

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

GEOSTRATEGIC PORTENDS IN ASIA 2020-2025



Col RS Sidhu, SM (Retd) is a post graduate in History from Delhi University. He has authored various articles published in reputed service and think tank journals.

“Rise of a challenger to an established regional or global power is invariably disruptive of geopolitical peace.”

GENERAL

In the geostrategic circles, the 21st Century is already being talked of as the Asian century, wherein the dynamics of forces being generated by the rivalry between US and China, and Bharat and China on the other hand, will deeply influence the discourse of international relations the world over. Within Asia the primary factor which is shaping the geostrategic alignments is the energy security needs of China.

Since almost a decade one of the most anticipated event horizon in the geostrategic space has been the rise of China as a challenger to US supremacy in Asia and the world at large. History is mute testament to any such climb of a challenger being disruptive to regional and world peace. China's upsurge is no different.

To the student of history it is quite interesting to note great similarities in the ascent of China in Asia and the earlier disruptive rise of Nazi Germany in

the 1930s in Europe. Quite like Nazi Germany, Communist China is seeking land and maritime space well beyond its borders, engaged in Human Rights abuses against own minorities, employing armed might to impose its will on the weaker adversaries, actively violating well defined international conventions and agreements, and refusing to implement decisions of lawful international judicial organisations.

Even more interestingly, like Nazi Germany, Communist China is heavily dependent on imports for energy security, lacks maritime prowess to defend its maritime trade in hostile situations, and is engaged in the cardinal geostrategic sin of simultaneously opening all fronts against its adversaries. But this is where the similarities end. Quite unlike Britain and France, the then Great Powers of Europe neighbouring Germany, Bharat has chosen to confront China along the mutual borders on the Himalayas and is willing to pursue the conflict into full spectrum of modern war. This has taken China by surprise, habituated to a traditionally submissive response from India to provocative actions by the former.

Similarly, unlike in 1940s where US entered the battlefield against Germany more than two years post commencement of World War II, US has now taken ab initio lead to confront China in the South China Sea (SCS).

Chinese hierarchy is well known for its long term policy focus. Hence its decision to open a second front to its South West in the Himalayas, while still engaged in the East against aggressive US maritime posturing in SCS, has surprised the geostrategic community world over. To understand the constraints that are driving Chinese actions on a seemingly self-destructive course, we need to look at its geostrategic imperatives.

IMPERATIVES OF CHINA

“Measures undertaken by a nation to overcome its strategic vulnerabilities are the most obvious targets for the opponent.”

Critical Vulnerabilities

China has four critical vulnerabilities. Firstly, its political and economic core is most vulnerable to maritime threat along its exposed 14,500 kilometers

long coastline. Secondly, its economy is critically dependent on energy imports. Thirdly, its access to open waters of Pacific Ocean is confined by Japan to the East, while the restricted maritime region of Malacca Straits impedes its trade routes towards the open waters of Indian Ocean. Fourthly, it lacks naval capability to safeguard its maritime trade routes for ensuring uninterrupted energy supply during active hostilities.

Chinese leadership is pragmatic enough to comprehend these vulnerabilities. Once we too appreciate these realisms, it is easy to comprehend the imperatives of China in embarking on the course of action it is undertaking.

Employing Remedial Measures

China is unlikely to possess adequate maritime capability to be able to secure its maritime trade routes, at least for the coming decade. Without uninterrupted supply of energy resources Chinese economy will collapse, setting in motion centrifugal forces leading to collapse of the Government itself.

Chinese actions in SCS are primarily focused towards securing an extended defensive parameter which can inhibit employment of offensive maritime force by its adversaries against its exposed coastline, thus enabling it to marshal its resources to the West to secure overland energy routes to West and Central Asia.

Its establishment of 'string of pearls' bases along its critical energy supply maritime trade routes is to be seen as a nascent attempt to impart some semblance of security to its maritime trade.

