

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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**CHINESE CONUNDRUM
ON INDIAN BORDERS:
REALITY CHECK
PROMPTS DE
ESCALATION**



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China came with all the fury and bluster on the cusp of Tibetan summers saber rattling at multiple points on the Indo- Tibet borders. It obviously had a good old purpose to intimidate India into political submission to Chinese dictates. **There continues to be an uneasy opaqueness of their intentions as there seems to be a calculated camouflage with their apparent plans gone awry with episode of night 15/16 June in Galwan sector.** What next, is the question that appears to be the Chinese dilemma after their seemingly failed gung-ho move of let's do it again and teach India yet another lesson.

What is coming out clear is that China has probably not thought through the conflict termination in varied contingencies that may come about in case plan does not succeed. The political arrogance and high self image seems to have blurred their vision to factor in the capabilities of the opponent, a basic input prior to launching a military operation. The Chinese planners have been confident of a sure shot military victory and consequent early political capitulation of India. Whereas, China having hit the wall of Indian resistance and resolve to fight it out took out winds from the sails altogether. China is seemingly looking for other options now to push their agenda.

Teaching a lesson as military aim per se is peculiar only in the Chinese philosophy of war culled out of their ancient philosophical clichés not relevant in case of reckonable nuclear powers, India being one of them. It goes without saying that China is now in a fix to untangle herself from a problem of their own making as resurgent India is unlikely to blink this time as she seems to be ready for confrontation, if it comes to that. And that is not a good news for China, an egoist nation with over dimensional political hubris which would crumble even if it is a stalemate in case of a military confrontation. India, given her war experience in high altitude areas and optimal combat ratios is certainly in a position to do better than a draw of the match .

The China is known to be unethical in her political conduct but they can be so impractical and irrational by indulging in coercive exercise on multiple fronts against regional as well as global big wigs is seen for the first time. As a result, Chinese hegemonic conduct in the South China Sea has antagonized western world who are also charged up to deny use of Indo-Pacific in case China does not mend her ways. Consequent to such a strategic hydraulics unfolding, they seem to be indulging in diplomatic camouflage to cover up their political inconsistencies. They have been issuing statements justifying legality of their stand and portraying China as the aggrieved party and yet magnanimous enough to mend the fence. Surely, there is a loss of face as the entire world is looking at China and her unacceptable demeanor.

There has been vast difference in agreements arrived at various levels and their actual implementation on ground. The bogey of Sino-Indian military level talks is mired in lies and false promises made which are flouted even before the military commanders can barely reach their respective camps. The statements from their political level also have fair content of lies to hood wink the environment. A mischievous misinformation campaign has been launched by the Chinese official media with false narratives as part of perception management. China is hoping that their psychological warfare, duplicity, and dubious ways of creating delightfully vague narratives will restore their lost political ground.

On the contrary, China is losing out her credibility due to her unbecoming political conduct not befitting of a nation with aspirations to rise as a global leader. Instead of influencing the world comity with her cooperative and inclusive approach as an anchor power, China continues to believe in primacy of military in conduct of politics, a carryover of medieval mindset. That is the biggest fault line in Chinese political approach.

China has obviously bitten more than what they can chew by opening up military fronts in the East & South China Seas and Indian land borders. Imposition of national security law in Hong Kong amounts to violation of terms of transfer of power besides resistance by Taiwan for its merger. China surely is losing out on the friends with such hegemonic tendencies and defiance of international norms in their political conduct. Even the countries who are under deep obligation of China for their financial generosity have started to review their priorities of their relationships with China.

China, probably in order to establish her credentials as a military power, chose India perceived as a soft state with no stomach to oppose China based on their earlier experiences. A military humiliation of fourth largest army would have met this political objective, what they have been looking for. Whereas, in the changed situation, the Chinese leadership is being questioned even within China, besides antagonizing rest of the world. Apropos, the Chinese leadership is under compulsion of showcasing some kind of success to placate the internal constituency.

