

Policy

WATCH

Volume IX, Issue 11
November 2020, New Delhi

India's Place in the World

In this issue

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Lt General NS BRAR**

**The India-China Quagmire
How Not to Negotiate
from a Position
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Webinar on
**Restoring India-Nepal
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Challenges and
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**The Modi government will
find a Biden presidency
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**India - Russia relations -
Then and Now :
Ambassador Divyabh
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RAJIV GANDHI
INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

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Editorial

The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) works on five themes:

1. Constitutional Values and Democratic Institutions
2. Growth with Employment
3. Governance and Development
4. Environment, Natural Resources and Sustainability
5. India's Place in the World.

This issue of Policy Watch is on the theme India's Place in the World and discusses the difficulties that have arisen between India and China in light of India's relationship with major powers – the United States and Russia, and also the attempt to build a new alliance the Quad – with the US, Japan, Australia and the US as the other three corners.

The first article is by Gen HS Brar, titled the "New Great Game", which we have reproduced with the kind courtesy of The Citizen. Gen Brar asserts "that both sides cannot substantially alter the ground situation and that we can and will hold what we are holding, a bold and open offer can be made by us to settle the boundary along the MacMohan Line in the East and the McCartney-MacDonald Line of 1899 in the West with minor and appropriate adjustments.. This would place the onus of settlement on the Chinese along with reinforcing the legitimacy of our offer based on the McCartney-MacDonald Line, formally presented to the Chinese in 1899 and accepted by them till 1959, and not what they call the 1959 line now."

The second article is by Prof Partha Ghosh, formerly Professor of South Asian Studies at JNU, and now a Senior Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Social Science, who had earlier written on SAARC in Policy Watch, May 2020 issue. The article in this issue is titled – "The India-China Quagmire-How Not to Negotiate from a Position of Weakness". Prof Ghosh asserts that "no one knows how will the India-China conflict finally end, but we can simply pray that these two Asian giants would not decide to fight to the finish the inevitable consequence of which is mutual destruction. To avoid that disaster, let India bide its time and start preparing forthwith to avoid a repeat situation. Timely retreat is an essential element of war strategy".

Continuing with the China theme, next, we have an article by Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar IFS (Retd), titled – "Does the Quad Have a Future?" The Quad was a response to China's actions to strengthen cooperation among the US, Japan, Australia and India, set up "to promote the basic objectives of a free and open Indo Pacific and promotion of rule of law, peace and prosperity in the region. Amb. Sajjanhar asserts that "from contemptuously dismissing the Quad as 'sea foam', the Chinese Foreign minister referred to it 'a so-called Indo-Pacific NATO'. Wang Yi noted that the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is a 'big underlying security risk' and what it pursues is to trumpet the Cold War mentality and to stir up confrontation among different groups and blocs and to stoke geopolitical competition." The author concludes that the Quad has come of age and its partners should work assiduously to evolve an Indo-Pacific security architecture.

Just so that we don't forget our smaller neighbour as we deal with China, we are also carrying a summary by Prof Somanth Ghosh of a webinar titled "Restoring India-Nepal Relations: What Steps to Take?", organized by India International Centre on Monday, 28th September 2020. The speakers were Amb. Bakh Bahadur Thapa, former Ambassador of Nepal to India, and Amb. Ranjit Rae, former Indian Ambassador to Nepal. It was moderated by Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Ashok K. Mehta. In a frank interchange, Amb Thapa said India-Nepal relation is special like between no two countries.

But given China's superiority in technology, economic might and capacity to implement large projects speedily and effectively, all countries are getting closer to China. He thought Chinese involvement in Nepal will increase. For example, there are more Chinese flights to Nepal than from India. He appealed to the media not to play one country against another. Gen Mehta rounded up the discussion by pointing out the need for person-to-person contacts and in this direction lauded the formation of Eminent Persons' Group on this issue.

The next article is an edited transcript of a Consultation on India-US relations, which was organized jointly by the Foreign Policy Research Centre (FPRC) and the RGICS. Professor Somnath Ghosh, Sr Visiting Fellow, RGICS, not only participated in the Consultation, but also worked on the transcript. The Consultation was held within a few days of the visit to India by the US President Donald Trump in late February 2020. The panelists were Dr. Chintamani Mahapatra, Rector and Professor Centre for American Studies, JNU; Maj-Gen Dhruv Katoch, Director, India Foundation; Ms Smita Sharma, Foreign Policy Bylines ETV Bharat/Huff Post/ Ex-Tribune /India Today/IBN; and Mr Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, Sr. Assistant Editor (Foreign Affairs), The Economic Times, New Delhi. Prof Mahapatra asserted that "The bipartisan consensus that is there in Washington DC on engaging India, that has to be maintained." As we go to the press, the US election results have been called and looks like Joe Biden will be the President. The impact of that is captured in an article by Tanvi Madan for the Economic Times, which we are reproducing. Tanvi Madan is a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, in Washington DC and has published extensively on the triangular relationship between India, China and the US.

Juxtaposed with the above is an article titled "India -Russia relations – Then and Now" by Amb. Divyabh Manchanda, IFS (Retd). This article focuses on India-Russia relations from the historical times to the present. It describes how the relationship moved closer with visits to each other's countries by leaders like Nehru, Khrushchev, Indira Gandhi, Brezhnev, Rajiv Gandhi and Gorbachev. It also focuses on how the relations between India and Russia went on a lower key since 2000 despite the establishment of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC), for identifying and working on strategic issues of interest to both countries. Lately India has been using platforms like the RIC and the SCO to use its relationship with Russia to open up a dialogue with China. He concludes that "there are too many variables to make any serious predictions... If the Americans would drop -- or dial back -- this neo-Cold War offensive, Russia would be less inclined to slide into China's embrace and more inclined to balance China with ongoing good relations with India. Likewise China would seek to diversify its relations more to Europe, Africa, Latin America, etc. (through say) the Belt and Road Initiative. Russia and China are not natural allies, or even friends, but they are being driven together by a bigger force."

We hope you enjoy reading these articles. We look forward to your feedback.

**Vijay Mahajan, Director,
Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies**

THE NEW GREAT GAME¹

Lt General NS BRAR

‘A settlement is always political and execution military’

The compulsions which we must use towards our enemy will be regulated by the proportions of our own and his political demands. In so far as these are mutually known they will give the measure of the mutual efforts; but they are not always quite so evident, and this may be a first ground of difference in the means adopted by each. Von Clausewitz On War

At the height of British imperialism and Czarist Russian expansionism, both powers vied with each other to safeguard their empires. Resultantly, both carried out moves and counter moves on the chess board of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Tibet with the core concern being to maintain Afghanistan and Tibet as a buffer zone between Russia and the Indian subcontinent.

It was dubbed as the ‘Great Game’ by the British and the ‘Tournament of Shadow’ by the Russians. Attempts by the British to place a pliant Amir in Kabul resulted in the disastrous First Afghan War 1839-42 and Russian phobia triggered the Second Afghan War 1879-80. At the end of the colonial era the two big states – India and China - were left with the legacy of the game with Tibet as the perceived area of interest and conflict.

For India it still remained a desirable free buffer zone, however, for China it was to be assimilated in accordance with its strategic interests and perceived suzerainty over the region in the past. It was to be the New Great Game. Nevertheless, over the years we have accepted Tibet being a part of China

With the hindsight of history, it would be charitable to say that India being a newly emerged nation with the leadership and institutions lacking experience in handling the complex issue of the legacy of colonialism and independent foreign relations, it did what it did culminating in the 1962 border war.

Post 1962 the then Foreign Minister Vajpayee’s visit to China in February 1979 was indicative of India’s new found confidence and pragmatism which further found expression in Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visiting China December 19- 23, 1988 at the invitation of the Chinese premier. It was a major event in Sino-Indian relations since the heydays of the 1950s and the bitterness post 1962.

Then followed the 1993 Peace and Tranquillity Agreement and other Confidence Building agreements which sought status quo along the frontiers while developing bilateral relations.

However, the 2005 Agreement between the ‘Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question’ signed at New Delhi on April 11, 2005, was the true indication of the confidence and willingness of both sides to settle the boundary issue.

‘Amongst other articles and the customary diplomatic language, three aspects stand out. Under Article III it was agreed that ‘both sides should, in the spirit of mutual respect and mutual understanding,

¹ Source: This article first appeared in The Citizen on 8th Oct 2020.
<https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/4/19469/THE-NEW-GREAT-GAME>

make meaningful and mutually acceptable adjustments to their respective positions on the boundary question, so as to arrive at a package settlement to the boundary question. The boundary settlement must be final, covering all sectors of the India-China boundary’.

Article VI was explicit in that ‘the boundary should be along well-defined and easily identifiable natural geographical features to be mutually agreed upon between the two sides.’

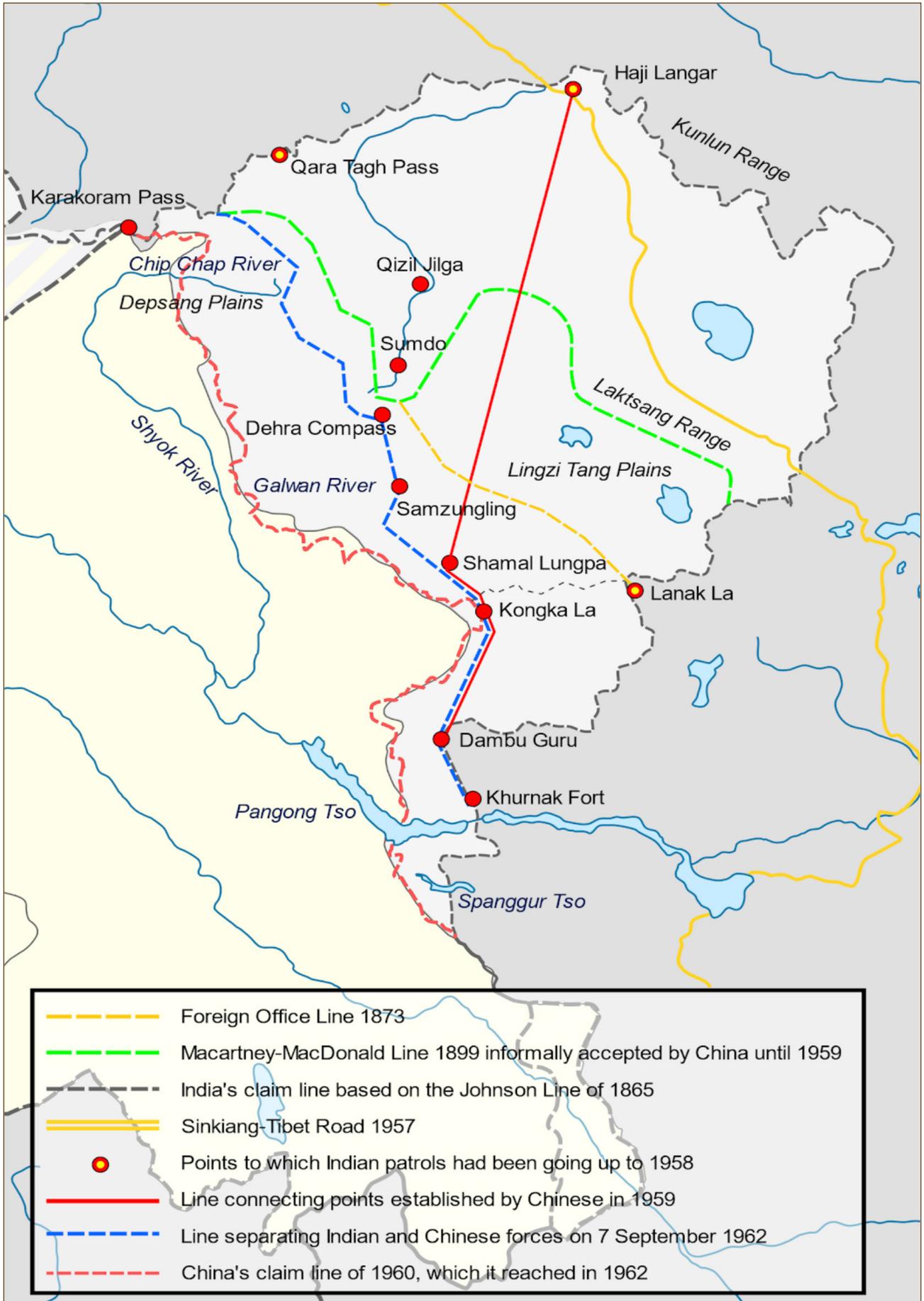
And Article VII and VIII, perhaps reinforcing Article III, stated that ‘in reaching a boundary settlement, the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas’ as also ‘within the agreed framework of the final boundary settlement, the delineation of the boundary will be carried out utilising means such as modern cartographic and surveying practices and joint surveys.’

It requires no in-depth interpretation to conclude that the Agreement actually put aside past claims and counter claims on historical or cartographic grounds (adjustments to their respective positions) to accept the ground reality and concerns of both sides to come to a mutually adjusted settlement with no major change on the ground (without displacing settled populations) and to delineate and demarcate the agreed border with modern cartographic means which in fact would lay to rest all past maps and markings, often based on inadequate and inaccurate survey depicted on inappropriate scales of maps leading to different interpretations.