Its Belt and Roads Initiative should be looked at as an attempt to open up alternate energy supply lines. CPEC and CMEC are two critical components of this strategy. However the threat from Bharat has put a question mark on the viability of these projects.

Another alternative is to expand its reach to overland energy routes into Central and West Asia energy sources. It has already tapped Russia for energy supply through Trans Siberia energy pipelines. Another probability is

to develop energy pipelines through Central Asian Republics or Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan into oil rich regions of Central Asia, Iran and Iraq. It is this criticality of China which is making it the common thread running through the geostrategic realignments taking place from East to West Asia.

BROAD REALIGNMENTS IN ASIA

“Between capability and intent of an adversary, it is realistic to keep an eye on its capability building. Intent is nebulous to discern and can change overnight, capability building takes time and is also easy to monitor.”

Interplay of differing factors is influencing the changing geostrategic realignments in South East Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia. In South East Asia the challenge being posed by China to US supremacy is the key factor influencing the realignment of forces.

In South Asia it is the animosity between Bharat and China which is shaping the alliances.

In West Asia the challenge being posed by Shia predominant Iran to the leadership of Sunni leadership of Saudi Arabia is the dominant force influencing regional dynamics, coupled with China's search for energy security.

The Sunni predominant Central Asian Republics, under the watchful eyes of Russia, are currently keeping aloof from the alliances taking shape in their neighbourhood. China also looks at the Central Asian region as the panacea for its energy needs.

With China and Iran on the brink of entering into a major strategic partnership, the former becomes the common link in the realignment of geostrategic forces across the length and breadth of Asia. Thus the realignments are broadly coalescing into pro and anti-China forces.

Active intervention by US in all the affected regions of Asia has devolved the mantle of leadership of anti-China forces on US.

Russia, heavily dependent on its energy resources for strength of its economy, is currently non-committal, though keeping itself relevant by its intervention in Syria and supply of high technology military equipment to warring factions.

South East Asia

The territories of Japan in conjunction with Taiwan and Philippines control direct access of China to the open waters of the Pacific Ocean. Chinese control over Taiwan would enable the former to gain unhindered access to the open waters of the Pacific Ocean. Whereas an independent Taiwan, due to its proximity, poses a significant potential threat to Chinese mainland. China's unilateral use of force in SCS to establish its nine dash claim line has brought it into conflict with almost all major ASEAN bloc countries. Similarly its threat to use force against Japan, Taiwan and South Korea to resolve maritime and sovereignty disputes has pushed them to align against China.

Japan has already speeded up its rearmament and is determined to act as bulwark between China and its unhindered access to the open waters of the Pacific Ocean. Propped up by US support, Taiwan and ASEAN are emboldened to voice open criticism of unilateral Chinese actions.

Most curious is the shift in stance of Australia, from being deemed to be part of the Chinese sphere of influence to becoming its leading critic. China, by far the largest trading partner of Australia, had surreptitiously acquired controlling stakes in multifarious strategic industries and projects in the latter country and was even influencing outcome of their democratic elections.

However, the unravelling of Chinese conspiracy to make Australia subservient to its interest has generated a backlash in Australia. The latter is now taking the international lead for holding China accountable for Covid 19 pandemic. Its new found anti-China stance is also influencing Australia to lend physical support to US maritime deployments in SCS. Retaliatory trade action against Australia by China has only strengthened Australian resolve to pursue its anti-China stance.

US has now deployed its naval armada to inhibit further expansion by China into the disputed maritime regions of South East Asia. It is also leading the efforts to form a broad coalition of Japan, Australia, US and Bharat to counter Chinese expansionist designs.

China is currently content with securing its gains in the SCS and to wait out the US naval task forces.

South Asia and Bharat-Chinese Adversarial Factor

The comprehensive victory by China over India during the 1962 war had resulted in a very long lasting shock and awe impact on the decision makers in Delhi. This resulted in Chinese provocations along the Himalayan borders drawing predictably meek response by India, barring a few personality based aberrations by commanders on the spot.

