the guidelines of the Communist Party of China, amended PLA's Military Service Law on 29 October, 2011.¹ The NPC had started to review the draft amendment in June 2011.

The amendment addressed various issues like recruitment of more quality candidates including those from colleges, improving terms and conditions of military service, flexible entry, and optimum use of Reserve Forces. The maximum age of entry has been raised to 24 years. Direct entry schemes as officer, civilian experts (wenzhi guanyuan) and NCO after secondary school certificate have also been added. Another major amendment is that the Chinese militia has been bifurcated into Core Militia and General Militia. The amendment also addressed the welfare of military personnel and several improvements have reportedly been made on that count.

Comments:

The People's Republic of China practises a military service system which combines conscripts with volunteers and a militia with a reserve service. According to the earlier laws, recruitment was done on the basis of conscription according to regional quotas formulated each year. Students completed or about to complete 18 years of age and secondary school education were chosen and drafted for training as privates or officers. Thereafter, compulsory military service set in, the

tenure of which depended on the extant laws and the military wing, but generally between two to four years. After the completion of compulsory service, the option of voluntary military service is open for varying tenures to eligible personnel. Generally speaking, military service earlier was identified with job security and status. However with the fruits of economic reforms, the employment market in China transformed. Jobs with much more income, greater freedom and much less hardship were available catering to individual choice. PLA gradually found it difficult to attract and retain well-educated youth which started to have a telling effect on its military modernisation programmes. Even today, most of those who volunteer for military service are from villages, presumably with lower educational qualifications and lesser job opportunities. So since 2008 onwards, PLA started to recruit candidates from special technical secondary schools, colleges and universities, increasingly from technical disciplines, on generous terms and conditions. The current amendment is also a step in that direction so that more and more well-educated youth take up military careers, better learn and handle complicated and high-tech equipment, systems and concepts, and more importantly, feel job satisfaction. But while addressing these issues which shall entail more spending, the Chinese have been mindful to check expenditure. Aiming to optimally use the Reserve Forces and bifurcating the militia are also attempts towards cutting costs. Finally, what is also noteworthy is that despite these quite major amendments since 1998, the prerogative of the state/PLA has been retained and the Article 55 of the Chinese Constitution has not been tampered with which maintains that it's the sacred duty of each Chinese citizen (male or female) to serve the military. This also is a statement on the threat perception of the Chinese military and state leaderships.

Endnote:

 http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/todayheadlines/2011-10/30/content_4705627.htm

Armour Brigade Tests Combat Grouping Models in Field Drill

An armoured brigade of the Lanzhou Military Area Command (MAC) carried out manoeuvres in a desert area of Northwest China sometime in late October 2011.1 The brigade was practising coordinated drills of different arms in alternating positional attack, firepower attack, anti-airborne operation and other subjects. One combined Armoured Battalion of the brigade had reorganised into "1 center and 9 teams" including the command group, the main assault team, the in-depth assault team, the reconnaissance team and so on. As an independent combat unit, commander of the combined battalion utilized the commanding network to provide fire power to combat operations of various detachments. The assault team called for artillery fire support to form a comprehensive fire. As the operations of the combined arms units within the battalion are coordinated and inter-supported, their operational efficiency improved, it was reported. With regard to accelerating the mode change of combat capability generation, the brigade reportedly resolved a total of 40 issues concerning the training of combined battalion, creating thereof new training ways for the entire PLA combined battalions.

Comments:

The PLA has recently advocated a Combined Battalion concept for its armoured brigades by creating some independence in battalions and introducing the combined arms approach, whereby infantry, armour, artillery, aviation, air defence, and engineers from the same brigade (or even different brigades or divisions) are grouped into combined arms battle groups for training and operations in a modular form enabling units to be reorganised to the requirements of the mission and then be easily modified in the theatre as per the situation. Thus units of different service arms are still managed according to their administrative structure in barracks, but are put together to form different types of functional modules in training and operations. The fact that this brigade is from Lanzhou MAC has special significance for India as this MAC is responsible for the area opposite Aksai Chin and Eastern Ladakh.