It was the acceptance of reality by India which as Mohan Guruswamy writes ‘there seems little or no chance that the Chinese could be persuaded to hand over Aksai Chin to us, thereby de-linking Tibet from Sinkiang. There also seems an equally remote chance that we might be able to retrieve it from the Chinese by military means. Even if we summon the political will to stake a fortune, the sheer lack of any tangible benefits, material or spiritual, will only make this even more foolhardy.’ For the Chinese too it was clear that reclaiming Arunachal Pradesh (South Tibet) by force was no longer a feasible proposition.

It would therefore be logical to ask as to why there was no movement on the settlement for the last fifteen years and where was the plot lost bringing us to the present situation. Perhaps our domestic political compulsions, irrespective of the political dispensation in power in this period, wherein national security issues have progressively become a competitive matter of exaggeration and magnification of minor tactical actions on the borders by the ruling party and any setback, actual or perceived, is painted as a sell out by the opposition leaving no scope or ground for serious and pragmatic debate for resolution with national interest in focus.

On the other hand, for the Chinese, Aksai Chin was a strategic concern needing security and resolution. As veteran journalist Prem Shankar Jha writes ‘China is undoubtedly the country that has triggered the confrontation. But it should be apparent to those not numbed by hyper-nationalism, that it has not done so simply to grab a sliver of additional territory in the Himalayas, whose economic value to it is less than negligible. If we can give credence to the statements of the foreign office in Beijing and the Chinese embassy in Delhi, China has acted the way it has because it believes India is no longer abiding by the understandings upon which the 1993 Agreement on Peace and Tranquillity in the Border Areas, and its subsequent elaboration in 2005, were signed, and has therefore ceased to be a reliable treaty partner’ and further writes that ‘Today, 15 years later, China has, by and large, kept its side of the bargain...’ That may be an extreme view, however, our political and military utterances have been contrary to the text of the agreement.



The concept and terminology of LAC (Line of Actual Control) has no standing or sanctity in expressing international borders between nations and is also not binding in legal terms. It was a working construct to define where opposing troops and physical presence existed. In other words, whatever was actually under control of both sides. By the same token it could be altered by force which the Chinese have done in Eastern Ladakh.

While the analysis, views and theories doing the rounds of academic circles, seminars and TV panel discussions may suggest the aim, motive and long-term strategic purpose of Chinese actions, and the threat to India, the Chinese would not have planned and executed this move on such a large scale to simply withdraw after discussions. That they are there to stay is clearly indicated in the Moscow Statement of September 10, 2020 which finds no mention of status quo as on April 2020 or any reference to the term LAC and their subsequent assertions.

Consequently, the troop deployment by both sides is very unlikely to be diluted. A militarised line separating the two is there to stay. That would be the oft stated 'long haul' and not just tiding over the logistics this winter.

A common refrain and counter argument in all forums on the question of a settlement is the issue and perception of trust, which is a deeply ingrained perception over the decades, militating against any settlement with the Chinese. Given our experience and inadequacy of capabilities to meet such developments on the border, the need was and is to ensure building our capability and streamlining our national security structures to handle any situation arising out of 'lack of trust', which we did not, rather than ascribe such challenges to 'betrayal of trust'.

National security and interests are not secured on trust, good faith and diplomacy alone, they are secured with the backing of hard power. Whether we settle the boundary with China or not, hard power will remain an imperative and important constituent of comprehensive national power and any meaningful diplomacy.

Macho militarism created by media hype, not backed by adequate capability and sterile diplomacy again without hard power, cannot attain national objectives. We have a convoluted history of handling the border question with China over the decades since independence. Perhaps a benevolent rationalisation would attribute it to missteps by individuals and institutions lacking experience in handling strategic issues, however, seven decades is a long time to lose our innocence.

We can curse or regret past actions but cannot be held hostage to our past and leave a similar legacy for the future. The situation on our northern borders is a tangled web created by politics and diplomacy and expecting the military to unravel it through border talks is an unrealistic expectation.

A settlement is always political and the execution military. Besides serving the limited and immediate purpose of imposing some restraint on both sides, it cannot obviously settle anything in the long term.

However, if the existing ground situation is accepted as normal, and bilateral trade, commerce and other relations are restored as well as studied neutrality is maintained on the questions of Sinkiang and Uighurs, Tibet, the Dalai Lama, Taiwan and South China Sea, as suggested by the Chinese, it would be a humiliating sell out amounting to abject capitulation.

Any agreement to mutually pull back troops from the present positions would mean giving up ground held by us as also accepting ground occupied by the Chinese.

Perhaps the situation can be turned around to our advantage by shedding the baggage, diffidence and 'good faith' of the past six decades. 'Never let a good crisis to waste', they say.

Given that both sides cannot substantially alter the ground situation and that we can and will hold what we are holding, a bold and open offer can be made by us to settle the boundary along the Mac Mohan Line in the East and the McCartney-MacDonald Line of 1899 in the West with minor and appropriate adjustments.

This would place the onus of settlement on the Chinese along with reinforcing the legitimacy of our offer based on the McCartney-MacDonald Line, formally presented to the Chinese in 1899 and accepted by them till 1959, and not what they call the 1959 line now.

This would entail the Chinese pulling back appropriately East of the present position and address our internal political conundrum and sentiments related to 'not losing an inch of territory' besides yet assuring the Chinese security of their Highway 219 connecting Sinkiang with Tibet. Till there is a positive and accommodative response, all adverse economic, diplomatic and strategic linkages against the Chinese should be exercised.

Notwithstanding a settlement or otherwise, China will remain a rival, competitor, adversary, threat or enemy depending on shifting equations and interests. We need to be prepared to handle it appropriately for a long time to come.

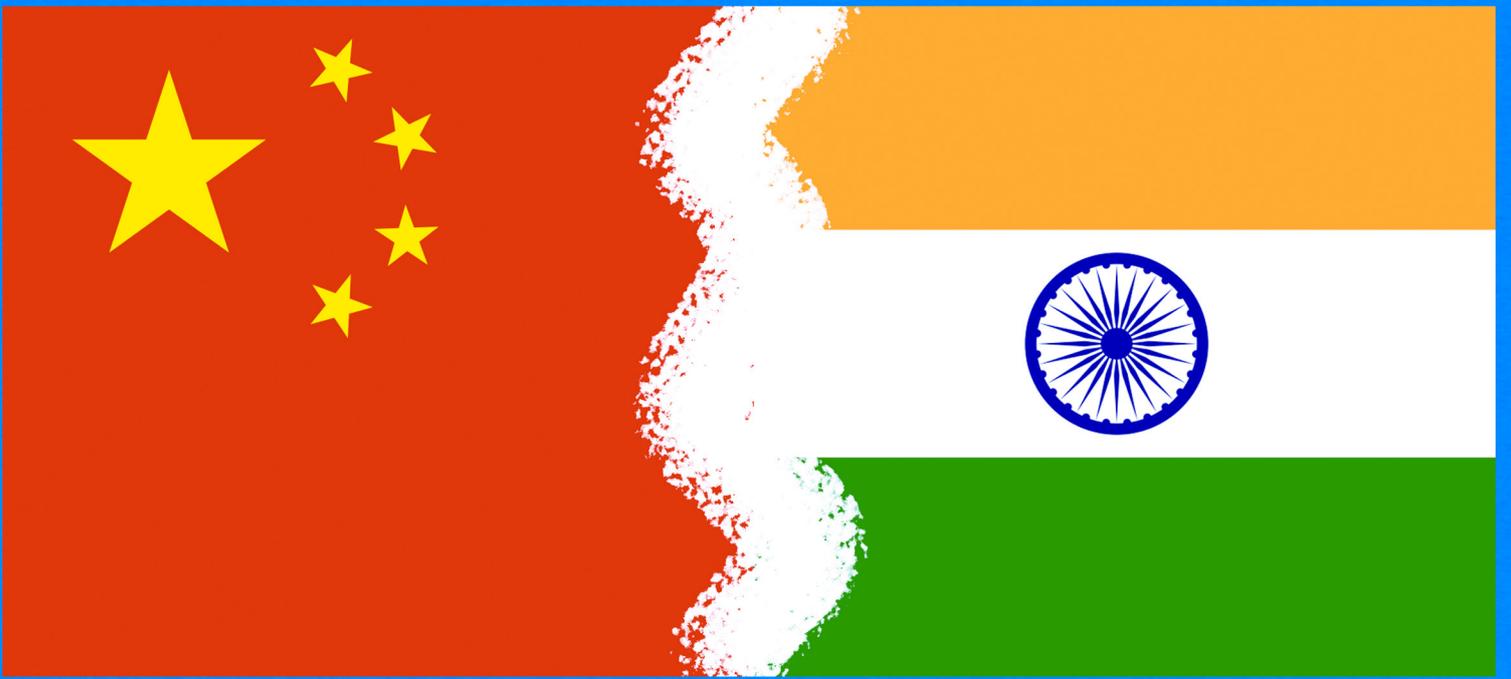
Lt General NS Brar is former Deputy Chief Integrated Defence Staff and Member Armed Forces Tribunal.

Ministry of Defence

8th round of India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting

Posted On: 08 NOV 2020 8:10AM by PIB Delhi

On November 6th, the 8th round of India-China Corps Commander Level Meeting was held in Chushul. The two sides had a candid, in-depth and constructive exchange of views on disengagement along the Line of Actual Control in the Western Sector of India-China border areas. Both sides agreed to earnestly implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, ensure their frontline troops to exercise restraint and avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation. Both sides agreed to maintain dialogue and communication through military and diplomatic channels, and, taking forward the discussions at this meeting, push for the settlement of other outstanding issues, so as to jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. They also agreed to have another round



The India-China Quagmire

How Not to Negotiate from a Position of Weakness

Partha S. Ghosh*

Centrality of Power

The theory is rather simple: colonial wars created borders, postcolonial nations scramble over them. In South Asia these so-called borders routinely complicate regional security. Between India and China the bones of contention are the disputed boundaries in the Ladakh region and the McMahon Line (1914) in Arunachal Pradesh that separates it from Tibet. Between Afghanistan and Pakistan it is the Durand Line (1893/1901), which is arguably a crisis in the waiting. One need not search for morality in those imperial exercises for all that mattered to the British was their strategic interest. Power, as understood in international politics, constituted the warp and woof of the system those days, as they are even now.

The on-going border conflict between India and China will be put to rest someday depending upon who bargains for what based upon their intrinsic power. Although the definition of power has undergone changes over the years the bottom line is still the respective military strengths. The other backup variables are: economic base, societal cohesion, structure of the national ambition as buttressed by ground preparations, etc. India does not stand measurably vis-à-vis China on any of these counts. One fundamental advantage for India, however, is its democracy provided it is duly put to use.

Current Border Blues

An uncanny peace now prevails on the India's China border. The Indian government first assured the nation that no Indian territory had been lost to China. Later, on 15 September 2020, through its Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, it categorically informed the Lok Sabha that China had over the years either occupied, or illegally claimed, approximately 133,180 sq. km. of India's land, including Aksai Chin, portions of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), and vast stretches of Arunachal Pradesh. The statement *inter alia* said: '[T]he situation this year is very different both in terms of scale of troops involved and the number of friction points, we do remain committed to the peaceful resolution of the current situation. At the same time, the House can be assured that *we remain prepared to deal with any contingencies* (emphasis added).' Notably, there was no reference to the recent territorial advances made by the Chinese.

What meanings can be adduced from the statement? Here are some probable explanations. One, India is preparing for an all-out war with China to regain its recently lost territories, and more importantly, its bruised prestige in the world, more particularly in the region. The Delhi-based *Outlook* magazine (21 September 2020) even carried a cover story with the title: *Is war inevitable?* It might have excited India's self-styled nationalists, but given the power differential between the two nations, such a scenario is very risky to visualize. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has avoided all kinds of jingoism. He even steered clear of mentioning China by name. The war is, therefore, unlikely, though India's message is clear: this far and no farther.

Two, the statement is meant to play to the gallery. Anyone who has studied Prime Minister Narendra Modi's blitzkrieg style diplomacy¹ should know that it is heavily oriented towards bolstering his domestic support base. It started from day one in 2014. In his inaugural ceremony he invited all the eight SAARC heads so as mark a new beginning for the organization. But today SAARC is in tatters. Later, his meetings with NRIs in developed countries were primarily meant to communicate with their families and friends back home in India. At present, Prime Minister Modi is the uncrowned king of India. All that his supporters want to hear from him is that everything is okay on the India-China front and when the crunch comes he would adequately teach China a lesson.

Three, more than India, it serves China's interests. Diplomatic and military parleys with the Chinese to diffuse the situation and reclaim more than a thousand square kilometers of lost Indian land have been going on for several weeks now. But one has not come across any Chinese commitment to restore the status quo ante. Neither the joint statement nor the two separate statements released after the meeting of 10 September 2020 between S. Jaishankar and Wang Yi, the foreign ministers of the two countries, mentioned anything to that effect.

In a web-based colloquium organized by the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations held on 9 October 2020 under the title: 'Tensions in the Himalayas', the Chinese participant, Professor Shen Dingli, categorically underlined the disputed nature of the India-China border and suggested that the best way to prevent the situation from further deterioration was to declare a 'demilitarized zone' and wait optimistically for a better situation to emerge sometime in the future, which could be years away. His proposed solution was to first define a reasonable area of dispute, then to turn the area into a temporary area of peace as per the Line of Actual Control (LAC) ideally defined by both countries. This would be a temporary solution thereby turning the area of dispute into an area of stability, disengagement, and demilitarization. This way, China and India would learn to respect each other and find a more long-term solution.² Shen indeed was not speaking on behalf of the Chinese government but Chinese academics know their government's mind better than their Indian counterparts.