In consequence, China is clearly seen to be reacting to Indian build up as she is also forced to mobilize and maintain additional forces. China is trying to show force in areas other than Ladakh to convey their intent to expand the scope of confrontation as part of their psychological warfare to pressurize India. Whereas, partly it is a defensive move as India has managed to create a threat in being through their presence in other sectors also.

The Chinese game plan is to tire out India and make them accept the ground reality in order to avoid confrontation in the current economic stress due to pandemic situation. Such a stance may well also be to provoke India into initiating a local military skirmishes thereby legitimize Chinese military response. This would also give opportunity to expand the conflict to other areas including opening up Pakistani front to the apparent advantage to China.

Only fear is that in such a dual threat scenario, the conflict may spiral out of the region with possibility of other countries jumping into fray. China would like to avoid such a situation as even they have to fight on multiple fronts including on high seas to their disadvantage. China unfortunately is struck with an odd situation of their own making. They cannot go back fully on Indian front as it would be a loss of face for them. In case hostilities break out it would be for China to attack India which has high probability of failure due to super high altitude resulting in high casualties. India would be the winner even if there is a stalemate as China would have failed to achieve her military objectives.

India has leverages in the IOR to interfere in the Chinese merchant shipping impacting on her economy, the main stay of Chinese political strength. Off late, India has been seen exercising her naval ships closer to the strait of Malacca to show case her inimical potential. This option once applied would be a game changer as there is support of US and with other allies with their strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. With such a military diplomacy a strategic hydraulics has been set for China to think about her continued aggressiveness in Ladakh. As a result, China seems to be buying time to shore up adequate forces to make a substantial dent into Indian defences whereupon she can de escalate the situation from position of strength.

The time window for China is receding with every day as winters are approaching fast wherein it is logistically difficult to sustain large forces in this region. Though same logic also applies to India but in case of India the administrative bases are much closer as compared to China to stock up and create habitat for optimum forces. Moreover, the window for collusive threat

would also reduce during winters , thereby reducing the pressure on India to handle such a situation. **China has to take a call to stay, or withdraw, or attack reasonably entrenched Indian army alongside potent air component.**

On socio-economic platform, as the new generation of India had started to accept China beyond scars of 1962 looking at positive economic synergies, the Chinese leadership with one wrong move has lost more than 600 million young partners. There is unlikely to be a positive equation with China ever in life time of these young Indians. China has managed to put the clock back by six decades and blurred the future by another similar time lines, if not more. China has lost one of the biggest and the closest markets alongside a cultural bondage which has inspired and benefitted Chinese immensely in the past. **The Chinese dream of global leadership is unlikely to be achieved fully without one fifth of humanity not in sync with them.**

China is surely is facing a politically strong and militarily competent India with a clear message that military centric approach is not the way to deal with her anymore. It is China who needs India more than what India needs China to achieve her aspirations of global leadership. **It is time to change her coercive doctrine as it would be futile in present times with resurgent India with high strategic pull and geo political synergies.** Reconciliation with genuine intent to sort out the territorial disputes amicably without burden of unsubstantiated historical precedence would still save the day with some respect.

As far as India is concern it is the right time and opportunity to call Chinese bluff, otherwise we will be simply postponing the malignancy as China is bound to visit again to humiliate India. The world in general is in support of India and is expected to stand against Chinese hegemonic moves. The existent policy of “No Brinkmanship, No blinking” holds good as of now, unless China chooses to force India to think of other options. The objective of standoff this time should be to ‘treat the disease and not the symptoms’ as was the pattern all this time.

Chinese leadership has to take a call to pick up threads from where they broke them, and settle the boundary issue retaining the sanctity as it existed at the time of state of J&K ceded with India. China can utilize the benefits of strategic potential of the areas under dispute with appropriate political understanding sans her intransigence of hegemonic strains.

India is no more a push over and her strategic patience should not be taken as a weakness. Hence, it is time for China to accept the reality and de-escalate the ante and refrain from military coercion in future. In fact, it is an opportunity for China to mend the fences once for all. If not done now, then the present leadership will go down in the history for the cause of Chinese political fall from grace. Ball is in Chinese court. Still, if there is a war at the end of the day, so be it.

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