Endnote:

1. PLA Daily, 2011-10-09; http://eng.mod.gov.cn/MilitaryExercises/2011-10/09/content_4303219.htm.

Jinan Theatre Maritime Joint Combat Drill Claims Improvisations

On 26 October 2011, the North China Sea Fleet of the Jinan Theatre of the Chinese PLA Navy (PLAN) conducted a joint defence drill marking a culmination of three years of experimental joint training in maritime three-dimensional offensive-and-defensive combat.¹ This experimental joint drill of the Jinan Theatre was rated as a major strategic mission entrusted by the Party Central Military Commission (CMC) and the General Staff Headquarters of the PLA. Since its establishment in 2009, the joint training leading group of the Jinan

Theatre has successfully organized a theatre-level defence combat drill and a joint air defence combat drill. The drill focused on maritime joint defence combat and has studied and practised subjects such as joint campaign planning, joint command collaboration, political work and comprehensive support. A total of more than 300 officers, including Zhang Qinsheng, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the PLA, Fan Changlong, Commander of the Jinan Military Area Command (MAC), Du Hengyan, Political Commissar of the Jinan MAC, leaders of various major organizations of the PLA and experts of some military academies observed this experimental joint drill.

Comments:

This is perhaps one of the first "theatre" level drills conducted by the PLA. This signals the success of integrated joint operations training, a major part of the transformation of the PLA. However, the fact that only 300 officers participated indicates that this was possibly only an exercise in staff work and validation of plans. It may be recalled that the Jinan MAC is also nominated as the Reserve MAC of the PLA and it would be reasonable to assume that this drill was to review contingency plans of the PLA.

Endnote:

1. PLA Daily, 27 Oct 2011; http:// eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-militarynews/2011-10/27/content_4704526.htm

Shenyang MAC Conducts Joint Operation Combat Drills

The Shenyang Military Area Command (MAC) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) carried out drills on evaluating the systematic combat capability of joint operation groups of units under its command.1 "During the exercise, small-scale tactical joint combat groups were used to break through and attack the enemy defence in line with the action plan of targeting, striking and accurate fire power release", said Yu Jiangdong, Deputy Director of the Intelligence Department of the Shenyang MAC. The aim of the operations was to fulfil assigned task by "small forces to achieve big impacts in small-scale actions" by first paralyzing the enemy's structures to enable the main forces to achieve strategic and tactical objectives quickly. According to reporters, the two sides (Red and Blue) launched more than 20 point-to-point precise strikes at each other during a drill indicating that "Pinpoint strike" has become the norm of engagement at the battlefield and has enhanced the operational cost-effectiveness.

Comments:

The drill involved an all terrain vehicle (ATV) operating with helicopters in close coordination. This indicates use of "special troops" in small joint teams, carrying out precision attacks with heliborne support. The PLA has one Special Forces battalion in each MAC and this drill may be to rehearse them in execution of special mission operations.

Endnote:

 PLA Daily, 25 Oct 2011; http://eng.mod.gov.cn/ DefenseNews/2011-10/25/content_4308521.htm

TIBET

China Brings More Tibetan Rural Population under Livelihood Subsidy

Local authorities in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China have extended its minimum living subsidy mechanism to include more rural and lowincome families.1 According to a circular issued by the regional government, rural residents are entitled to minimum living subsidies if their families' annual per capita income falls below 1,450 RMB (228 U.S. dollars). The threshold is 150 RMB higher than the previous limit of 1,300 RMB. Residents who qualify for the minimum living subsidy can receive annual benefits totalling 564 RMB to 1,070 RMB, depending upon the working abilities of their family members, said the circular. Tibet established its minimum living subsidy mechanism in 2007, initially covering households with an annual per capita income of less than 800 RMB. This is the fourth time that the threshold has been raised by the regional government.