Fourth, and most importantly, now that the much-hyped bonhomie between India and China has soured, what should India's larger policy vis-à-vis China be. It has two major aspects: one, how to match China economically which determines the intrinsic strength of a nation, and two, how to create a world opinion against China as an expansionist power. The latter may not make China return the territory it has already grabbed but it can at least prevent it from any such filching in the future.

¹ Partha S. Ghosh, *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism: Savarkar to Vajpayee to Modi* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2017), pp. 437-46.

² <https://www.ncusc.org/events/himalayas-tension>

India-China Asymmetry

In spite of all the tall talk about India emerging as the *vishwaguru* (wisdom giver of the world) and that the shining global profile of India is making the country one of the top seeds in the international race for supremacy, the reality is quite different. From my personal experiences in Europe and America after this *vishwaguru* business became quite popular in India I can say with a sense of responsibility that this claim is grossly misplaced, primarily created in India by its own electronic media with hardly any taker abroad barring a section of the NRIs. There was a time in the 1990s and early 2000s when India studies were becoming popular in many of these countries but by the end of the first decade of this century India studies started getting replaced by China studies. It was not for any love for China but simply because the latter mattered more to them in economic and strategic terms. If 'know your enemy' is the gospel of all Area Studies programmes it meant simply that. In contrast India lost its glamour, was increasingly seen as a poor nation seething with all kinds of social tensions.

This author was startled to see how his lecture on 'India in South Asia' at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) in March 2015, by when BJP was well entrenched in power with its election manifesto having proudly proclaimed the country as *vishwaguru*, was completely hijacked by a volley of questions on gang rapes in India. Although the Nirbhaya gang-rape tragedy was almost three years old by then, it continued to catch the imagination of the students. These are hard realities Indians trumpeting about Indian glory sitting in India's middle class drawing rooms must realize. Almost during the same time it became a big news in India how the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, had inaugurated the Indian Pavilion at the Hanover international trade fair in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But in the German media the event hardly figured as an important news.

In contrast, Deng Xiaoping, the builder of modern China, is famously associated with the statement, 'hide your capacities and bide your time'. One is not sure whether he really said so, or in what context, but the slogan has certainly been translated into reality. An India-China comparison done about a decade ago underlined the gap between the two nations. For example, China's GDP in PPP terms was 9.87 trillion dollars vis-à-vis India's 3.91 trillion; annual per capita GDP in PPP terms was 7,599 dollars versus 3,425; and the defence budget stood at 106.4 billion dollars to 40.5 billion dollars. China's annual steel production of 683.3 million tons dwarfed India's figure of 72.2; in cement production, the ratio was 1800 million tons to 220 million tons.³

In terms of welfare, 29.8% of the population survived on less than \$2 a day in China, the corresponding share for India was 54%. Adult literacy in China stood at 96%, in India at 76%; and the Human Development Index (HDI) ranked China at 101 while India at 134. China produced 16,200 doctorates in science and engineering every year, India barely 7,300; China had 520,000 vocational and training institutes, India just 12,260. China's child mortality rate (under 5 years per 1000) in 2010 was 18 compared to India's 63. China's per capita electricity consumption was 2631 kWh, while India's was 597 kWh.⁴

The gap has persisted. In defence while the per capita spending in China is \$182 it is less than a third of that in India. In 2019 India spent about \$71 billion on defence while China as much as \$261 billion. During the last ten years Chinese defence spending has more than doubled while that of India only by half. It may be argued that the Indian armed forces are more battle-hardened than the PLA but on balance the advantage is clearly with the Chinese.⁵

³ For the complete table, see Partha S. Ghosh, 'An Enigma that is South Asia: India versus the Region,' *Asia-Pacific Review* (Tokyo), 20 (1), May 2013, pp. 100-120

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Nalin Mehta, 'To take on Chinese "wolf warriors", India must fix military asymmetry,' *Sunday Times of India* (New Delhi), 28 June 2020.

Chinese venture capital is well entrenched in India with more than \$8 billion invested in most successful Indian startups. China supplies many goods and services that India needs.⁶ Just to take a recent COVID-related example, sometime early this year it was thought that one of the possible drugs for the pandemic was hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) of which India was the biggest producer accounting for almost 70 per cent of the global supply. But one of the essential ingredients of the medicine came from China. It is possible that this dependence may gradually decline but it will not happen overnight.

India is looking for a larger economic and strategic role in the Indo-Pacific region. But there also it would require fine tuning keeping in mind, on the one hand, India's strategic participation in the Quad (America-Australia-India-Japan), and then on the other, its exit from the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership). One must remember that China is aggressively pursuing its economic interest in the region, leave alone strategic. In recent years ASEAN has overtaken the United States and soon it may even overtake the European Union as well as China's largest trading partner.⁷ How to adjust India's Act East Policy with this frame is a huge challenge.

Playing Ball with America

Ever since President Donald Trump's rise to power, Prime Minister Modi has wholeheartedly stood by him considering the fact that not only the Indian-Americans matter in American politics but also because they constitute a huge source of support for BJP. As the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the Trump presidency which may lead to his defeat in the forthcoming presidential election it is in India's larger interest to watch out its steps before treading into the over-hyped anti-China net spread by the Trump administration. The ultra-right pro-Trump think tank, Committee on the Present Danger: China (CPDC), which is massively manned by former military and intelligence officers, is on an overdrive to declare China as enemy *numero uno*.⁸

The U.S. idea is to create a conducive climate for an impending Cold War 2.0. But India must respond carefully. One may recall that from the end of the Cold War until 9/11 when Islamic terror became the focal point of U.S. global strategy, it was Japan that occupied the image of America's prime adversary. Debates in American academia centered on the impending economic wrangle between America, Japan and Western Europe, most significantly Japan.⁹ China was nowhere in the picture. Like the U.S-Japan rivalry then, what we see today is an impending technology war between America and China. Who will beat whom in the realm of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the question?

In this twenty-first century 'great game' India is unlikely to matter. In the India-China context some may hope that when the chips will be down for India the U.S. will come to India's rescue. But that is not how superpowers work. They take care of their interests first. One may have noted that on several occasions President Trump tended to offer mediation between India and Pakistan, or between India and China, but rarely did he take any pro-India position. At best he was diplomatically nuanced.

Conclusion

In the ultimate analysis, a nation will have to fend for itself. Foreign tie-ups do help but only to a limited extent. What matters most is the national strength structured on security preparations, internal stability, and economic strength. Lately, India has been suffering from many fault lines. Barring the Partition days, Indian society has never been as polarized as it is now. The Indian economy has

⁶ Uday Balakrishnan, 'A strategic dealing with China,' *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 2 October 2020.

⁷ Zorawar Daulet Singh, 'On the economy, don't disengage with China,' *Hindustan Times*, 28 July 2020.

⁸ Atul Bhardwaj and Inderjeet Parmar, 'Trump's Desperation and the Manufactured China Threat,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai), 55(31), 1 August 2020, pp. 10-12.

⁹ See, Lester Thurow, *Head to Head: The Coming Economic Battle among Japan, Europe and America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992).

never been worse off than what it is in now which the COVID-19 pandemic has further battered. Indians have never been as poorly informed by the state as they are now. Even such a major event like the unlawful Chinese occupation of our territory was obfuscated for months by inconsistent official statements.

Let me end this essay with a self-effacing perspective. Sometime in 1985 the London University historian Kirti Narayan Chaudhuri speaking at the Heidelberg University made a point which may be recalled here. He said that history had its course, its own philosophy, not necessarily fathomed by the decision makers of the day. By early twentieth century many thinking Brits had apprehended that the end of their Empire was in the making but they could not arrest the process. In his memoirs *Present at the Creation* (1969) the U.S. Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, confessed that everything within America's power was done to prevent the 'fall' of China to the Communists in 1949, but America could not succeed.

How, therefore, will the India-China conflict finally end no one knows. In keeping with our academic reticence we can simply pray that these two Asian giants would not decide to fight to the finish the inevitable consequence of which is mutual destruction. To avoid that disaster let India bide its time and start preparing forthwith to avoid a repeat situation. Timely retreat is an essential element of war strategy.

The screenshot shows a news article from The Hindu newspaper. The header includes the newspaper's name and navigation tabs for NEWS, NATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL, STATES, and CITIES. The article is categorized under NATIONAL and has a title: "India won't accept shifting of LAC, says Gen. Bipin Rawat". The author is Dinakar Peri and the date is November 06, 2020, 12:04 IST. The article text states that India will not accept any "shifting" of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and that unprovoked tactical military actions "spiralling into a larger conflict cannot be discounted." It mentions that Gen. Bipin Rawat said this on Friday during talks with China. The article also notes that India and China held the 8th round of Corps Commander talks at Chushul in an attempt to resolve the ongoing stand-off. Gen. Rawat's statement was made at a webinar by the National Defence College during its diamond jubilee celebrations. The article concludes by mentioning that the situation in Eastern Ladakh remains tense and that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is facing "unanticipated consequences" due to the Indian defence forces' firm response.

THE HINDU

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NATIONAL

India won't accept shifting of LAC, says Gen. Bipin Rawat

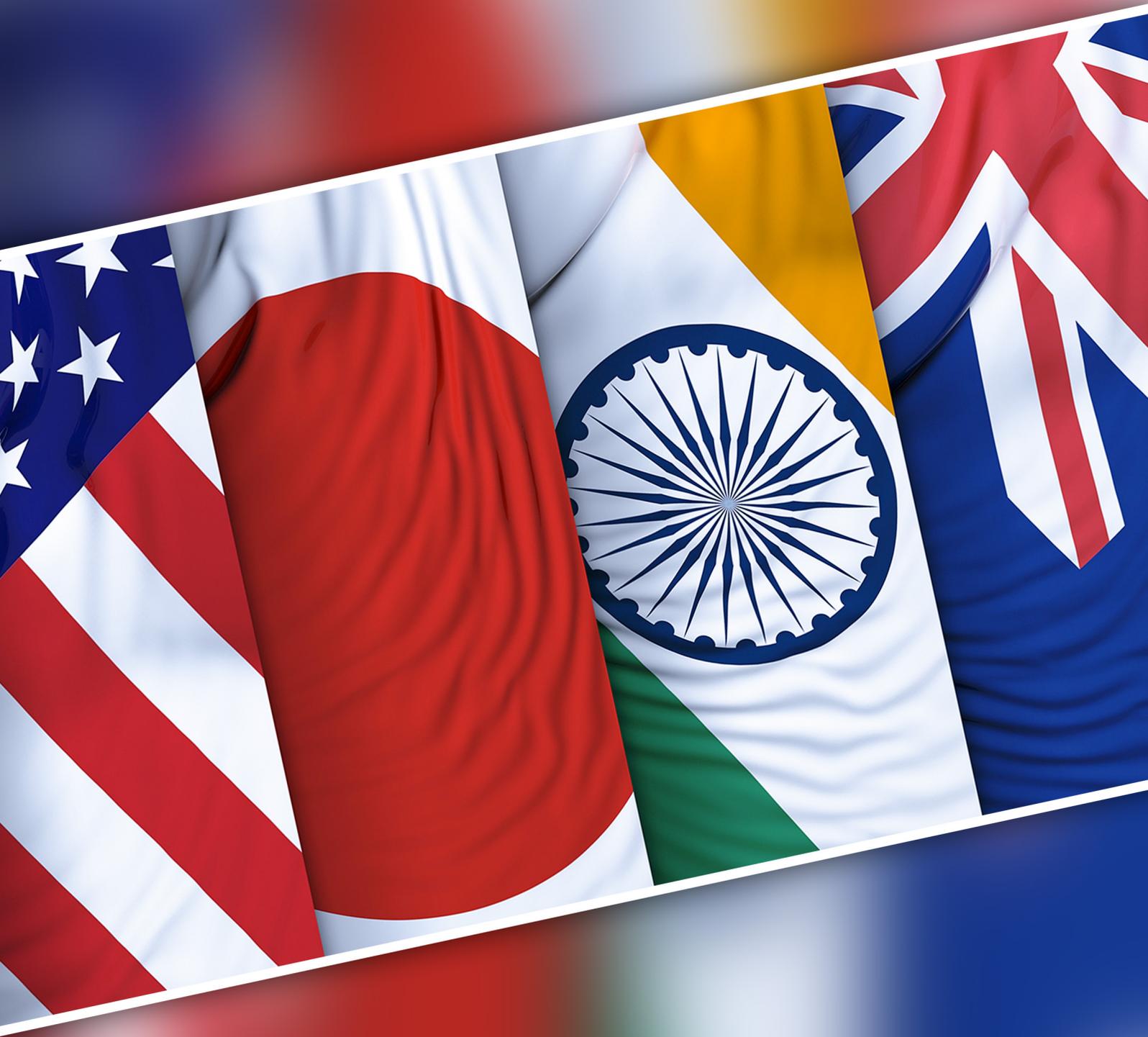
Dinakar Peri NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 06, 2020 12:04 IST

"Tactical military actions can spiral into larger conflict," the Chief of Defence Staff said.