However, India's transformation into a resurgent Bharat, during the Doklam incident of 2017, severely jolted China. It views a resurgent Bharat as threat to its long term energy security.

The geostrategic location and military potential of **Bharat** makes it a lynchpin in any strategy to choke energy routes of China. Along the Himalayas, the CPEC and CMEC are both within strategic interdiction capability of Bharat. Similarly the maritime energy trade route of China can be choked from the maritime base of Bharat at Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The actions of Bharat to fast pace infrastructure development in Laddakh, enhancement of mountain specific deep interdiction combat power, publicly stated resolve to liberate POJK and Aksai Chin regions, increasingly close strategic alignment with US, and actively participating in development of the US – Japan – Australia – Bharat Quad Alliance are causing deep concern to Beijing.

The decision by China to take coercive action, short of open hostilities, against a resurgent Bharat before it became too strong is predictable in view of China's propensity to threatening or employing force to resolve bilateral disputes affecting its core interests.

The pre-planned ingress by China across the LAC in mid-May 2020 met with unexpected tough response from Bharat. The miscalculation by China is now proving to be highly costly for it to pursue its strategic interest by force. China is also stymied by Bharat showcasing its resolve to pursue the standoff, if needed, into a full spectrum open conflict.

A nuclear armed **Pakistan** has proclaimed geostrategic designs of controlling or at least being able to influence the ruling dispensation in Afghanistan to its West. To its East it aims at annexing J&K through indirect intervention. However it lacks requisite economic strength and combat power to achieve its geostrategic designs. This overreach has seriously debilitated its economy, which is now hostage to foreign loans and commercial agreements biased in favour of China. This has forced Pakistan into a strategic partnership with China which is dictated by the latter.

China, in conjunction with Pakistan, has now posed a threat in being of a two front war on Bharat. Here Pakistan is in a bind. The emerging geopolitical alignments in West Asia and SE Asia are inimical to it engaging in an open conflict with Bharat. The likely international trade and economic sanctions will lead to its fiscal collapse.

China has also succeeded in drawing **Nepal** into its orbit of influence. This will adversely impact on Bharat's combat potential along the Himalayas and should be a matter of serious concern.

It provides a bridgehead to China over the Himalayas. It makes the Siliguri Corridor dangerously vulnerable to interdiction. But the most dangerous fallout for Bharat would be the question mark on continuing effectiveness of its highly trained mountain warfare adept Gorkha troops amounting to almost three divisional strength.

Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives are maintaining a neutral stance.

Changing Alignments in West Asia

The Sunni and Shia Muslim religious divide has emerged as the major factor in shaping regional alliances in West Asia.

Saudi Arabia, as the defacto leader of the Sunni Muslim predominant countries, has formed a broad coalition comprising United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen. It has also influenced Pakistan, dependant on Saudi aid, into providing freelance combat support. This alliance has active material support of USA and tacit support from Israel, a US ally.

Israel, the only non-Muslim country in the region, has the strongest regional military with geostrategic reach encompassing almost the whole of West Asia. Its policy of pro-active intervention to safeguard its geostrategic interests, makes it a powerful influence in West Asia geopolitics. In end June 2020 it has reportedly conducted a covert strike by employing Air Force, Cyber and Special Forces assets, on Iranian nuclear weapon and uranium enrichment facilities.

Iran has emerged as the defacto leader of Shia Muslim dominated countries. Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Kuwait are part of this alliance. Iran also holds considerable sway over Shia Muslims in other Asian countries, enabling it influence well beyond its borders.

Russia is providing indirect military technological support and influence to the Iran led coalition.

US, on the other hand is openly employing coercive force as well as wide ranging economic sanctions against Iran to detract the latter from its indirect strategic intervention against Saudi Arabian alliance.

Strategic engagement with USA is currently the corner stone of Bharat's strategy to effectively withstand coercive policy of China, the primary adversary of both the nations. Hence, India cannot afford to go against US interests of neutralising Iran. Under US pressure India has ceased import of petroleum products from Iran.