Comments:

While there is no denying the fact that Tibet has undergone considerable positive changes under China, the extent and spread are however moot topics. Like, a higher threshold of poverty line does not necessarily mean a higher standard of living. The increment is usually meant to adjust for changes in the consumer price index, and is not necessarily an indicator of more cash-in-pockets. So raising poverty line at a higher threshold doesn't really mean that the income of Tibetans in TAR has improved. A mean value like Per Capita Income in a sparsely-populated area like TAR neither reflects the actual distribution of income in TAR nor its disparities like the urban-rural and the Han-Tibetan incomes. The increment of \$ 100 over three years is not reflective of a consistent qualitative improvement. For example between 2010 and 2011 the increment is only roughly 20 dollars (\$1450 v/s 1300). Hence it's clear the financial crisis recovery years had a higher threshold (\$ 80 over two years), and more so because China was suffering its worst inflation as well at the time. Since per capita values depend on population statistics, in order to have a more scientific understanding, it's necessary to see incremental increase of the population and not simply a smooth distribution of 100 dollars over three years. The fact that the report says "more rural residents" are to be covered by the subsidy scheme also indicates that Chinese authorities have to fight harder against rural poverty in TAR.

Endnote:

1. Xinhua, 26 Oct 2011; http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-10/25/c_122197748.htm

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

China Opposes Attempts to Internationalise South China Sea Dispute

China's military authority repeated its stance on the South China Sea issue, saying attempts to internationalise it would further complicate the issue.1 Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng told a monthly press briefing, "Any move which is designated to multilateralise or internationalize the South China Sea issue, will make the question more complex and neither will it help." Geng repeated China's "constant" and "clear" stance, saying that China owns the incontestable sovereignty of the islands in the South China Sea and their surrounding waters. Geng reiterated that China always advocates for a peaceful solution through bilateral talks and friendly consultations. When asked to comment on the Philippines' attempt to contest with China on the issue by engaging other countries, Geng said, "We hope that concerned parties will behave in line with the interests of regional peace and stability". On the freedom of navigation in the waters, Geng said such freedom has never been affected due to sovereignty disputes, and any nation using this as an excuse will be opposed by China.

Comments:

The South China Sea has been recently in the news amidst growing concerns of China's aggressiveness on the disputed waters, especially involving the Spratly and Paracel Islands in it. Various parts of the South China Sea are disputed

between two or more "countries" of the region including China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore. Various parts of the Sea are also under the control of various countries, which of course is an essential component of the dispute. China's statements are particularly relevant to India after an unidentified caller contested the free passage of an Indian naval ship as it sailed the high seas off the coast of Vietnam claiming that it's Chinese territorial waters. China has also challenged the oil exploration by ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), an Indian oil company, which has been awarded oil exploration contracts in Vietnam owned oil blocks in the South China Sea and is exploring in various blocks there since 1988.2 China claims these waters as its own as does Vietnam and four other countries of the region. In the case where an unidentified voice "buzzed" the Indian naval vessel to exit "Chinese territory", the Indian vessel chose to disregard it and sailed on its due course as per freedom of navigation in international waters. As regards the oil exploration by OVL, India maintains that it's a purely commercial activity between Vietnam and India, and the territorial dispute is between the contending countries to resolve to which India is not a party. As regards the Chinese spokesperson's remarks, it can be interpreted as: one, if the issue is escalated to a multilateral forum China would not cooperate and would take a more rigid stand, making the process more "complex". Two, attempts like the Philippines' would not be in the interest of "regional peace and stability" - this being a veiled threat of military action by China.

Finally three, that China would not allow the dispute to harm the freedom of navigation in those waters since much more is in stake there for China in the form of maritime trade. Hence, given that a solidarity has evolved in the region against unilateral military action, in the event of which the US would get involved too on the same page, means that the dispute would have to be resolved peacefully and any attempt to alter the status quo by force would be foolhardy.