India will not accept any "shifting" of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and unprovoked tactical military actions "spiralling into a larger conflict cannot be discounted," Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Bipin Rawat said on Friday, as India and China held the **8th round of Corps Commander talks at Chushul** in attempts resolve the ongoing stand-off.

"Our posturing is unambiguous. We will not accept any **shifting of the LAC**. In the overall security calculus, border confrontations, transgressions, unprovoked tactical military actions spiralling into a larger conflict therefore cannot be discounted," Gen. Rawat said at a webinar by the National Defence College as part of its diamond jubilee celebrations.

Talking of the situation in Eastern Ladakh, he said it remained tense and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was facing "unanticipated consequences" of its "misadventure" in Ladakh because of the Indian defence forces' firm and strong response.



Does The Quad Have a Future?

Ashok Sajjanhar

Introduction

The question regarding the future of the Quad is pertinent because just about two years ago the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had disdainfully described it as “sea foam” and predicted that it would crumble under its own contradictions. China’s confidence about the unviability of this grouping comprising of Australia, India, Japan and USA, was possibly not misplaced. It was aware that all four members of the Quad have wide-ranging and deep trade and economic ties with China which would not permit them to adopt overtly adversarial positions towards China. It would have thought that, like in 2007, it would be able to browbeat these countries and the Quad would be no more than a low-level discussion group.

Recent Developments

In fact, the trajectory of the Quad over the last three years after it was resurrected by the US President Donald Trump with the leaders of the other three countries on the margins of the East Asia Summit in Manila, Philippines in November, 2017, was quite similar to what the Chinese Foreign Minister had predicted. Mid-level officials of the four countries routinely met twice a year on the margins of Regional or Global Summits/Meetings to discuss prosaic issues related to humanitarian assistance; disaster relief; free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific; counter-terrorism etc. while affirming the centrality of ASEAN. No concrete or specific measures or actions were deliberated upon or taken.

The four countries could not issue Joint Statements after these meetings but issued separate read-outs thereby strengthening the impression that there were sharp differences between them. In addition, these countries went out of their way to reassure that this grouping as also the geographical construct of the Indo-Pacific was not directed against any country. No mention of China was made by any of these countries specifically or explicitly as the *raison d’être* of their coming together after an interregnum of 10 years. However, all those who read between the lines were left in no doubt that it was the increasing assertiveness and growing influence of China in the South China Sea (SCS) and on the global platform which was the principal reason for this mechanism to be revived.

After four meetings at the official level, the four countries met at the Ministerial level for the first time on the margins of the UN General Assembly Session in September, 2019 in New York. It was decided that regular Ministerial-level Meetings of the countries will take place in future. Another official-level meeting took place in November, 2019 on margins of the East Asia Summit in Bangkok.

With the above perspective in view, no political or security analyst could have anticipated just a year ago that the foreign ministers of the four countries would travel expressly during the current highly contagious pandemic to Tokyo to attend a stand-alone meeting of the grouping. This is testimony to the long distance that the grouping and the four countries have traversed over the last three years

since the second incarnation of this Informal gathering emerged in 2017 and even more so, over the previous one year.

The previous hesitant and tentative attempts by the four countries to come together occurred at the time of the Tsunami in South East Asia in 2004 when the four countries collaborated to provide relief and succour to the affected countries in ASEAN, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Timor L'este, etc. The then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during his address to the Indian Parliament in 2007, floated the idea of the Indo-Pacific as an "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity... along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent". The initiative however sputtered to a standstill quickly on vigorous opposition from China which castigated the move as being directed against it. Kevin Rudd, the then Prime Minister of Australia quickly wilted under the pressure and withdrew from the informal outfit.

China's Rise

The decade beginning 2008 witnessed visible evidence of China's increasing political, military and economic strength as well as its growing assertiveness in its bilateral dealings with its neighbours as well as in international fora. The two defining events of this period which gave rise to such tendencies by China were the international financial and economic crisis of 2008 and the successful hosting of the Beijing Olympics by China the same year. The global economic crisis proved to be a shot in the arm for China as it was able to register a comparatively robust growth by injecting a significant stimulus while the western economies including the USA, Europe as well as Japan experienced a precipitous downturn as a result of the subprime mortgage lending crisis in USA followed by the European sovereign debt crisis from 2009 onwards. The impressive hosting of the Olympics by Beijing in 2008 imbued it with confidence that it was ready to take on the world. A few other significant developments took place over the last decade.

Although Chinese assertiveness and expansionism had started becoming visible from the reign of Hu Jintao, it assumed an entirely different dimension with the advent of Xi Jinping as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012. Soon after taking over, he floated the aspirational idea of the Chinese Dream of making China a moderately prosperous country by 2021 and taking back all territories that it considered its own by that date. Notwithstanding the fact that there is no evidence to substantiate this contention, China considers the five fingers of the palm of Tibet viz Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, its own. And Xi Jinping vowed in 2013 that China will get these territories under its control by 2021.

Another significant course of events ensued when China started occupying and militarising islands as also creating artificial ones in the South China Sea from 2015 onwards. Xi Jinping's solemn assurance to Barack Obama in 2015 that China will not militarise the South China Sea did not stand in the way of its wicked design to convert SCS into a "Chinese lake" based on the false and unsustainable assertion of historical claim over this maritime body. The emphatic unfavourable verdict on its contention by the Hague based Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in July 2016 in the case filed against China by Philippines also did not deter China from advancing relentlessly in establishing de-facto control over most of SCS.

There are questions about the coronavirus which originated in Wuhan, China in late 2019. The US has accused China of being deceitful in dealing with the issue when the epidemic first surfaced at the

end of last year. China was able to recover much quicker than the rest of the world, both in restoring its people to health as well as in revival of its economy. Although it still has a long way to go to achieve economic growth levels that it enjoyed before the pandemic, its revival has been much swifter and sharper than most other countries. This asymmetric impact of the pandemic on the rest of the world vs. China raises some questions.

This scenario with the rest of the world frantically grappling with the twin challenges of coronavirus pandemic as well as the unprecedented economic downturn and the resultant social and political upheaval this created in several countries, could be viewed as a strategic opportunity by China to realise its expansionist ambitions. In the absence of Covid-19, possibly China might have taken a few more years to consolidate itself internally and externally but presumably it found the global economic, political and security scenario too tempting to give a go by. It apparently surmised that its only real challenger and competitor viz the USA is too enmeshed in dealing with the pandemic, managing its economy, contending with its divisive domestic politics and a highly contentious Presidential election. Thus the USA would not have the strength or stamina to confront China in any meaningful way. But this is where it seems to have committed a huge strategic error.

The Current Setting

China has caused the rapid intensification and escalation in engagement amongst the Quad nations. The four members of the Quad and several other countries had already started feeling deeply concerned over the last many years at the increasing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea. It became clear that China had over the last few years significantly expanded its military control over SCS and none of the ASEAN member states had been willing to lift a little finger against it either in word or in deed because of their huge dependence on China for trade and investments. Only Philippines took the bold step of dragging China to the PCA but after obtaining a resounding victory from that Institution, it decided against pressing home its advantage, both because of a change in government in Manila, as also intimidation and economic coercion that it was subjected to by China.

The Belt and Road Initiative along with its maritime component also proved to be attractive to some countries of ASEAN and elsewhere as they could get funding from China for improving infrastructure comprising of roads, ports etc. For the last several decades these countries had benefitted from the security presence of USA - America has alliance arrangements with Philippines, Australia, Taiwan, Japan and ROK – and dynamic economic engagement with China. These countries do not wish to choose sides between the incumbent super power and the aspiring challenger for the top position.

Matters came to a head with the unprecedented and unexpected spread of coronavirus around the world at the beginning of this year. It originated from Wuhan in China and spread like wildfire throughout the world. It is the worst health, economic and social crisis that the world has witnessed at least since the second World War. China's initial attempts to conceal its culpability, its muscle-flexing not only against India but also against Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Malaysia, and its expansionist designs on its small neighbours like Bhutan, Tajikistan and others have marshalled the world against it.

In a recent poll conducted by the Pew Research Group, it was found that the image of China and its leader Xi Jinping has taken a severe beating around the world. Its acts of commission and

omission have been compounded by its aggressive diplomats as well as its strategic control of some critical items like drugs and pharmaceuticals, ventilators, testing kits for coronavirus etc. that several countries in the world depended on it for. The remarks by the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi during his visit to Germany that the Czech Republic would be punished and would have to pay a heavy price for the visit of its Speaker to Taiwan offended the political establishment and ordinary people in Europe in general and in Germany in particular.

This is of course not to suggest that China has been isolated in the world. It is too large a country in territorial area, population, size of economy and political and military strength to be isolated. It also has friends and supporters (in addition to Pakistan and North Korea) in Africa, Latin America, Central Asia, Middle East, ASEAN and others who view Chinese support as an attractive economic opportunity. But the hostility and antagonism of the Quad countries as well as several advanced and developed countries in Europe like UK, France and possibly Germany could have a significant long-term adverse impact on China's economic well-being and concomitant social and political stability in the country. A huge pushback against China has started in right earnest. This is one of the significant factors responsible for catapulting the Quad to the position that it occupies today.

India and the Quad

In 2017 India was seen to be the most reluctant and circumspect member of the grouping as it realised that it is the only one out of the four to have a 3,488 kms long unsettled and disputed land boundary with China. Also, its relations with China are particularly complex because of the political, economic and military support that China extends to India's hostile neighbour Pakistan, and more recently to Nepal, as well as the fact that China looks upon India as a strategic competitor and challenger to its numero uno position in Asia.

However, the recent incursions and aggression by China against India in Eastern Ladakh culminating in the faceoff in Galwan valley on 15th June laid bare the designs of China and changed India's stance. Rather than being hesitant in strengthening the Quad, it is reported that India has been in the forefront of upgrading the level and broadening the scope of this outfit.

India's relations with the other three members of the Group have also witnessed a remarkable upswing over the last few years. Relations between India and Japan have strengthened beyond recognition since PM Modi met his counterpart Shinzo Abe in August 2014 soon after coming to power. In addition to bringing the first bullet train to India, Japan is collaborating with India in developing infrastructure in India's North Eastern States, by cooperating under the Asia Africa Growth Corridor, by concluding the bilateral civilian nuclear deal and the Logistic Support Agreement and more. These are just a few examples of the metamorphosis witnessed in bilateral ties over the last few years.

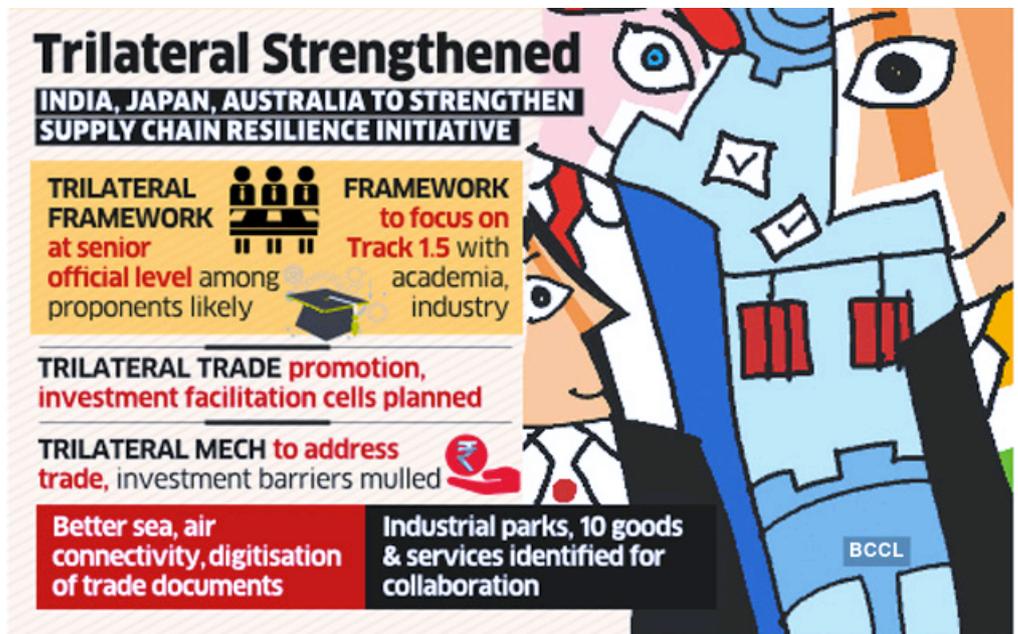
With Australia also the transformation in bilateral partnership has been no less remarkable. India signed the civilian nuclear deal with Australia which is home to the world's largest reserves of uranium ore. The last Summit between the Prime Ministers of the two countries in early June, 2020 provided a significant fillip to bilateral ties. In view of the growing confidence and convergence of views at the strategic level between the two countries, Australia has been invited back to the Malabar Naval Exercises which will take place in November, 2020.

India's ties with USA have turned out to be the most consequential and according to PM Modi "an indispensable partnership" in current times. In addition to wide ranging cooperation in defence, security, technology, innovation, energy and a whole host of other areas, India and USA share broadly similar world views particularly as far as confronting and balancing the untrammelled rise of China is concerned.

