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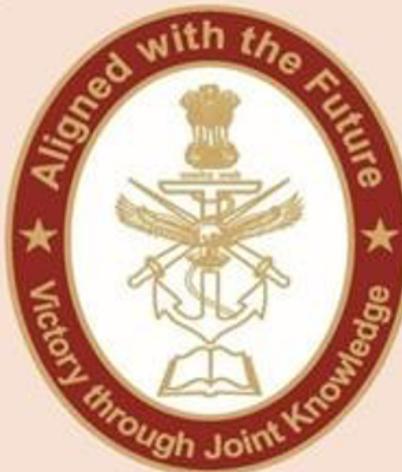
RUSSIA

# UNSETTLED BORDERS: LESSONS FOR INDIA FROM RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

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CHINA

INDIA



## CENJOWS

### UNSETTLED BORDERS: LESSONS FOR INDIA FROM RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR



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#### Abstract

A major lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war for India is that territorial disputes between two nations are not settled because of their complexities but, intent of the side which is in a stronger position to impose its will when it suits it the best. After nearly four years of fighting, it is more than evident that Russia with its sheer size, military and resources, has more or less achieved its military objectives. It definitely is in a position to negotiate peace from a position of advantage. India shares 15,106 Kms of its land borders with seven countries, out of which approximately 3,488 km is along China and 3,320 Kms is with Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> A quick analysis of our war-waging capabilities in light of the Russia-Ukraine experience with our two major adversaries, with whom we share large tracts of land borders, will make us comprehend the necessity to reset our future engagements with China, in particular. China's growing influence in the world has raised hackles not only in the region but in the entire Western hemisphere. Its rapid military modernisation, use of economic hegemony, coupled with the employment of coercive diplomacy, has catapulted it into being

recognised as a world power. In an ever-changing world order where the US post inauguration of President Trump's second tenure has openly weaponised tariffs, challenged unfavourable regimes through use of asymmetrical force and coaxed Ukraine to negotiate with Russia, however, it has been exceptionally cautious while dealing with China. The fact that China enjoys a trade surplus of nearly one trillion US dollars, shares good relations with Russia and almost dominates the Eastern hemisphere, has compelled the West to negotiate rather confront China. The West, however, has not displayed a similar sensitivity towards India, even though, it sees India well positioned to counter China. The same was experienced during the border standoff between India and China in May-June of 2020, where the West led by the US hardly did anything to check China's belligerent actions. Therefore, it will be in India's strategic interest to embrace smart diplomacy by resetting its ties with China, resolve border disputes, foster collaborative economic arrangements till it is in a position to match or outgrow China militarily and economically.

**Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine War, US, NATO, India, Pakistan, China, South China Sea, PLA, Economy, GDP, Land borders, Indian Armed Forces, Re-alignment.

## **Introduction**

Who could have imagined that a nuclear power like Russia could be dragged into a seemingly unending war with its erstwhile constituent and now an adversary with no matching military or economic prowess. Two recent wars between Russia and Ukraine, as also Israel's unrestricted war with its neighbours, including Iran, have kept strategic planners preoccupied with searching for relevant Military lessons for their respective nations. The Russian-Ukrainian war has thrown up numerous lessons for military thinkers and strategic planners, particularly in India. The contours of the conflict, though still evolving, have many semblances to the complex boundary disputes India has with its neighbours along the Northern and Western borders. While the Western media has been in awe of the Ukrainian Armed Forces' resilience, adaptability and innovative capabilities, very little has been talked about the Russian grand strategy and aims. After nearly four years of war, it is fairly evident that the Russians are in no rush to either terminate the conflict or to concede any concessions to the NATO allied nations. Ironically, despite being the most sanctioned nation in the