Endnote:

- 1. Xinhua; 29 Sep 2011; http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-09/28/c_131165615.htm
- 2. B. Raman, www.firstpost.com/world/india-mustbe-wary-of-chinas-shadows-in-vietnam-oil-deals-110572.html

China: U.S. Arms Sale to Taiwan will Disrupt Military Relations

Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Geng Yansheng said at a monthly press briefing that, "In light of the serious damage resulting from the U.S. arms sale to Taiwan, planned China-U.S. military exchanges, including high-level visits and joint exercises, will definitely be impacted."1 The comment came a week after the U.S. government notified its Congress of its decision to sell arms worth \$5.85 billion to Taiwan, including upgrades for 145 of Taiwan's fighter jets.2 Geng also said that Chen Bingde, Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army of China, spoke over phone to Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen about the issue on 23 Sep 2011 "at Mullen's request" regarding the circumstances of the sale. "Mullen gave explanations for the U.S. arms sale, while Chen expressed China's solemn stance on the issue," Geng said. He called on the United States to honour its commitment regarding the Taiwan issue, stop

selling arms and take practical measures to work for the healthy and steady development of China-U.S. military relations.

Comment:

The sale of arms to Taiwan has been a sticky issue in US-China relations especially since 2009. China has repeatedly warned US to desist from arming or providing weapons upgrades to Taiwan. After the Obama administration's decision on the present deal, the matter was subsequently taken up by the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi with the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on 26 Sep 2011 to "reconsider" the US decision for the sale, which was turned down by the latter.3 As far as this deal goes, the US however has not fully responded to Taiwan's demand as Taiwan had asked for 66 pieces of the far superior and new F16 C/D jets of Lockheed Martin Corp. 4 US instead has offered to upgrade 145 existing outdated F16 A/Bs held on the Taiwanese inventory. According to a 21 Sep 2011 Pentagon statement, the offer includes a package like retrofitting the older jets with Raytheon advanced radar, Boeing GPSguided Joint Direct Attack Munitions, Northrop Grumman Corp. Litening laser guidance pods and required training.⁵ Taiwan had also requested for 176 state-of-the-art Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar sets, as well as advanced airto-air missiles, laser/GPS-guided bombs and other weapons systems for its F-16 fleet.⁶ The upgrade of the F-16 fighters was an old demand of the Taiwanese which was till date put on hold by the US. The decision in favour of the sale can point to many factors and determinants like the US-China relations, the US elections, the security situation in the South China Sea and the shifting US commitment thereto, elections in Taiwan, the US economy, besides of course the obligation of the US towards Taiwan's security vide the Taiwan

Relations Act passed by the US Congress in 1979. Taiwan too appeals to the China to dismantle the missiles aimed at it, the figure of which is reportedly 1600.7 Taiwan is long interested in Lockheed's F-35 joint strike fighter, especially the short take-off vertical landing (STOVL) F-35B version used by the US Marine Corps, but has been unsuccessful to acquire so far. This shows the security dilemma which Taiwan suffers vis-à-vis China. However in the light of the strong current of improving relations across the Taiwan Strait and the absence of any substantial upgradation of the military hardware through this deal, this military sale may just be rendered to a good commercial deal. Hence, as far as China-US relations are concerned, it is unlikely to have any serious impact except a temporary dip in military exchanges.

Endnote:

- 1. Xinhua; 28 Sep 2011; http://us.chineseembassy.org/eng/gdxw/t863390.htm
- 2. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/19/world/asia/us-decides-against-selling-f-16s-to-taiwan.html
- 3. http://www.straittimes.com/BreakingNews/Asia/ Story/STIStory_717119.html
- 4. http://www.f-16.net/f-16_users_article19.html
- 5. http://mobile.bloomberg.com/news/2011-10-24/taiwan-f-16-upgrade-proposal-clears-congressional-review-period
- 6. http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/22/china-usa-taiwan-idUSL3E7KM00920110922
- 7. http://www.sinodaily.com/reports/ Taiwan_urges_China_to_remove_missiles_999.html

TERRORISM

China Defines Terrorism Terms

The Chinese Vice Minister for Public Security Yang Huanning on 24 Oct 2011 explained a draft of the "Decisions on Relevant Issues Related to Strengthening the Anti-Terrorism Work" at the 23rd session of the 11th Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China.¹ The draft, for the first time, contains China's definition of terms like "terrorist activity," "terrorist organization" and "terrorist". The draft was certainly approved by the Chinese cabinet, the State Council.