Moreover, India has entered into 2+2 dialogue arrangements with all the three other members of the Quad. During COVID time, senior officials of the Quad Plus - New Zealand, Republic of Korea and Vietnam have been meeting at Foreign Secretary/Vice Minister level over virtual platforms every week to share experiences on fighting the pandemic.

The Way Forward

While the Quad ministers after their meeting on 6th October in Tokyo did not release a joint statement. Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. issued readouts. In their readouts as well as their opening statements, each Quad country spoke about its vision of Indo-Pacific. All four countries emphasized the importance of working with other like-minded partners even beyond the ASEAN. Japan mentioned European partners, in particular. The readouts of the four countries noted the importance of regularizing the ministerial, as well as continuing working-level and subject experts' meetings.



While most countries did not explicitly mention China, there were various implicit references to it. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was the exception, mentioning the Chinese Communist Party in particular. The lack of consensus on whether or not — and how — to mention China might have been a plausible reason for the countries to not release a joint statement. In a subsequent press interaction, American officials made clear that China was discussed at length. They also indicated that Beijing's behaviour vis-à-vis Australia, India, and Japan over the last few months — rather than the Trump administration's encouragement — increased their enthusiasm for the Quad. It is obvious that there is a convergence in interest and positions between the four countries and a joint statement is needed to suitably address this issue.

The visit to Tokyo also provided an opportunity to the three Foreign Ministers to assess the commitment of Japan to Quad and the Indo-Pacific in the post-Abe era. The Japanese PM's first visits after assuming office to Vietnam and Indonesia are a positive step in engaging other countries with this initiative.

Conclusion

Going forward the Quad will have to actively work towards expanding the coverage of issues that it would deal with. These could include but not be limited to quality infrastructure, 5G technology, resilient supply chains, connectivity, HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief), cyber-security, counter-terrorism, anti-piracy cooperation, technology, countering disinformation and others. It would also need to reach out to other like-minded countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, UK, France, Germany etc. to provide greater inclusivity, acceptability and credibility to the evolving Institution.

From contemptuously dismissing the Quad as “sea foam”, the Chinese Foreign minister referred to it “a so-called Indo-Pacific NATO.” Wang Yi noted that the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is a “big underlying security risk” and that “what it pursues is to trumpet the Cold War mentality and to stir up confrontation among different groups and blocs and to stoke geopolitical competition.” This shows that the Quad has come of age and that a bright future beckons it!

The Quad and its partners should work assiduously to evolve an Indo-Pacific security architecture. This should ensure a free, open and rule-based Indo-Pacific confirming freedom of navigation and resolution of all disputes through dialogue and in conformity with international law particularly UNCLOS '82.

The Quad plus participating countries should pro-actively collaborate to develop the 5G technology so that a viable alternative and competitor to Huawei can emerge.

The increasing belligerence and aggressiveness of China is a challenge that not only the Quad but all like-minded countries need to confront together. The recent Quad Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo demonstrated the resolve of these countries to work jointly so that China does not emerge as a threat to peace in the region and the existing rule-based world order.

While the obstreperousness of China has acted as a glue in getting the four countries together, as it evolves, the Quad's progress should not be dependent on China's behaviour. Several areas have been identified in which these countries and several others can work together. Going forward the Quad should further strengthen its cooperation to promote the basic objectives of a free and open Indo Pacific and promotion of rule of law, peace and prosperity in the region.

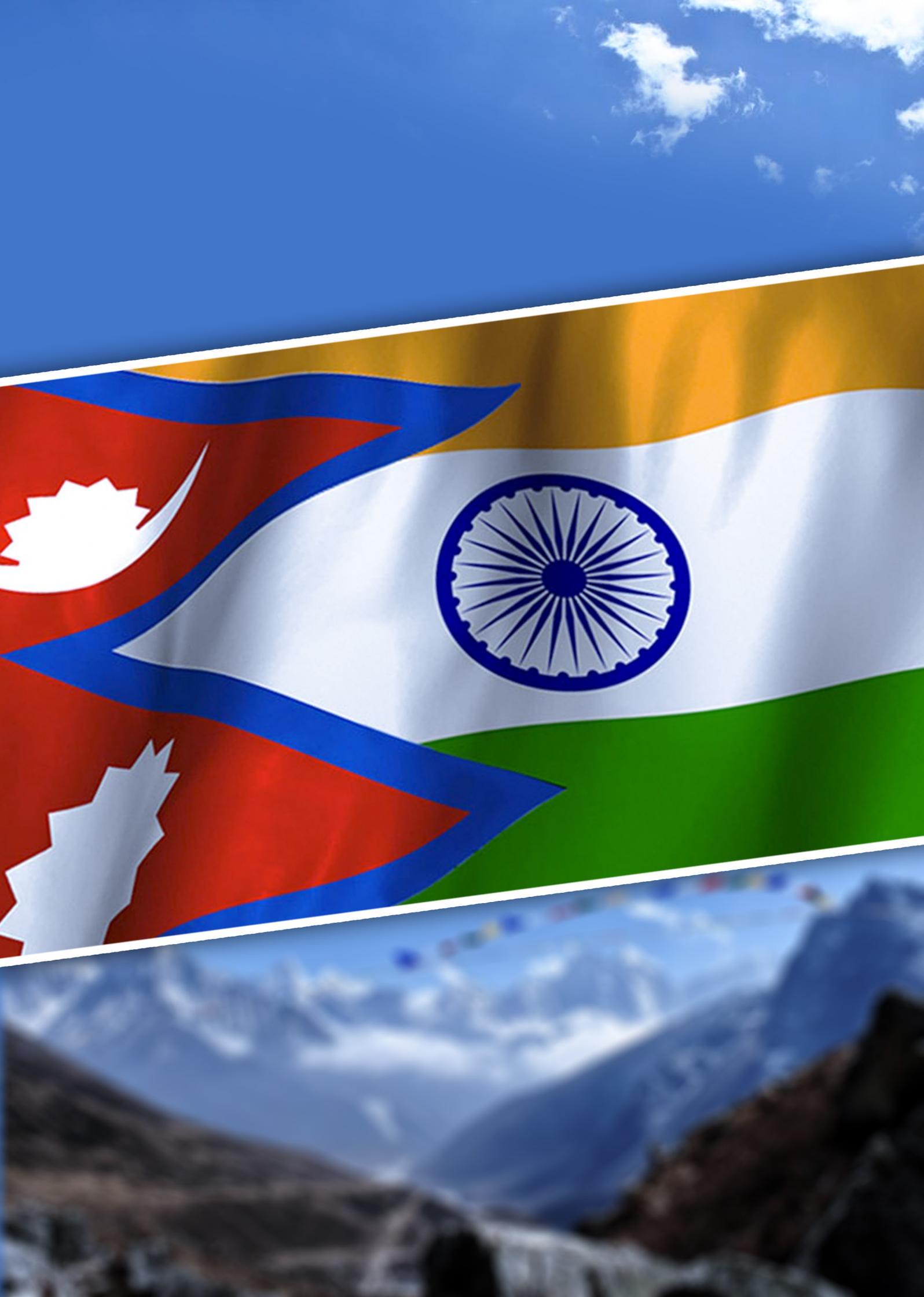


Malabar 2020: the coming together of the Quad in the seas

Dinakar Peri

OCTOBER 31, 2020
21:35 IST

Australia will join India, Japan and U.S. in the annual military exercises this week as the countries seek to deepen their maritime cooperation



Webinar on Restoring India-Nepal Relations: What Steps to Take under Neighbourhood First Series

A webinar on **Restoring India-Nepal Relations: What Steps to Take** as a part of *Neighbourhood First Series* was organized by India International Centre on Monday, 28th September 2020. Speakers were Amb. Bekh Bahadur Thapa, former Ambassador of Nepal to India, and Amb. Ranjit Rae, former Indian Ambassador to Nepal. It was moderated by Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Ashok K. Mehta.

Dr Somnath Ghosh attended the webinar on behalf of of RGICS. The following is a record of webinar proceedings as noted by him:

Gen Mehta welcomed the panelists and introduced them to the audience. He noted that Amb Thapa was not only a former ambassador of Nepal to India but has also Nepal's ambassador to United States. Since Amb Thapa also served as the foreign minister and finance minister of Nepal, Gen Mehta hoped Amb Thapa would also bring a political perspective to the discussion.

Thereafter, gen Mehta opened the discussion by observing that since 2015 our relationship has deteriorated. He flagged three developments: growth of Nepalese nationalism, unprecedented majority by leftist party, and an increase in anti-India feeling. He then invited Amb Thapa to share his views.

Amb Thapa opened his remarks by expressing sadness at the death of Jaswant Singh with whom he shared a warm professional and personal relationship. He said that given Jaswant Singh's scholarship and sagacity, there were lots of exchange of ideas on defence, finance and bilateral relations. Thereafter, Amb Thapa observed that the first thing about India-Nepal relations was the need to "switch off the mute button". He said no two countries have been as close and also at odds as India and Nepal; there have been ups and downs in the relationship. He recalled that in 1964 when Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri visited Nepal, he had a two-hour meeting with the King, and the outcome was very positive. He also mentioned that during IK Gujral's time, "every difficult issue was discussed" with the objective to "minimize differences, maximize cooperation". But he observed that after Gujral, foreign secretaries (of the two countries) never met to review the 1951 agreement. Later, during Vajpayee's tenure, the relationship was also good. And when Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal, he charmed every Nepalese. But, "lo and behold, there was soon a blockade".

Amb Thapa went on define the current state of Nepal. There was lot of insecurity. There was also a sense of confusion at the changes from monarchy, to constitutional monarchy and then to parliamentary democracy: "where (do) we stand today? There's a feeling of numbness". With respect to India-Nepal relations, there's uneasiness due to lack of dialogue; though people to people engagement is there.

Gen Mehta then invited Amb Rae to respond as well share his views.

Amb Rae began by acknowledging that “relations are at all-time low”. But he disagreed with Amb Thapa on people to people relationship. He said there’s resentment among Indians due to many statements (made by important people in Nepal). Media has also played a “high decibel role”, as if Nepal is like Pakistan. He further said, on the boundary issue some initiative was taken by Govt. of India, but did not succeed. He observed, there’s a dilemma here: now a constitutional amendment (in Nepal) reinforces the boundary issue; so how do you go about a dialogue?

There was also the question of timing. There were two aspects to it: first, there’s a boundary problem (that India has) with China; and second, China stands by Nepal regarding India-Nepal border problem.

The boundary issue (between India and Nepal) now appears to be a strategic issue, and not just a boundary issue.

But there’s a silver lining, he said, referring to Janakpur railway line. He also said a symbolic gesture was also required in inviting the Army Chiefs of India and Nepal to one another country, as the Army Chief of each country also happened to be the ceremonial Army Chief of the other country. But Amb Rae also emphasized the need for some substantive project. In this connection he mentioned Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project (PMP)- a bi-national hydropower project to be developed in Mahakali River bordering Nepal and India. But he lamented that though six years old, to date “even DPR (detailed project report) not done”.

Gen Mehta then responded to the observations of both ambassadors. He said, India could have done more positively, and maybe averted publication of map (by Nepal). He then referred to Amb Rae’s observation of the reciprocal relationship of the Army Chiefs of both countries, and recalled the Gorkha connection which was “as old as history”. He said one of the “most enduring aspects of (India-Nepal) relationship was the Army Chief of one country was also the Army Chief of the other country. In this connection, Gen Mehta observed that it was “not a wise comment by General Naravane to say that Nepal is doing at the behest of China”. He proceeded to say that the Indian armed forces has always helped Nepal during crises like the air crash of 2015, and the massive earthquake of April 2015, termed Operation Maitri. Similarly, the Indian armed forces helped Nepal to fight Covid. He also referred to joint military exercises, joint seminars and that such initiatives between the armed forces of the two countries “needed to be replicated in the political sphere”.

He then posed a question to Amb Thapa: “Is the power struggle between Oli and Prachanda over?”. To which **Amb Thapa** replied that the blockade by India “punished the Nepalese people”, and that there’s a “sense of hurt”.

To this, **Amb Rae** said the restrictions on traffic movement was on account of Madhesi issue. It is their protest that resulted in blockade. He said, India’s stand was that “It is your political problem. Please ease it up”; though it was projected a India’s role rather than Madhesi’s. But maybe, India could have done more.

Gen Mehta then said there was two **questions** from the **audience**: (1) “There is Chinese interference in Nepal; yet there’s no protest. Why is this so?” (2) “Is anti-India feeling only in the valley or all over Nepal?”

To this **Amb Thapa** responded: India-Nepal relations is special like between no two countries. But given China's superiority in technology, economic might and capacity to implement large projects speedily and effectively, all countries are getting closer to China. Even India's trade with China is more than it is with Nepal. But he thought Chinese involvement (in Nepal) will increase. For example, there are more Chinese flights to Nepal than from India. He appealed people not to play one country against another. To this both **Gen Mehta** and **Amb Rae** agreed that media in both countries have played the villain's role.

Amb Thapa ended by saying that Nepal is moving towards a consensual style of functioning; but for one vote, every party supported the government on the boundary map issue.

Gen Mehta rounded up the discussion by pointing out the need for person-to-person contacts and in this direction the "positive development" of the formation of **Eminent Persons' Group** of which Amb Thapa was a member. Amb Thapa said that he was both happy and fortunate to play such a role especially at concluding part of his career.