world, the Russian economy grew by 4.1% in 2024 surpassing all G7 nations with the Ruble trading nearly at the same value vis-à-vis the USD as it was before the commencement of the conflict in 2022.<sup>2</sup> Ukraine has also been a beneficiary of unconstrained military hardware supply and financial support made available to it by NATO and other anti-Russian bloc nations, however, it has not deterred Russia to pursue its military objectives. The alacrity demonstrated by Trump administration to find an amicable solution to the conflict has further exposed the vulnerabilities of NATO and the limited leverages they had over Russia to concede to their demands. The West perhaps appreciates very well that Russia not only has a military edge but also enjoys a disproportionate geographical advantage to shape the ongoing conflict with Ukraine. Moreover, it has also demonstrated greater war-waging stamina than anticipated on account of the diverse natural resources it holds, a bigger economy and committed support it continues to garner from its allies, thereby adequately absorbing the economic cost of war and sanctions. Russia shares a long land and sea border with Ukraine, which has nearly 17.3% population of Russian ethnicity living along the southeastern borders, thereby making it easy for it to integrate captured territory with the Russian Federation.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in order to support Ukraine, NATO nations will need to deploy their resources on ground in Ukraine or continue supporting Ukraine as hitherto fore which, till now, has failed to deter Russia. This reality, perhaps is well understood both by Russia and NATO alike.

On the other hand, Israel's ongoing conflict with Hamas, Lebanon, Syria in its immediate neighbourhood and with Iran approximately 1600 km to its East is very different in nature. Since its inception, Israel has fought several wars with its neighbours; however, it is now confronted with fighting a protracted existential war against Islamic terror groups indirectly supported by some Arab nations. Given the commanding economic and military supremacy as also all-weather support, it receives from the US, Arab countries have refrained from supporting either Iran, Syria or the Islamic terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas. While the current conflict does not involve a boundary or territorial dispute, however, with the sole objective to consolidate its own security, Israel has been seizing territory for use as a buffer. Since it has resolved its land border disputes with all its neighbours barring Lebanon and Syria, it does not envisage any real land-based threat. Israel's proactive strategy in securing itself against state-sponsored terror by employing technology-enabled

platforms for surveillance, executing intelligence-based precision operations, does hold lessons for India to effectively counter proxy war supported by Pakistan.

A comprehensive analysis of the Russia-Ukraine war will assist us in defining how we should engage with our adversaries along the Northern and Western borders, where we share large tracts of disputed land borders. An imperturbable assessment of the ongoing wars makes it evident that where two nations share large borders, have disproportionate resources, and go to war, the duration and outcome will invariably favour the nation having superiority in military, economy and resources. Speaking in an interview, on 10 December 2025, President Donald J Trump, when prompted to comment on the outcome of the ongoing war, stated that Russia was much bigger and stronger than Ukraine and “at some point size will win”. Hence, in the context of Russia-Ukraine, whatever may be the negotiated outcome, the end state will favour Russia. This perhaps is one of the most important lessons of the Russia-Ukraine war for two neighbouring nations sharing large geographical borders, which has a direct bearing on us.

### **Impact of Asymmetrical Capabilities**

Closer home, Indian think tanks, strategic planners and military leaders have been closely following the Russia-Ukraine war since 2022 to learn relevant lessons from the ongoing war so as to suitably address strategic and equipment gaps in our own military capabilities. However, what has largely remained enshrouded from the minds of military leadership and strategic discussions is the glaring resemblance a future conflict between India and China is likely to have to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. India shares 15,106 Kms of its land borders with seven countries, out of which approximately 3,488 km is along China and 3,320 Kms is with Pakistan. A quick analysis of our war-waging capabilities in light of the Russia-Ukraine experience with our two major adversaries, with whom we share large tracts of land borders, will make us apprehend the necessity to recalibrate our future engagements with China, in particular. Interestingly, China has settled its land border disputes with 12 of the 14 neighbours it shares land borders with, India and Bhutan being the only exceptions. Geographically, China is nearly three times the size of India, with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) twice the size of India. Both the nations have a similar size of