This has influenced Iran to undertake its own strategic policy realignments, which are inimical to Indian interests.

China, with an eye for meeting its own energy needs, has seized this opening to enter into a strategic alliance with Iran. The alliance is vital to China to further diversify and secure its overland energy supply lines.

The emerging **geostrategic alignment between China, Pakistan, and Iran** has inherent fault lines. Sunni Muslim predominant Afghanistan gets squeezed between Shia Muslim predominant Afghanistan and Sunni Muslim predominant Pakistan.

The Afghan state does not possess the necessary strategic resilience to withstand any major external intervention. Any collapse of the Afghan state will release destabilising forces in the entire neighbourhood, which in turn will invite extra regional intervention. This will also lead to a conflict of interest between Iran and Pakistan.

As the geostrategic situation heats up, a more far reaching impact will be on continuation of Pakistan freelance support to Saudi Arabian alliance and threat of consequent cut off from economic aid by the latter.

Sunni Muslim predominant **Turkey**, a militarily powerful nation in West Asia, is reasserting its power by actively intervening in Syrian conflict as well as in Libya. To buttress its leadership claims in the region, it has also joined hands with Iran to jointly combat Kurdistan factor and challenge Saudi Arabia leadership of Organisation of Islamic States. Similarly it is making overtures in support of Pakistan to wean it away from Saudi Arabia alliance. **Egypt**, with French support, is emerging from its self-imposed isolation to challenge Turkish intervention in Libya.

But the most serious ethnic-religious fault lines in West Asia today are in Iraq and the adjacent regions to its North, bordering Iran, Turkey, and Syria. 60 % Iraqis are Shia Arabs, predominantly concentrated in South Eastern Iraq bordering Iran, 20 % are Sunni Arabs generally in Western Iraq bordering Syria, and 17 % are Sunni Kurds in North Eastern Iraq bordering Iran and Turkey. Approximately 25 to 30 million Sunni Kurds are majority inhabitants of the border regions of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Iraqi Sunni Muslim separatism and cross border **Kurdish nationalism** are highly potent movements readily available for exploitation.

This is the region which shall next fall prey to geostrategic machinations between the two opposing power blocs to tie down respective opponents.

Central Asia

An overwhelming 99 % population of Sunni Muslims, numbering around 103 million, reside in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Eastern Xinjiang.

Shia Muslim Azeris comprise roughly 85,000 in Kazakhstan, 35,000 in Uzbekistan, 33,000 in Turkmenistan and 18,000 in Kyrgyzstan. 1.5 lakh Ironis, Shia Muslims of Iranian descent, inhabit Uzbekistan. Small numbers of Ismaili Shias inhabit Tajikistan.

85 % Afghans are Sunni Muslims, numbering around 33 million. Around 6 million are Shia Muslims, with another 4 lakhs Hazara Shia Muslims and one and under one lakh Buddhists.

The presence of Shia Muslims of Iranian descent provides Iran with a modicum of influence in Uzbekistan.

Central Asian Republics continue to remain under strong sphere of Russian influence. Any attempts by them that go against Russian interests are likely to invite direct or indirect destabilising Russian intervention.

Russia is also wary of a strong and unchecked China neighbouring its thinly populated but mineral rich Eastern borders, especially as China also voices claim to the Vladivostok region of Russia.

Yet Russia has vested interest in tacitly supporting China. The latter is Russia's biggest trading partner, and geopolitically, deployment of US resources to confront China provides Russia greater room for manoeuvre to secure its national interests in Central and West Asia.

ASIA PORTENDS FOR 2020-2025

“Essaying the excuse of ‘stab in the back’ is the strongest indication of incompetency in geopolitics and military affairs and should logically invite immediate sacking!”

The outcome of two events by November 2020 shall dictate the geostrategic course of Asia for the next five years.