THE
WIRED
ANALYSIS DIPLOMACY

India-Nepal Relation Could Finally Be Moving Towards a Thaw

RAW chief Goel's visit to the Himalayan country and a scheduled visit of Army Chief Naravane next month show that both nations are eager to resolve outstanding issues between them.



India-US Relations: Challenges and Way Forward

Foreign Policy Research Centre

in collaboration with

Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies



Donald Trump's visit to India – Feb 2020

Image Source: <https://images.indianexpress.com/2020/02/trump-ahm-1200.jpg>

At the outset, Prof. Mahendra Gaur, Director of Foreign Policy Research Centre, welcomed the panellists and introduced them to the audience. He then highlighted the significance of the consultation given the historic ties between India and US, and hoped the distinguished panellists would shed insights into this long and complex relationship. Then, on behalf of RGICS, Professor Somnath Ghosh thanked the panellists for taking time off their busy schedule to share their thoughts on this important topic. We present below excerpts from the presentations of the various speakers of consultative process:

Mr Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

When we're talking about *India-US Relations: Challenges and Way Forward*, I guess in everybody's mind will be the recent visit of President Trump to India and people who definitely compare his visit with the last three visits, which is President Bush, which really transform this relationship and followed by President Obama's 2010 visit and in 2015 visit.

So, in my understanding, when you negotiate a trade deal with a country like US and that (too) with President Donald Trump, and when India was giving concession before to make the deal happen, he was asking for two more things. He went a step backward to have the maximum. That's his style. (But) he knew he is not getting the big deal, but he still came here. To get that Diaspora connect.

As General Katoch has pointed out, the Indian diaspora in US is slowly making the difference. You know it's a second biggest diaspora after the Chinese and for US it's slowly making certain differences in certain states beyond the western and the eastern coast and he probably needs your support in long term. Indians are getting into the Congress, the state Congress as well as in the Federal Congress and he probably has realized that the Indian diaspora in the coming years. He may not be there; he'll probably get it or may not get a term (but) looks like that he will get a term. But he knows the value of this Diaspora which is making the relationship beyond the leadership. Secondly, he has a personal connect with Prime Minister Modi. Prime Minister Modi himself believes in, I guess, personal chemistry and this man also believes in personal chemistry.

I would focus on one only one aspect of this visit - which we didn't give due attention - which is about the Indo-Pacific partnership, because this is largely remains in the intellectual domain; so, most media doesn't focus on it per se. ... The US is inviting India to join something called Blue Dot initiative. Well, Australia, Japan, are already partners. How will this shape up? My understanding is, India is cautious on this and probably will take time, if at all. But beyond that, there is a convergence of views on the Indo-Pacific region.

Just the last word on the trade deal. I guess trade deal or not, Indo-US trade is on an upswing. We are buying more oil from US; there is US investments in India. And these are happening beyond the trade deal. So whether we clinch a deal, whether we clinch an investment treaty, whether we clinch an FT or not, to my mind it shouldn't be seen as the be all and end of a deal at all, because the trade is increasing, our purchases will increase, the US investments in India is going to increase. Thanks.

Ms Smita Sharma

I'll talk first about the India-US relationship and then look at it from the perspective of the Trump visit, and then talk about the challenges.

As far as the India-US relationship is concerned, without a doubt it is one of the most important relationships for India today. And nobody should have any qualms about accepting it whatever may have been the Cold War history when you saw India aligned with the Russians. In the past two decades (Indo-US) relationship may have seen our fair share of ups and downs, but this relationship has evolved in a way. I think there is no zero sum game here anymore, and which is what works to the advantage of both these countries.

When you talk about two democracies - one being the largest, and the other being the oldest - because there are so many pillars in this relationship today which integrate these two countries. People to people relationship as General Katoch talked about, and I will expand on those a bit more. There was also a question about the diaspora and their seeming intervention in American politics. But you have the other core areas.

I think one of the areas that has taken up massively in this relationship has been defence. What has happened is India acquiring at least \$18 billion of arms and ammunition from US in the past twelve years alone. Now this is a significant. Until some time back, we were looking at an Indian arms system, Indian military software, hardware system where you were acquiring at least 72% to 75% of items from Russia. Now this has come down to almost 60%. A lot of it is also because India still continues to acquire a lot of spare parts for the Russian equipment that it already has.

But the shift has been in the aviation sector... In aviation today the doors have opened to acquire equipment and aircraft from the Americans, which was earlier closed because of that entire phase of sanctions. That has now opened up and a lot of India's critical platforms are actually now of American make. And as you go forward, you also have India expanding its weapons basket acquisition from. The Europeans, from France, from UK, from Israel. The dependence on Russia in a way has seen a significant transformation. So I think this is one of the key areas for India US relations.

IAF receives final delivery of Apache and Chinook from Boeing

Amid ongoing tensions at the LAC with China the Indian Air Force receive final delivery of Apache and Chinook military helicopters from Boeing

VIVEK SHUKLA - JULY 10, 2020



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www.DefenceWatch.in

Today we talk about Indo-Pacific, which was the Asia Pacific, but US realigned, recalibrated and then gave it the name of Indo-Pacific so the US Pacific Command is now called the Indo-Pacific command. If you see the American presence of the bases is far more from Indonesia to Australia. Russians don't match up to it. The number of exercises - bilateral, multilateral – that the US and India are engaged in today. They can be anywhere between 20 and 24, and with Russians you have one or two. So that's significant transformation of opening up and which is why you've had two crucial foundation agreements signed. LEMOA which is about logistics exchange agreement, so that you know you can use each other's bases for refuelling purposes, for logistic sharing. The other is COMCASA to improve interoperability between the forces as they go in for the exercises. We are all hoping it will be signed somewhere this month itself. So I think defence is the one area where we have seen the two countries pick up a lot of steam and a lot of energy.

Talking about the third area, it would be energy. We are living in a time now where we have moved from non-alignment movement to what we call today our strategic autonomy. India wants to align with countries based on each other's needs and interests. India's energy needs have of course added. But from the times when India was importing largest crude oil source from Iran, now it has gone down to zero. India's has now shifted a lot of buying LNG gas supply from the US. So as the US lands up and discovers more and more oil and gas supplies, the US will also play a crucial role in trying

to keep the oil prices globally stable along with other countries including Saudi. The Canadians have been discovering a lot of gas. In fact they are keen that India should sign up. For our interests and, for a country of 1.3 billion, the energy needs are something where again US will play a key role.

The Nuclear Energy pact was in my opinion one of the most significant transformations in the India-US relationship that also changed the way the world sees India. All credit to George Bush who did a lot of heavy lifting for India to sail through but the agreement but then India came up with its domestic liability law which became a huge friction point between India and the US because the American makers of nuclear reactors were not comfortable with the idea that if tomorrow unfortunately that does happen, the liability for that they said should be fixed upon the operators of the reactors and not the makers of the reactors. So during this visit in fact we were expecting movement forward in terms of the nuclear commerce that hasn't happened. Will touch upon it in a bit, but I think the essential part is that the bipartisan support that India enjoys, and let's talk about it today.

The bipartisan support that India enjoys in the US in the American Congress regardless of whether it's the Democrats or Republicans in power. That is a very very crucial component of this relationship and that is a component that the lawmakers and the leadership need to keep in mind as we continue to engage with each other.

Now coming to the Trump visit. I would say, every time you have a high level summit visit, it's not possible to expect an absolutely big ticket item like a civilian nuclear deal being announced or the next steps in strategic partnership. But at the same time you do expect the visit to look concrete in terms of substance. In my opinion, substance in this visit is something that I found a little lacking at this point in time. Of course we did sign up for the \$3 billion of acquisition of helicopters. But if you're a member, the Ministry of External Affairs before the visit in fact announced that there would be broad discussions happening and we're expecting at least five (agreements) to be signed.

Eventually what was signed were actually three MOUs. One was in the mental health sector. Second one was in the safety of medical devices and third one was between Exxon Mobil and Indian oil, but even that Indian Oil and Exxon Mobil agreement was about LNG infrastructure plant in terms of parties of LNG. There has been a lot of friction. That's been happening between the two sides because India somehow was not comfortable buying LNG at a fixed price from the Americans because they think that they're going to run into losses.

Dr. Chintamani Mahapatra

When an American president comes to India, this in itself is significant. And wherever he goes, whoever may be the President of the United States, if it was just a particular country, and moreover, if it is a stand-alone visit; that itself is very, very important. Soon after he (President Trump) made the visit and returned, he tweeted, "Great India, great successful visit". Around the same time Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a statement here that it was a path-breaking visit by the American president. Now the question is if Trump said it was a successful visit, was it successful for India? We have to think if Prime Minister Modi says that this was path breaking. One can debate it in very many ways.

Let me begin by saying something about what the critics would say. They said, Donald Trump condemned India, criticized India in very many ways and then he hit India. Before he comes, he says

he will engage with the tariff King; he comes to India and says the same thing. In Washington, DC, sitting next to the Pakistani prime minister he would say, I would like to mediate in your Kashmir dispute with India. As the report says, he comes to India and says the same thing. Then in India he praises the Pakistani prime minister: "He's a good friend and together we are combating terrorism". He says hardly anything about Pakistan and China, the countries of concern for India. So what really good did the visit do? He came all the way; people waited for last two years. Indians and Americans are negotiating a trade deal. He imposed high tariff on India, retaliated on 28 items of imports from the United States. He comes here, no deal was signed. And when no deal was signed, he said some big deal was in the making. And the government of India also says not to worry, wait, things will improve. We need not be in a hurry to sign a trade deal.

Point number two. Yes, he signed \$3 billion dollar deal of some helicopters and all. Here what he did not say is important. He didn't say, don't buy S-400 from Russia. He kept quiet. I think that is a very good news; and he thinks Indians are going to buy more. After all, they are not thrusting on India, that you buy this, you buy that. They are offering and we have the choice to buy or not to buy. So if that particular deal was signed, in my view it is okay. As part of the trade deal is concerned, I think I'll go by what our ministries have said and what Trump said before he would land. There are difficult issues like taking India out of GSP; then you have the H1 B visa issue; and then you have the data localization issue, totalisation issue. These are critical issues. He may take India off the GSP list. It's not that he is certifying that India has now become a developed country. No, that is business; it is negotiation, it is bargaining. It is hard. So we should not hurry up and sign a deal, simply because there is a President visit right now to India.

On Kashmir. Many people said, "What is he going to say on Kashmir? He said he would like to mediate." My answer is what he did not say about Kashmir is important and we should take note of it. Simply because he's offering his mediation we need not be upset about it. After all, without Indian agreement and willingness, he cannot mediate. He did not challenge the legal validity of abrogation of Article 370. That's a very big thing. Trump administration has not challenged whatever Government of India did in Kashmir. When Pakistan and China together were trying very hard to discuss Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council, ultimately when India's succeeded in preventing that, there was strong American support. In the FATF, when they're keeping Pakistan on the hit list, even now, - and another round of discussion is going to take place in June - and if that was possible, it is simply not because of India's diplomacy with other countries, the American support was really important.



How about China? This fellow would never criticize China in India. No, the kind of signal he sent to China in my view is important. Like for example, just to give you one example. The Chinese are pretty upset about it. The concept of Indo Pacific: they think India is being highlighted. US-Pacific was different. They don't like it at all. I have interacted with very many Chinese people even at the government level and the university level. They don't like it, but the joint statement that was issued. If you take a look at it. Out of 21 small, paragraphs, five paragraphs were devoted to Indo Pacific. Number two, he did not criticize India for allowing the Huawei for 5G tender. And number 3, when he mentions about the BRI. And saying that the US would always support a transparent deal as far as BRI related investments are concerned and there should be a rule based transparent policy, particularly on giving loans etc.

“Pakistan must not allow its territory to launch terrorist attacks”. It is written in a joint statement. If you run your eyes through the report in the Pakistani media on of what transpired on Kashmir, they all talk about what he said in Ahmedabad and ignore what is there in the joint statement. So overall, if you see all these things, I think it was a very, very useful visit by an American President. They are increasingly taking note of India. In my concluding observations: What next? This is my view and it is the view of many other people also. Prime Minister Modi goes to Houston, and in a way endorses President Trump's candidates. Now he comes to Ahmedabad and much bigger - double the size of the people in the audience. Somehow down the line, it is sending a signal to the Democrats that Indians are now siding with a Republican President.

Number three: the critical issues like GSP and all the trade deals are really serious. We cannot put a full stop; that Donald Trump has told us a big deal in the offing. I think critical issues are at stake. And American politicians particularly would not understand critical aspects of the political economy of the world. Generally, the American congressmen - senators also at that level - they think, “Oh, Americans are doing a great job giving assistance to many many countries, third world countries, developing countries... Why should we pay our taxpayers' money to Tanzania, Ghana, South Pacific islands? Questions are raised. You know American debate. For every one dollar given in assistance to the developing countries, ultimately the Americans will get \$4 in return over the years. It is not just free doling out; no free lunch in the United States. So there are many issues even on Indo-US deal. You know it is not one-sided at all. Americans get benefit out of it. They're not at all bleeding hearts: *is garib Indians ko madad karo* type – no, it is hard economics. So we need not be in a hurry. But we have to play our cards very well in times to come.