population, with India having an edge both in population size and youthful profile. While India has a larger Male Recruitable Population (MRP), China not only has a larger standing Army but has a greater reserve of military trained population in the form of reservists, since it follows conscription as a state policy, thereby nullifying the population dividend India enjoys purely from a military point of view. China today has a defence budget nearly three times that of India and is at least two decades ahead in the modernisation of its defence forces vis-a-vis India. The Chinese GDP is nearly six times that of India, it holds the biggest foreign exchange reserve in the world of USD 3.4 trillion, which affords it deeper pockets and stamina to sustain any future war with India. In the last one decade alone, it has committed an average USD 210 billion on military modernisation.<sup>4</sup> China is also rich in all kinds of resources, including rare earth minerals and cutting-edge niche technologies. Unlike India, where we are the second largest importer of military hardware, China, from being an importer of military hardware, has become the fourth largest exporter of equipment to over 40 countries. The enormity of capability gap between the two neighbours can be gauged by the fact that China manufactures over 240 combat aircrafts annually, whereas we struggle to manufacture 24 pieces a year, with engines imported from the US.<sup>5</sup> China has taken a huge leap in space as well, with over 1000 satellites in orbit against 136 of India and a fully operational Chinese Space Station (CSS), Tiangong. To prove its economic and industrial credentials, it successfully hosted the Olympics in 2008 while we are preparing to bid in 2036, a gap of nearly three decades. It is therefore necessary that a balance analysis of our war-waging capability with China is factored in our discourses while deciding the shape of future engagements with China, because, unlike Ukraine, in a future India-China conflict, any support from a third country or a grouping of nations is unlikely to fructify.

Pakistan, on the other hand, with whom we share a significant portion of land borders, will continue to remain an irritant and collaborate with forces antagonistic to India. Considering its poor economy, technological threshold, military capability and resources, it is unlikely to pose any major threat to India's land borders. While it relies on China significantly for financial and military support, Pakistan, however, does not share proximity to China like us either geographically or culturally. Rather, China has been exceptionally watchful of the spread of Islam in its own provinces adjoining Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where Hui and Uighurs have been

embracing Islamic religious practices in a manner to assert an independent identity from the Han Chinese majority. The influence of the ultraconservative Salafi strand of Islam in its North Western provinces forced it to adopt the policy of starting the infamous re-education camps. It is therefore in India's interest to cooperate as also collaborate closely with China not only to secure our Northern borders but for greater prosperity, tranquillity and economic growth of the region. Our future engagements with China should aim at weaning it away from Pakistan to further isolate it and deprive it of the strategic backing it presently enjoys from China. While the West, led by the US, will do everything to deter normalisation of relations between the two Asian giants, however, for the betterment of respective populations and economies, the two nations need to identify and surmount such impediments. It is difficult to fathom the potential of two neighbouring nations having nearly 40 per cent of the world's population, with a combined land mass only lesser to Russia and with a collective GDP of nearly US 23.5 trillion Dollars, well ahead of the EU and only second to the US.

### **Historical Linkages and Disputes**

India and China are old civilisational nations with deep-rooted cultures and more similarities than disparities. While the majority of the Chinese population is atheist, nearly 17% of its population follows Buddhism, a religion that originated in India. A large chunk of India's population in the North East and the two landlocked countries between India and China share startling cultural and religious similarities with the population in the immediate vicinity of their borders in the Tibet autonomous region. Historically, there are no records of invaders attacking India from the Northern borders; rather, the two nations shared good trading ties.