According to the draft "terrorist activities" mean activities carried out with the intent of creating social panic and hijacking governmental departments or international organizations and have caused or have the intention of causing severe social harm, such as loss of lives, heavy destruction to property, damage to public facilities and chaos of social order. Participating or financing the afore mentioned activities or supporting them in other ways has also been considered as terrorist activity. "Terrorist organizations" refers to the criminal groups aimed at carrying out terrorist activities. While "terrorist" refers to individuals who organize, plan or implement terrorist activities and the members of terrorist organizations.

During the presentation, the Chinese minister also admitted that since China had not made specific definitions of these terms earlier, its campaign to crack down on terrorist activities and control terrorist assets as well as international antiterrorism cooperation have all been hindered.

Comments:

This is good news on the front of global counterterrorism efforts. China for long had indulged in ambivalent or non-committal stance on terrorism to keep its "all weather friend" Pakistan, terrorism's breeding ground, in good humour. China could afford such a stand since comparatively speaking, it remained largely unaffected by the global contagion of terrorism. However, the nasty riots of July 2009 and the unrest of July 2011 in its turbulent western area of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region forced China to face the bitter truth. That was the revelation that Pakistan-based terror organizations had trained Uyghur terrorists to carry out those attacks in Xinjiang. This was first hinted by Pan Zhiping, head of the official think tank Institute of Central Asia at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences and soon after stated by Kashgar city authorities in July 2011.2 Scholars elsewhere had already informed that Uyghur militants were being trained by Al Qaeda, Taliban, Afghan terrorists etc. and were fighting in Afghanistan. Even the Xinjiang Daily had long before detailed as to what constituted "terrorist acts", which were probably used more for public propaganda than legislative purposes. In fact in December 2001, China had made certain amendments in its criminal code by listing certain terrorist acts which however didn't include any definition per se. It might be remembered that sometime in 2009 China had turned down an Indian request on some "technical" grounds to declare Masood Azhar, the head of the terrorism organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed, as a terrorist and that he be sanctioned by UNSC's 1267 Committee.3 On other occasions when Chinese authorities and scholars were questioned on China's double standards on terrorism, their usual plea was that "there is no single definition of terrorism" and hence China has avoided taking a clarified stand on it. However, the current Chinese draft has clearly defined those terms and have upheld the supremacy of public safety and sanctity of the state as well as of international organisations vis-à-vis the terrorists. It is worth mentioning that about a month before the presentation of this draft, Wang Min, deputy permanent representative of China to the United Nations, on 28 Sep 2011, while addressing a meeting of the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, had appealed to the international community to discard double standards in the fight against terrorism.4 Castigating terrorism in all its forms, the Chinese representative had claimed that double standards are the main reasons that hinder the international counter-terrorism cooperation and affect the implementation of UNSC Resolution No. 1373, which was adopted on the aftermath of September 11 attacks. He also declared that the UN was China's first choice which can lead international counter-terrorism efforts. Those might have been indirect criticism of the US for not sanctioning against Uyghur organizations for Xinjiang's unrest or for its counter-terrorism methods. But worth

remembering is that in the case of action against Mohammed Hafiz Saeed, chief of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, China had first taken Pakistan into confidence in December 2008 before putting him on the "consolidated" list of the UNSC's 1267 committee. Only after that did Pakistan put Mohammed Hafiz Saeed under house arrest. However, right now China is aware of real terrorist threats it faces during its unbridled course of strong state controlled growth. It knows that the fight against terror might be long and hard and hence it needed to change its stand on terrorism to quick start global counter-terrorism cooperation, choke terrorism's breeding grounds and achieve its development targets.