Finally on Afghanistan. Many people say Americans are already doing some dealing with the Taliban. And what is going to happen to India's future in Afghanistan? In certain areas where we need to cooperate, collaborate: particularly in the area of combating terrorism.

Maj Gen. Dhruv Katoch

There are just a few points I would like to give us a starter. The United States is the only superpower today. It is the only country which can impose sanctions on anybody because (it has) the financial controls - where financial dealings are done with the US dollar and the control of the US dollar is with the United States. They control everything that is in a very, very broad perspective. Now with regard to Indo-US partnership, I look into four basic pillars.

The first thing is the human relationship - the people to people dimensions, leadership to leadership dimensions, including the Diaspora. The second dimension is the political imperatives of whichever country. The third dimension is the economic side of it. We're getting into very stronger defence cooperative with the United States. But then the economic side of any relationship is very important. Lastly, the most important of all is the strategic convergence and divergence which really make the relationship. While people to people relationships may be good or bad or indifferent, ultimately it is the strategic convergence which make the relationship. If you take away the strategic convergence nothing else will matter right. You may have very good people to people relationships (but) they only carry that far.

...If I have to give any credit to the government of the last six years on any one field, it won't be the economic field, it'll be the foreign policy field. I think the one place where we have really succeeded is the foreign policy field. Now Professor Chintamani rightly said, so many things haven't happened. Obviously they haven't happened. Diplomacy is not in making things go right. Diplomacy is preventing things from going wrong. Let us put it that way; it is basically conflict management. There is no way in which you can win. You can simply cut your losses.

The second I aspect I want to talk about is the defence aspect. And then I want to go into strategic convergence and divergence, which I will end with that. You see, I think the defence partnership has taken off in grand way, in a really great way. What was so important and why is it too important. Former President Abdul Kalam, made a very pertinent statement, he said. We import 70% of our defence equipment and we just manufacture 30% and he said we need to reverse it.

Technologically, I think this assistance now which we are going to get with the US, especially with BECA coming up the 4th foundational agreement. I think if we can have that cooperative deal together by which we can start manufacturing together. We have a great deal to offer in terms of software and space technologies which we can share with the Americans. So it's not that it's going to be a one-sided traffic but then technology, I think we can get a great deal of it too.

But now I want to talk about the strategic aspect and there are three things, which I think that we need to, and here I want to delve into it a little bit. The first is the pivot to Asia. Now why was this pivot to Asia? You know when we talk of a pivot to Asia, we are really meaning that you're getting towards the Central Asian systems, you're getting on to the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Now why was this pivot necessitated? And I think it had something to do with energy resources. For the first time America found it was not dependent upon West Asia at all. So America became self-sufficient in energy and now America is exporting energy.

Number two, when they say that the 21st century is the Asian century, it is because sometime this year or last year at some point of time, the economy of all the Asian countries combined exceeded the world. So the shift to Asia is very dramatic. There's going a purchasing power parity, and not in real terms but BP and in PPP terms. You know the economic shift is bigger here. So if you're looking at an economy that is growing every year and the gap between Asia and the rest of the world is going to keep getting bigger and bigger. That is why it is called the Asian century.

Now, how does Asia get its resources? The complete dependence of the world trade now is shifting to the Indian Ocean and any disruption on the Indian Ocean has an impact on world trade. So the

shift to Asia and the Indian Ocean region had great strategic importance for the world and for the United States. If you look at the map, India's centrality as part of the Indian Ocean is clear, and the fact that India's economy is growing, and we can afford to do it. I think we are in a position.

Now I'll just talk about a few divergences. I think when we're looking at the Afghanistan part region, there is a divergence. When this question came up that the Americans will withdraw I made it very, very plain that America leaving Afghanistan is not good news for India. Now whether they will leave or not, that's the million dollar question as Prof Chintamani has said. They may not leave. I remember when President Obama was the president and they were having a drawdown and Obama in his speech said, we are going to pull out of got it off Afghanistan. I was heading the Indian Army's think tank and the American delegation had come there and I told them, you can't do it, and the American said, "Our president has ordered it. We will do it", and I told them you can't do it. They couldn't do it.

The question is, there is a logic to what is happening in a particular area. So if the Americans withdraw then what is the situation going to be? What is the situation they're going to leave behind in Afghanistan? You have got two people who are fighting that particular conflict as of now. One is the Afghan national security forces that is the government forces, with the police and the army, and you on the other side is the Taliban, which is supported by Pakistan. The public really doesn't really matter. If you go to Afghanistan and ask any common Afghan which is the country which you like the best, India is number one. And which country which you hate the most, Pakistan comes number one. They hate Pakistan more than they hate the Americans. But will that make a difference? Honestly, it won't really make any. The public opinion of Afghanistan is not going to make a difference, that's a reality in Afghanistan.

But I think we must be very concerned about our own interests, which way our interests lie, and to think what we really need to do. You get your economy going, get your defence preparedness up to the appropriate shape too. And then of course, everything else will fall into shape, and hope the Americans can help us in getting these two things right. I think these will be the challenge for our political leadership for our diplomats, and for our civil society.



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The Modi government will find a Biden presidency to be less volatile

Tanvi Madan

If present trends continue, Joe Biden will be president of the United States on January 20. While the situation remains in flux, certain elements are worth keeping in mind for the next few months.

First, Donald J Trump will still be president till then, with the power to handle crises that emerge and to take actions such as personnel changes and executive orders, including on China and Iran.

Second, control of the Senate is not yet clear. It will be determined by the outcome of the two Senate races in Georgia, which will be headed for runoffs on January 5. Senate control could shape President Biden's choices with regard to personnel appointments that require Senate confirmation, and policies — including on trade, immigration, democracy and human rights, an economic stimulus package and the defence budget. If Republicans keep control of the Senate, centrist — rather than progressive — appointments and approaches will be more likely.

Third, personnel appointments could have an impact on a Biden administration's approach on key issues of interest to India, like China and trade. Positions to watch include the leads of agencies involved in foreign and security policy (national security adviser, secretaries of defence and state, CIA director) and economic policy (secretaries of treasury and commerce, US Trade Representative). Lower-level positions of interest will include the NSC senior director and the assistant secretaries covering the region, and the US ambassador to India.

Fourth, Biden's main policy priority will be dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. This will include controlling its spread, vaccine development and distribution and dealing with the economic fallout.

That does not mean President Biden would ignore foreign policy. He might indeed have more space in this arena than in domestic policy if Republicans control the Senate — in part because this is where they could find areas of convergence, especially on China policy.

Biden has an internationalist instinct and has committed to working more effectively with allies and partners. His first few visits are likely to be in the neighbourhood (Canada and Mexico), and to Asian and European allies. India might not feature on his short-term itinerary, but could get visits from senior members of the administration, or invitations for high-level meetings in the US.

In addition, Biden has promised to rejoin the Paris climate change agreement. He would also likely halt US withdrawal from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and reengage in multilateral organisations — which would please Delhi.

Whatever his own preferences, however, Biden's approach will be affected by an American public that has shown little appetite for interventions and investments abroad, and remains concerned

about the consequences of globalisation at home. This will likely mean a continued drawdown of forces in Afghanistan (with a remaining counter-terrorism-focused presence), and an expectation of burden sharing from allies and partners. And it could shape Biden administration's approach to trade and immigration. However, his promise to "build back better" could benefit American allies and partners, including India, if it strengthens the US, and could even present opportunities if it includes, for instance, investments in innovation.

Among other key issues of relevance to India will be the administration's approach in Asia. While it might get relabelled, Biden advisors have shown support for a number of the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific policies and objectives. As for China, the Biden campaign's tough rhetoric on Xi Jinping and Xinjiang, promises on Tibet and Taiwan, and indication that tariffs would not be automatically dropped reflect that strategic rivalry is here to stay. However, it is the terms of US-China competition — and any potential cooperation — that a Biden administration envisions that could be consequential for India.

Delhi should watch closely how Beijing and Moscow approach the administration. Will they seek to temper competition or test Biden? A Sino-US accommodation would create complications for India — so would Moscow testing Washington, reducing the already low likelihood of a US-Russia rapprochement.

How American allies and partners see the new administration will also matter. Uncertainty among Asian and European allies (including Australia, France, Germany, Japan and South Korea) over the last few years has fuelled their desire to deepen relations with Delhi bilaterally, in issue based coalitions and at international institutions. The close election outcome will likely reinforce this trend, even as the countries seek to engage Washington.

Global issues that are likely to be priorities for Biden could be areas of cooperation for India and the US, including climate change, global health security and democracy.

On the issue of concerns about internal developments in India, like the Obama administration, a Biden administration would likely convey them privately and temper public criticism.

Overall, the Narendra Modi government will find a Biden presidency to be less volatile, more fully staffed and relatively familiar with India. There are some known unknowns to keep in mind though. Crises can disrupt the best laid plans. Furthermore, it is not yet clear what the impact of the polarisation in America will be on its power and purpose.

However, it is premature to write off a Biden presidency as some have done, arguing he can get little done if there is a Republican-controlled Senate. American presidents have a lot of power, agenda-setting ability and instruments at their disposal. India will benefit if Biden can find ways to use them toward strengthening America and keeping it engaged in the world. And, along with other American allies and partners, Delhi would do well to find ways to facilitate that outcome.

To view the article, click the link below:

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/view-the-modi-government-will-find-a-biden-presidency-to-be-less-volatile/articleshow/79102966.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst



India - Russia relations - Then and Now

Ambassador Divyabh Manchanda¹, IFS (Retd)

Prologue

In 1466, a Russian merchant from Tver, Afanasy Nikitin began his journey to India. He travelled through Persia and the Ottoman Empire and stayed in India 1469-1472. The documentation of his experiences during this journey is compiled in the book *The Journey Beyond Three Seas*. (Nikitin's journey was portrayed by actors Oleg Strizhenov and Nargis Dutt in the 1950s film of the same name.)

The Russian city Astrakhan became a trading centre for Indian merchants who also visited Moscow and St. Petersburg. Russia was used as a transit trade hub for commerce between Western Europe and India.

The first Russian translation of the Bhagavad Gita was published in 1788 on the orders of Catherine the Great. Russian pioneers who travelled to India and studied Indian culture include Gerasim Lebedev who studied ancient Indian languages in the 1780s and later Nicholas Roerich who studied Indian philosophy. Roerich was influenced by the philosophy of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and the Bhagavad Gita.

In 1801, Tsar Paul ordered plans for the invasion of British India by infantry and Cossacks in an alliance with France. Following assassination of the tsar, his successor Alexander I immediately cancelled the plans.

...and to 1947

The USSR was under Stalin and India had Nehru when India became independent. Diplomatic relations commenced. Even though Nehru expressed appreciation for the USSR's swift economic development, India was still viewed as a "tool of Anglo-American imperialism". After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union started showing interest in India and voiced its optimism for "friendly cooperation".

¹ Ambassador Divyabh Manchanda was in the Indian Foreign Service from 1978 to 2014. He has a five year connection with Russia: as the Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow and then as Head of the Eurasia Territorial Division of the MEA. From the Russian leaders mentioned in the article he has met Gorbachev, Lavrov, Medvedev and Putin.



The World's Ten Largest Countries (square km)

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Russia. 17,098,246 | • Australia. 7,692,024 |
| • Canada. 9,984,670 | • India. 3,287,263 |
| • United States. 9,833,517 | • Argentina. 2,780,400 |
| • China. 9,596,961 | • Kazakhstan. 2,724,900 |
| • Brazil. 8,515,767 | • Algeria. 2,381,741 |

Introduction

After Nehru visited the USSR in June 1955 and First Secretary of the Communist Party Khrushchev visited India later the same year, things started to happen. The USSR commenced aiding India in all aspects of development. The Soviet Union's rapidly growing strong relations with India had a negative impact upon both Soviet relations with the People's Republic of China and Indian relations with the PRC, during the Khrushchev period.



The Soviet Union gave India substantial economic and military assistance during the Khrushchev period, and by 1960 India had received more Soviet assistance than China had. This disparity became another point of contention in Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviet Union declared its neutrality during the Sino-Indian war of October 1962, although the Chinese strongly objected. The Soviet Union agreed to transfer technology to co-produce the MiG-21 jet fighter in India, which it had earlier denied to China. In 1965 the Soviet Union served successfully as peace broker between India and Pakistan after an Indian-Pakistani border war. (The Tashkent Agreement).

Turning Point: 1971

In her recent book "Fateful Triangle", Tanvi Madan shows that conventional wisdom can sometimes be facile. During the period that her narrative (mainly) covers viz. 1949-79, the United States and India were not

always estranged; India's relationship with the Soviet Union was not always a given fact, nor always trouble-free; that it was not just commonality of democratic values, but real politik that brought them closer during the good periods and conversely, during the bad days, this commonality did not count for much.

In 1971 the former East Pakistan region initiated an effort to secede from its political union with West Pakistan. India supported the secession and, as a guarantee against possible Chinese entrance into the conflict on the side of West Pakistan, it signed with the Soviet Union the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971. In December, India entered the conflict and ensured the victory of the secessionists and the establishment of the new State of Bangladesh.