First is the survival or downfall of Xi Jinping as China’s President for Life, General Secretary of Communist Party of China and Chairman of Central Military Commission of China. Survival of Xi Jinping beyond November 2020 will be the clearest indicator of China continuing to march on the confrontationist course set by him.

The other is the victory or defeat of US President Donald Trump in his Presidential bid for the second consecutive term in November 2020. His victory will signal the continuance of US policy to aggressively challenge China in its backyard of SCS. On the other hand the defeat of the incumbent President will entail a lame duck Presidency till January 2021, followed by another 2 to 3 months of settling down period of the new administration.

The latter course of event would likely provide a window of opportunity of four to six months to China to aggressively push forward with its geostrategic designs without encountering a cohesive challenge from the US. In this scenario a strong possibility exists of China launching a short and sharp offensive, in conjunction with Pakistan, against Bharat. Hence late 2020 and early 2021 will be a decisive period. Depending on geopolitical alignments, with the Himalayan passes closed, it will also be an opportune moment for Bharat to launch pre-emptive military operations against Pakistan.

Likely Course of Action by China

The most critical factor for China during this period shall be the **security of its energy routes**, as it lacks military potential to ensure security of its maritime trade.

CPEC and CMEC are still under development and also vulnerable to interdiction by Bharat.

Central Asian Republic countries are highly volatile and not secure for routing energy supplies.

China cannot be solely dependent on Russian energy supplies through Siberia for strategic reasons.

That leaves it with only viable alternative of diversifying energy supplies through Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan to Iran.

Hence it is likely to **avoid prolonged open hostilities**, and concentrate its resources to secure and **diversify overland energy routes to West and Central Asia**.

China has been able to establish an extended defensive parameter in the SCS region to safeguard its vulnerabilities along the Eastern coastline. **It is unlikely to undertake any further provocative operations in SCS region**, so as to ease pressure from US and its allies. Under extreme pressure it may even temporarily offer to enter into negotiations to resolve disputes.

That will enable China to concentrate its resources to its West, on evolving security of its overland energy routes. Towards that end, its **primary focus shall be to neutralise Bharat**. China shall apply concerted pressure on Bharat through all available means at its disposal, including a short and sharp open conflict, if geostrategic opportunity favours this option.

Alliance with Iran and Pakistan is vital to China's energy security. However, because of inherent internal contradictions, China will be forced to divert major attention and resources to maintain effectiveness of this alliance.

Neutralising Pakistan, the weakest link of this alliance, should therefore be the primary focus for the opposing coalition.

Options for US

On the military front US is most likely to exert pressure on China and its allies along four points.

Indo- Pacific Theatre Command shall **continue to conduct Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS)** in SCS and ECS, in conjunction with the nascent Quad Alliance and other friendly powers to exert pressure on China. US deployment will also provide a security umbrella to Taiwan, Japan and ASEAN countries against any further maritime threat from China.

US Central Theatre Command shall adopt **offensive posture against Iran along Makran coast**, as also maintain over watch to ensure open access to merchant shipping in the narrow Strait of Hormuz.

US will **provide strong material and diplomatic support to Bharat** for any military eventualities against China and Pakistan.

US is also likely to **facilitate Sunni Muslim – Kurd coalition** in Northern and Western Iraq to apply further pressure on Iran and also tie down Turkey.

On the economic front US will further expand the scope of **economic and trade sanctions against China, Iran and Pakistan**.

US will also **pursue Chinese human rights abuses** in international forums, and provide **tacit support to efforts by Taiwan and Tibet Government-in-exile** to achieve greater legitimacy as a sovereign entity.

Russia

Continued strife in West Asia is advantageous to Russian interests. It disrupts the West Asian energy supply, provides market for its armament industry, and keeps the religious fundamentalist forces at a safe distance from its borders. Hence, Russia shall **continue with its presence in Syria**.