Endnote:

- 1. http://english.people.com.cn/90786/7628544.html
- 2. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/ 2011-08/01/c_131022491.htm
- http://www.indianexpress.com/news/delhistunned-uk-&-china-stall-move-to-blac/468636/;
 http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-08-15/india/28161290_1_dai-bingguo-masood-azharxinjiang
- 4. http://english.people.com.cn/90883/7608149.html
- 5. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2009-08-15/india/28161290_1_dai-bingguo-masood-azhar-xinjiang

SOCIETY

China's Economic Growth is Lopsided: Chinese Experts

China now should focus not just on developing its economy but also on social, legal and political reforms, senior Chinese business, government and civil society leaders, said in a panel discussion on China's 12th Five-Year Plan at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2011.1 "In the past, we paid a lot of attention to economic development. But we have to keep up with the times. China's development should be people-centric and sustainable. Our social development has lagged behind. We need to satisfy people's demands - not just economic, but also in education, health, security and other areas", said Zhang Xiaoqiang, Vice-Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) of the People's Republic of China.

Zhang Weiying, Professor of Economics at Peking University, agreed. "The important thing is reform," he declared. He tied the need for reform to China's rise in the world. "The responsibility of China to the world is to change its system to give more freedom to its people and build its society on the rule of law." Zhang warned of "big dangers" for China and the world if such reforms are not implemented. Education is a critical priority, he argued. "In the past several decades, we have failed in our education. We looked on it as dissemination of knowledge but not as a way to produce people with creativity and high moral standards."

Embedding the rule of law in China is crucial, added Wang Boming, Editor-in-Chief of Caijing Magazine. "How can we be sure that the rights of

the vulnerable population are protected? We should establish supervision and monitoring systems so that we finally have a society under the rule of law and achieve a nation under the rule of law." While the Chinese government's Five-Year Plan is now technically referred to as a programme or set of guidelines that is not legally binding, it was felt that there is still too much centralized control over the reform process, Wang reckoned. "If power is unrestrained, the inevitable result would be corruption."

The panellists also debated China's position in the global economy. "Many people underestimate the role of China," said Guo Zhuqing, Chairman of China Construction Bank. "But China is right at the centre of the world market. Yet China's economic power and influence at this stage of its development should not be exaggerated," Guo advised. "I don't think China alone can push the world out of the crisis." NDRC's Zhang agreed by saying "China cannot develop without the world and the world cannot develop without China."

Comments:

China should focus not just on developing its economy but also on social, legal and political reforms, this comes out as a strong message from senior personalities of China's business, government and civil society. That the message was voiced in a World Economic Forum panel discussion on China's 12th Five-Year Plan in China adds to its significance. It has been long felt that along with economic development Chinese authorities need to focus more on good education, health facility and social security for its people.

However, the criticism here that China needs to build a durable rule of law and ensure freedom and rights for the vulnerable sections of it population (like people displaced by state acquisition of farmland for industrial purposes) is a stark indicator of the condition of its social capital. On 06 Oct 2011, there was a gathering of some influential Chinese personalities who had pointedly expressed concern that the "Party had lost its way".2 It's however not a case that China is alone in this situation and actually on many counts is much ahead of other developing countries. Nonetheless such messages from its own eminent citizens, some senior serving officials do show that there is a huge gap which China has to fill up in order to match its position in the world today. Some of them like reforming the judicial system to ensure a uniform rule of law will take years. Some like freedom for its people is making encouraging progress, like this event shows, often aided by the global technological progress in internet and communication, which at times exasperated sections of authorities try to reverse. Failure to bring in reforms on the social sector can actually

turn the tide of its economic development, as warned of "big dangers" by one panelist. This too indicates that a huge section of the ordinary Chinese population may have been left out of its prosperity cover and are a disenchanted lot. The thousands of mass incidents (protests) that occur, which are illegal there, support that view. Nonetheless, given that many nations wish to emulate China's economic growth, a strong commitment towards people-centric development shall also have a demonstrative effect upon those countries that economic growth does not necessarily come at a cost of social and political progress, and that they are indeed wheels of the same vehicle.

Endnote:

- 1. http://english.people.com.cn/90780/7596727.html
- Jayadeva Ranade, "China: Differences in Political Thought and Styles Manifested in Run Up to 18th Congress", in National Defence and Aerospace Power, Issue Brief, Centre for Air Power Studies, 13 January 2012.

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