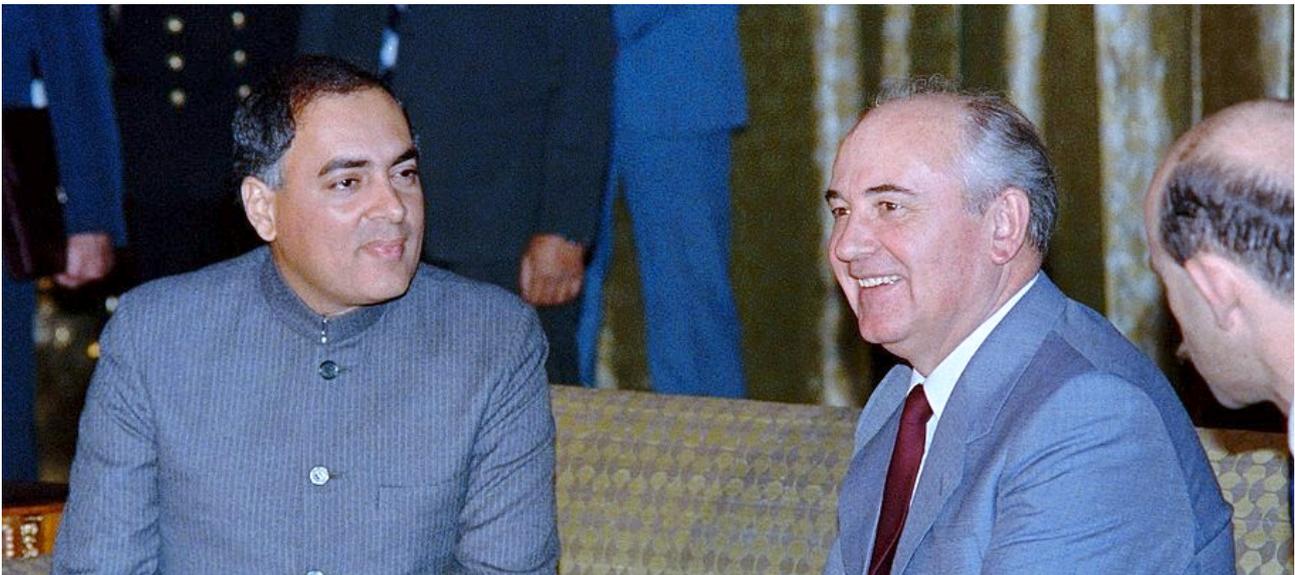
For the United States the math was simple: they were on the verge of a historic breakthrough with China; Pakistan was the facilitator; and India, with its Bangladesh crisis, the spoiler. Besides, if US-China relations were improving, the importance of India for the US was less. For India, the American support against China was gone, but the China-Pakistan problem loomed large; support from the Soviet Union, which was based on signing the Treaty, was the only “insurance policy” available.

1972-1990

Relations between the Soviet Union and India did not suffer much during the Janata Party's coalition government in the late 1970s, although India did move to establish better economic and military relations with Western countries. To counter these efforts by India to diversify its relations, the Soviet Union proffered additional weaponry and economic assistance.

During the 1980s, despite the 1984 assassination by Sikh separatists of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the mainstay of cordial Indian-Soviet relations, India maintained a close relationship with the Soviet Union.

Indicating the high priority of relations with the Soviet Union, the new Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, visited the Soviet Union on his first State visit abroad in May 1985 and signed two long-term economic agreements with the Soviet Union. During this visit, Rajiv Gandhi developed a personal rapport with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev.



In turn, Gorbachev's first visit to a developing world State was his meeting with Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi in late 1986 (which, as Deputy Chief of Protocol, I had the great experience of helping co-ordinate). With the improvement of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1980s, containing China had less of a priority, but close relations with India remained important as an example of Gorbachev's new Third World policy.

1990-2000

The year 1991 saw numerous changes in the erstwhile Soviet Union: communism collapsed and democratic governments were installed one after the other in most of the east European countries. Besides, due to greater emphasis on relations with the industrialized countries of the West, Russian relations with India got low priority. With the emergence of independent Central Asian Republics, Russia's borders fell further apart. The stand taken by India during the August 1991 coup did not particularly endear new Russian leaders.

As an example, see a statement by opposition politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and the leader of the LDP group in the State Duma, (when he was Presidential candidate 1993): “If I am elected President, Russian soldiers will wash their boots in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.” Zhirinovsky, 74, was fiercely nationalist and has been described as a “showman of Russian politics, blending populist and nationalist rhetoric... a brash, confrontational style”. His views have been described as fascist.

Initial Russian experiment of “intense engagement with the West” failed, and Russian leaders redirected the foreign policy eastwards. In the new scheme China and India gained importance. This transformation in Russian foreign policy was the result of “NATO's post-cold war expansion in Europe, its military involvement in the Balkans; and the growing political instability in Afghanistan and in the Asian region thereafter”.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union had altered the power equations in international politics. Though Russia remained a military power, it lost its erstwhile dominance in matters of economy and politics. It was no longer a super power.

2000 — Current

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited India in October 2000, and this visit gave a great boost to bilateral relations. Indo-Russian strategic partnership has been built on five major components: politics, defence, civil nuclear energy, anti-terrorism co-operation and space. In recent years, a sixth, economic component has grown in importance, with both countries setting a target of reaching US\$30 billion in bilateral trade by 2025, from about US\$9.4 billion in the year 2017.

Both countries are members of many international bodies where they collaborate closely on matters of shared national interest. Important examples include the UN, RIC, BRICS, G20 and SCO. India is the second largest market for the Russian defence industry. In 2017, approximately 68% of the Indian Military's hardware import came from Russia, making Russia the chief supplier of defence equipment.

The first major political initiative, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, between India and Russia began with the Strategic Partnership signed between the two countries in 2000. President Vladimir Putin stated in an article written by him in *The Hindu*, "The Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Russia signed in October 2000 became a truly historic step".

Russia currently is one of only two countries in the world (the other being Japan) that has a mechanism for annual ministerial-level defence reviews with India. The Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) is one of the largest and most comprehensive governmental mechanisms that India has had with any country internationally. Almost every department from the Government of India attends it.

In the military field, co-operation is now not limited to a buyer-seller relationship but includes joint research and development, training, service to service contacts, including joint exercises.

In October 2018, India inked the historic agreement worth US\$5.43 billion with Russia to procure five S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile defence system, the most powerful missile defence system in the world ignoring America's CAATSA act. The United States threatened India with sanctions over India's decision to buy the S-400 missile defense system from Russia.

The Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC)

The IRIGC is the main body that conducts affairs at the governmental level between both countries. Some have described it as the steering committee of Indo-Russia relations. It is divided into two parts, the first covering Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Co-operation. This is normally co-chaired by the Russian Deputy Prime Minister and the Indian External Affairs Minister. The second part of the Commission covers Military Technical Co-operation this is co-chaired by the two countries respective Defence Ministers. Both parts of IRIGC meet annually.



The President of Russia and the Prime Minister of India have met every year since 2000. The Commission supervises implementation of the “10-year umbrella Inter-Governmental Agreements on Military and Technical Cooperation”. The first agreement covered the 2001-2010 periods. In 2009, when Prime-minister Manmohan Singh visited Russia, second one was signed to cover the period of from 2011 to 2020.

Analysis

Currently, Indian-Russian relationship is currently primarily based on

- *Their **history** of co-operation through a variety of eras.
- *India's need for enhanced **security**.
- *India's need for **military spare parts for existing** assets and continued (though diversifying) need for military hardware for which Russia has to compete.
- *Co-operation in the **nuclear field**. Russia has agreed to build more than 20 nuclear reactors over the next twenty years with installed capacity of 1000 MW each. A 1000 MW reactor currently costs around \$2.5 billion.
- ***Energy needs** of India. Indian oil companies have invested in the Russia's oil sector. An example is ONGC-Videsh which has invested over \$8 billion with major stakes in oil fields such Sakhalin-1. "It is expected that Indian companies will strongly participate in projects related to new oil and gas fields in the territory of the Russian Federation. The sides will study the possibilities of building a hydrocarbon pipeline system, connecting the Russian Federation with India."
- ***Increasing Bilateral Trade**: Russian-Indian trade is around US\$ 20 billion and the target is US 30 billion by 2025. (Russian-Chinese trade, as well as Indian-Chinese trade, is in the neighbourhood of US\$100 billion.)

Russia has stated it will co-operate with India on its "Make in India" initiative by engagement in the development of "Smart Cities", the Delhi-Mumbai-Industrial-Corridor Project, the aerospace sector, the commercial nuclear sector and enhancement in manufacturing of Russian military products through co-development and co-production. India is currently the world's largest cutting & polishing centre for diamonds. Both countries have agreed to streamline their bilateral trade in diamonds through reductions in regulations and tariffs. Both the countries set the **investment target** of \$30 billion by 2025. Since they met the target by 2018, India and Russia expect to enhance the figure to \$50 billion. India also proposed to set up a special economic zone for Russian companies.

- ***Space Co-operation**: Historically, there has been a long history of cooperation between the Soviet Union and India in space. Examples include Aryabhata India's first satellite. The only Indian to visit space, Rakesh Sharma, was also launched by the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

Russia has a lot at stake with China: the gas deal is crucial given the current state of the Russian economy. Bilateral trade (2018) is at \$107 billion. Russia is the major source of China's energy and defence acquisitions (amid trade tariffs being imposed by US and EU). Politically, they are aligned on a number of international issues e.g. Afghanistan. However, the fear for losing Russian land to illegal migration by Chinese, particularly in the East, haunts the Russians for the last two decades.

Also, Russia will not be happy if BRI threatens their preeminent position in the region. Though Ukraine and Belarus continue to be Russian neighborhood priorities, Chinese moves in the Central Asian Republics as well as in Eastern Europe have sounded caveats.

Nevertheless, in recent months, no matter how hard the two countries tried to hush them up, disagreements have begun to appear in relations, including historical disagreements over Vladivostok (The present-day territory of Primorsky Krai, of which Vladivostok is the administrative capital, was part of the Manchu territory of the Qing dynasty before it was annexed by the Russian Empire in 1860 after the defeat of China by Great Britain and France in the Second Opium War), of the sale of Russian weapons to India, and the delay in deliveries of Russian missiles to Beijing.

Currently, the confrontation with China at various sites, including Ladakh, obviously occupies international attention.

“LAC confrontation has reminded the Russians of Chinese salami slicing in Far East, including the former Chinese territory Vladivostok. They see a threat to their global strategic construct RIC.”

India is using, with Russian help, the platforms available (IRIGC, RIC, and SCO) to have more opportunities for dialogue with the Chinese. However, India opted out of the Russian KavKaz 2020 strategic command post exercise (15-26 Sept) being held under the aegis of the SCO since the Chinese PLA was participating.

It remains to be seen how successful the efforts were. Some cynical Russia inhabitants feel that “the relationship is mostly based on inertia, and is not receiving any significant fresh impulses, despite many declarations and earnest efforts.” But isn't that typical Indian behavior, I would ask.

Act only when you have to.

“The longer-term direction is unpredictable, mostly because of this new Cold War situation between the US, Russia and China.... if push comes to shove, Russia will throw in with China. I am sure most Indians already have figured this out, and this conditions their own -- sharply deteriorating, it appears -- attitude toward Russia. If the next US president continues the economic offensive against China that Trump has started, China will turn more toward Russia to try and exploit the obvious economic synergies that are present. Not just oil and gas, raw materials, but also vast tracts of unused agricultural land, a land transport corridor to avoid the US-Navy dominated sea approaches to China, and a nuclear-armed political and potential military ally. If the US continues brainlessly alienating Russia, well, then, this seems a likely outcome.”

There is hope for the positive: The recent (August) media reports that Russia could be invited to join the Indo-Pacific moves, is a potential path breaker.

Where will India stand? *“Of course the US isn’t much of an ally to anyone under Trump, and things probably won’t improve [maybe the rhetoric will be nicer] if Biden wins..... But, in any case, the equation with Russia is going to shift down, and probably up with the US. How rapid and drastic those shifts occur depend on how bad things get in this current geopolitical competition. I personally expect it to get worse.”*

I, personally, do not think so.

“Anyhow, there are too many variables to make any serious predictions (today). If the Americans would drop -- or dial back -- this neo-Cold War offensive, Russia would be less inclined to slide into China’s embrace and more inclined to balance China with ongoing good relations with India. Likewise China would seek to diversify its relations more to Europe, Africa, Latin America, etc. (through say) the Belt and Road Initiative. Russia and China are not natural allies, or even friends, but they are being driven together by a bigger force.”

That, I think, just about sums it up.

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S-400 MISSILE SHIELD DEAL

5 SQUADRONS

of S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft, anti-missile systems

COST

\$5.43 BN
(₹ 40,000 crore)

PLAN

- ➔ Induct 1 squadron of S-400 in 2 years after the contract is signed, and the remaining in 5 years
- ➔ IAF will integrate S-400 with IACCS (integrated air command and control system) network of sensors and weapons

CHARACTERISTICS

- ➔ Can destroy hostile strategic bombers, stealth fighters, missiles and drone up to 380km range
- ➔ Radars (primary acquisition one has 600 meter range) can track hundreds of missiles simultaneously
- ➔ 4 kinds of missiles to intercept targets in different ranges
- ➔ Russia says S-400 can radar-lock and shoot down 5th Gen stealth fighters like US F-35 jets



CHINA

Signed a \$3 billion deal for integrating six S-400 batteries in 2014





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