Russia also looks at Shia Muslim predominant Iran as a bulwark against Sunni Muslim supremacy in West Asia. The latter eventuality would boost fundamentalist forces in Central Asian Republics along its Southern

borders. Hence Russia shall continue to **provide tacit material support to Iran.**

A militarily dominant China is inimical to Russian interest. Despite extensive trade relations with China, Russia is **unlikely to back any Chinese actions against Bharat. Nor is it likely to overtly support China in its confrontation with US,** Japan, Taiwan, and ASEAN in SCS region.

Turkey

Turkey is a militarily powerful state, currently seeking to chart an independent course in the region. Its military intervention in Libya has brought it dangerously close to confrontation with Egypt and France.

Coupled with increasing possibility of a resurrected Kurd separatist movement gaining tract in its South Eastern region, **Turkey will not have adequate resources at hand to effectively intervene in the unfolding West Asia imbroglio.**

Saudi Arabia led Coalition

This coalition will continue to engage in proxy conflict with Iran led Shia alliance in Arabian Peninsula countries and in Iraq.

Israel

A deepening Iran-China strategic relationship will be a cause of most serious concern for Israel. Knowing China's propensity for nuclear proliferation, it could speed up the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran. Hence, Israel shall oppose this alliance with all possible resources at its command. Towards this end, its collaboration with Bharat will further deepen.

Iran

Iran shall deepen **strategic partnership with China and Pakistan.** Flare up of Sunni separatism and Kurd nationalism in Iraq and collapse of

Afghanistan into warlordism will be of serious concern to Iran and will severely restrict its ability to pursue its interests in Syria and Lebanon.

Leveraging its Chabahar port sea access to landlocked Afghanistan, Iran shall attempt to extend its influence in Southern Afghanistan. This shall be a potential flashpoint in its strategic relationship with Pakistan.

Pakistan

The deteriorating economic situation within Pakistan shall be a key factor in its facing internal centrifugal forces. With a weakened economy it lacks resources to combat separatist forces in its South, an unstable Afghanistan to its West, and increased pressure from Bharat to its East. Its economy is already hostage to heavy loans from multilateral international funding agencies. In the altered geopolitical alignments the threat in being of withdrawal of these loans will be the most critical factor in determining its future course of action.

Pakistan's economy will be unable to withstand the fiscal shock of an open conflagration with Bharat and has no choice but to **avoid open hostilities with Bharat**, pressure from China notwithstanding.

Afghanistan

Unless US reverses its decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, the latter will collapse to the dynamics of China-Iran-Pakistan alliance. Mercurial warlords shall again dominate the country.

An unstable Afghanistan traditionally gives rise to fundamentalist forces. It will be a matter of great concern to Pakistan-Iran-China axis and will force their physical intervention. This in itself will invite interference from not only Russia but US and Bharat as well.

Japan

A rearmed Japan, rife with nationalist spirit, shall continue to defy Chinese attempts at intimidation and in conjunction with US will be a threat in being to Chinese maritime trade.

Japan shall also deepen its economic ties with Bharat to enable the latter to pose a greater geostrategic challenge to China from the rear.

Taiwan

Taiwan, with strong US support, shall continue to chart a geostrategic course which will be inimical to Chinese interests.

ASEAN

Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and Brunei are ASEAN member countries directly impacted by Chinese unilateral action in claiming and enforcing its control over disputed maritime areas of SCS. Bolstered by US naval presence, the ASEAN grouping has voiced its concern over unilateral Chinese actions in the dispute.

This has provided US diplomatic support for its maritime deployment in SCS, as also assured logistics support bases in the region in Philippines and Vietnam.

Australia

After unearthing the malicious undercover effort of China to undermine its sovereignty, containing Chinese expansionist designs and belligerence shall be the cornerstone of Australian diplomacy. It shall seek stronger alignment with US, Japan and Bharat to thwart China.

NATO

The deepening of the economic crisis in European Union and reduction in US Armed Forces deployment from Europe restricts the scope of NATO engaging in major intervention in Asia-Pacific region.

