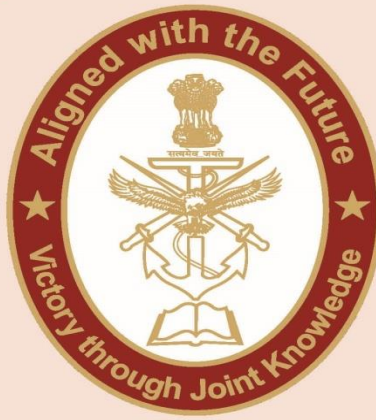


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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DIALOGUE OR MONOLOGUE: THE ART OF WORDS



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In October 1959 there was a stormy meeting between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Chairman Mao Zedong, during which Khrushchev squarely blamed the Chinese for the tension with India. This was after the Longju incident, in August 1959 in Upper Subansiri in NEFA and was subsequent to the escape of the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama who sought refuge in India in April that year. He stated “If you let me, I will tell you what a guest should not say: the events in Tibet are your fault.”

Further into the meeting, Khrushchev blamed the Chinese for killing Indian soldiers to which, Mao replied, “They attacked us first, crossed the border and continued firing for twelve hours“. Khrushchev stated “although the Hindus attacked first, nobody was killed amongst the Chinese and only the Hindus”. Premier Zhou Enlai replied “What are we supposed to do, we cannot fire in the air”. After that visit Sino –Soviet relations appeared to deteriorate.

The first meeting between Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, which was incidentally facilitated by President Yahya Khan of Pakistan took place in July

1971. It was primarily to discuss issues that had divided them with the aim of bringing about a rapprochement in ties. Kissinger's opening speech contained a line about China being a 'land which is a mystery'. On hearing this, Zhou Enlai immediately said "what is so mysterious about China? There are 900 million of us and it's not mysterious to us. Maybe we should work on it not being so mysterious to each other".

Surprisingly, the issue raised by Khrushchev, was touched upon while discussing the Indo- China War of 1962, during the meeting between President Nixon accompanied by Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai, in February 1972. Zhou Enlai stated, while referring to the conversation with Khrushchev, "If the side with the most casualties is to be considered the victim of aggression, what logic would that be? For example at the end of the Second World War all Hitler's troops were all casualties or taken prisoners, and that means that Hitler was the victim of aggression"

Sun Tzu, in his masterpiece 'Art of War', had stated that you need to know your adversary. The Chinese Foreign Ministry was only established in 1901, Imperial China based its policies on a set of hierarchical relationships and the standing of each country with China and not an adjustment of differences amongst equals.

The Chinese believe in identifying the end result which they wish to achieve and thereafter taking the necessary steps to achieve that result irrespective of the time it may take, and they carryout adjustments based on the circumstances. The end goal is never lost sight of by them. Keeping the LAC ambiguous maybe part of a larger plan.

While some people feel that the impasse at the borders has resulted in a stalemate, and the Chinese are not getting back to restoring status quo ante, it needs to be borne in mind that the Chinese have a different mindset and that negotiations with them will take time. We are embroiled in a dialogue which is part of a historical process.

Henry Kissinger, while discussing Graham Allison's book 'Destined for War' stated that when the Chinese Ambassador came to meet him, he was accompanied by three note takers. When asked for the reason for three, he replied that at the end of the meeting, each one sits down and compares what they have understood from their perspective and surprisingly they rarely agree completely on what they have heard and also the impression they have of the meeting; thereafter he absorbs all of this and finalizes the feedback.

Taking this analogy further, irrespective whether the three note takers represent three different views, engagement with China to resolve the border issue has to be at three levels, that is the military, diplomatic and political. Though, it is evident both sides are not keen on escalating the situation, but status quo as on date will please the Chinese as they would have been able to continue a Westward march in some areas as far as the alignment of the LAC is concerned.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that disputes need to be settled through dialogue, there have been twenty two rounds of Special Representative Level talks with China since 2003, with no outcome. The boundary issue is fundamental to the interests of both nations and it is imperative that steps be initiated to intensify bilateral talks to reach a mutually acceptable understanding. This will ensure that the next generation does not have an insolvable problem to deal with. Unfortunately, as per current indicators China does not see the settlement of the border as a priority.

The Corps Commanders have now met five times in order to work out both the disengagement and the de-escalation process and thereby restore peace and tranquility. While there has not been any escalation of hostilities since 16 June, the Chinese pull back is still a work in progress. The truth is that the Army is always guided by terms of reference, which are not negotiable and hence all commitments made have to adhere to these parameters. At the same time we need to be patient because dilemmas don't disappear. Our aim must be on achieving strategic success along with tactical gains.

Talks are also being held at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) level, the focus being to diffuse the situation and to restore the status quo ante. Thereafter, confidence building measures by both sides are crucial for maintaining peace and tranquility on the LAC. Protocols for ensuring border Management by both sides need to be worked out and adhered. We have had agreements earlier which have resulted in over thirty years of peace being maintained but after the recent crossing of red lines in the form of fatal casualties to our soldiers and the violation of our territorial integrity the value of the earlier treaties is questionable at best.

Prior to independence, the Himalayas had always been considered as a natural barrier, the impregnable bastion. No invasion ever took place from this direction and large parts of the higher reaches remained uninhabited. The 1962 war changed that perception and now, with the passage of time and the development of infrastructure and habitat by both sides they are less formidable.

While a resolution can only come through dialogue, we cannot appear to be weak during the negotiations. Our strength must come from our Armed Forces. In the current standoff we have demonstrated our ability to move adequate reserve formations. Our mobilization has been substantial both in quantity and quality, and our troops are well positioned to prevent any further incursions. We must focus on their modernization so as to be able to maintain a credible deterrence.

For the time being we have to acknowledge the fact that with the approach of winter the operational window of opportunity for carrying out any offensive action also reduces, however the paradox exists of the trust deficit being at such a low level that the deployment cannot be decreased unless there is a breakthrough in bilateral talks.

While our aim must be to resolve the issue of unresolved borders in a peaceful manner, at the same time we should build up our capabilities and also international opinion so that we are prepared for other options should the need

arise. Our strategic restraint should not be seen a weakness. In the event cooperation is elusive; there is no need for us to give into coercion.

Both countries are ancient civilizations, having their own perceptions based on their interpretation of the boundary and hence the talks are more like monologues, for a dialogue to take place there needs to be greater understanding and flexibility in both approaches and while we must be sensitive to domestic concerns we cannot be guided by democratic complexities. As Zhou Enlai had suggested, we need to work on understanding each other's positions. While currently, the outcome of talks to resolve the border dispute in its entirety may seem unachievable but we should remember that for both countries any alternative is undesirable.

A nugget of hope to untie the knots in our relationship possibly lies in what Chairman Mao Zedong told the then Indian Charged' affairs Brajesh Mishra in April 1970. "We cannot keep on quarreling like this. We should try and be friends again. India is a great country. Indian people are good people and we will be friends again someday".

In a recent survey reported by Beijing Review, out of 1, 60,000 titles in a newly launched e –library last month,' Xi Jing Ping: The Governance of China Volume III', is one of the most searched. It is basically a collection of articles, speeches, conversations and instructions of the Chinese President between October 2017 and January 2020. Apparently, the most common word in this volume is innovation. There is no doubt that we are now desperately searching for an innovative solution to the border dispute.

To quote Ronald Reagan, "Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflicts with peaceful means".

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