Limited military support from France and UK shall however be available to US in West Asia and SE Asia region.

WAY FORWARD FOR BHARAT

“The best way out for Bharat to avoid a war with China is to actively prepare to fight the war. It will also be cheaper in the long run.”

General

The rivalry between Bharat and China shall be long drawn out and will be played out across full spectrum of conflict scenarios. Bharat has faltered in early discerning of intent of China. There is no other way to explain the military predicament it faces of a two front war from China and Pakistan.

Bharat shall now have to develop a two pronged strategy to safeguard its interests. The first shall be to focus on urgent actions to withstand the joint threat in the immediate future. Second shall be the strategy for long term impact.

Short Term

The best option for Bharat is to proactively **secure a strong international alliance** in its support, to deter any open conflict by its opponents.

Thereafter, at an opportune moment, launch **swift pre-emptive naval and air strikes against Pakistan**, the weaker opponent, to degrade its combat potential as also the surface infrastructure critical to CPEC and commercial and strategic Chinese assets in POJK.

This will provide Bharat breathing space to withstand pressure from China. Longer the wait, greater shall be the vulnerability.

Degrading Pakistan combat potential shall also adversely impact its direct intervention potential in Afghanistan.

Bharat will have to cater for a **prolonged dissuasive ground deployment along the Northern borders**. To keep China unbalanced, the best course would be to mimic its incremental encroachment policy.

Naval deployments shall have to be effected such that it's a threat in being to choke Malacca Straits to Chinese merchant shipping. This will impose added caution on China for any attempts to pose an active ground threat along the Himalayas.

Bharat just cannot afford to let China call the shots in **Nepal and needs to take proactive steps to resolve the situation in its favour**. A strife torn Nepal is preferable to a Nepal acting at behest of China. The situation has to be resolved with finesse and ruthlessness.

Priority shall have to be allotted to force multipliers, electronic and cyberspace warfare assets for urgent replenishment along with war fighting equipment, munitions and supplies.

Long Term

Integrity and independence of a **friendly Afghanistan has to be ensured through pursuit of active geostrategic alliances**. This will divert valuable resources of China and its allies and shall assist Bharat to manage an overall favourable geostrategic environment.

An **independent Tibet** as a buffer between Bharat and China is in the best interest to maintain long term peace and tranquillity across the Himalayas. This should be the long term geopolitical focus for Bharat.

Well laid out diplomatic strategy needs to be executed to further own geopolitical interests with neighbouring countries.

Concerted drive by counterintelligence agencies needs to be orchestrated to **uncover and weed out Chinese fifth columnists** within the country. Lessons from Australian and Italian experience should be incorporated into own counter efforts.

The proposed reorganisation of Theatre Commands needs to be processed on priority. **Northern Theatre Command should extend from Pir Panjal in J&K to border with Myanmar**, so as to effectively counter Chinese Western Theatre Command operations in POJK and Shaksgam valley.

The **Mountain Strike Corps** in its present organisation is unwieldy to be employed in the assigned role in the mountains. It needs to be **downsized into multiple, highly versatile, and mountain mobile Battle Groups**.

Vertical intervention, Special Forces, and long range precision targeting capabilities need to be continuously strengthened.

Cyberspace being an invisible spectrum of war shall be highly vulnerable even during no war no peace scenario. There is definite requirement to fast track Cyberspace warfare capabilities.

National Security Council should be reorganised to integrate invisible spectrum warfare expertise.

The **Intelligence** acquisition, evaluation and dissemination setup has not been able to establish its efficacy, despite numerous recommendations for its streamlining. The Defence Intelligence Agency needs to be tasked and equipped to meet its own external intelligence inputs.

Peace time **border management**, especially along Northern borders, requires to be streamlined. All deployments of PMF/CAPF need to be brought under operation control of Theatre Commands.

Make in Bharat policy for defence equipment has to be given priority. The only cost effective way to combat prolonged Chinese belligerence is through self-sufficiency in defence equipment.