Fa Hien is known to have travelled to India in the late 4th and early 5th centuries to collect Buddhist scriptures, who was followed by Hiuen Tsang, who travelled in the 7th century during the reign of King Harsha Vardhan to study Buddhism and collect texts. He spent 15 years travelling through India and translating many Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Mandarin. Because of Buddhist influence, the region remained mostly peaceful in comparison to areas adjoining India's Western borders, which was invaded several times, and acted as a corridor through which Islam got introduced to

the Indian subcontinent. It baffles strategic sense as to how China, over the years, has earned the distinction of being India's biggest adversary despite the land borders between India and China remaining largely peaceful since both nations gained Independence in 1947 and 1949, respectively. Barring the 1962 war and differing positions on disputed land borders, both nations have managed to maintain peace and tranquillity on the borders. Despite two major recent border escalations in the areas of Doklam in 2018 and Eastern Ladakh in 2020, the situation along the land border can still be considered relatively peaceful vis-à-vis Pakistan, where both the militaries are deployed facing each other in an exceptionally hostile environment. Besides, India has fought three major and two limited wars with Pakistan, engaged in several border skirmishes and has been fighting Pakistan sponsored proxy war since the early 1980s. Unlike Pakistan, where the Indian Army is physically holding the ground all around the year, there is no such deployment along the Chinese borders in that magnitude. Perhaps, between Pakistan and China, the latter is more trustworthy as an enemy than Pakistan, despite the overwhelming superiority it enjoys over us. Since 1962 war, China has conscientiously abstained from adopting a hostile posture on the borders along India, barring a few skirmishes, which too were also devoid of the use of major weapon systems. The reasons for such skirmishes could be attributed to actions of overzealous tactical field commanders rather than a sanctioned state policy from both sides. It needs deeper analysis as to why a military power like China, in 2020 cautiously desisted from using conventional weapons against Indian soldiers and resorted to the use of improvised non-lethal systems (used for crowd control) despite suffering fatalities during Operation SNOW LEOPARD. While the land border disputes between the two nations are real and have been under deliberations since 1957, no serious attempt to resolve the same, barring few, have been made largely because it serves the Chinese strategy of anchoring India and war avoidance until it becomes a superpower. A cursory look at the border dispute between India and China throw up interesting inferences to appreciate the real gravity of existing disputes. From an Indian perspective, the 3,488 Kms of the Indo-China border is disputed primarily in Eastern Ladakh region, in a small portion of Central Sector (Uttarakhand) and the State of Arunachal Pradesh.

- **Eastern Ladakh.** There are several disputed areas between the Karakoram Pass and Gya Peak in this region based on perceptions of boundary. The entire

border lies in a High-Altitude Area and with extreme temperatures. On both sides of the border within the disputed claim lines, the presence of population is marginal. While PLA over the years continued with its strategy to consolidate its position and occupy areas up to the line claimed by them through repeated attempts of transgressions, post 2020 such incidents were met with stiff resistance from the Indian side leading to intermittent border standoffs. Currently, barring few, in most of the areas, there is a better understanding of the claim lines between both the sides setting conditions for a negotiated settlement wherein, mutually accepted barter may be possible.

- **Central Sector.** The only major area of dispute in this region is of Barahoti grazing ground which has no inhabitation and most of the villages North of Malari in this region migrate to the Southern areas of Uttarakhand in the winters.
- **Arunachal Pradesh.** In the 1962 war, China occupied certain areas in various Sectors of Arunachal Pradesh, however, the PLA withdrew unilaterally from most of the captured territory. Perhaps, then, China did not want to bite more than it could chew as it would have stretched its resources beyond manageable limits and entailed dealing with a sizeable population in captured areas, while it simultaneously undertook forced demographic inversion in Tibet. The border situation in the state has remained manageable despite China claiming most of the Arunachal Pradesh as its territory, a claim, China has been reluctant to back up with visible decisive actions on the ground barring occasional diplomatic overtures to keep the dispute alive.

### **China's Expansionism and India**

It is natural for two large nations to compete with each other, particularly if both are developing economies with large population and resource base. While India and China shared similar growth trajectory since independence, starting mid-80s, China not only increased the growth gap but invested heavily in modernisation of PLA and consolidated its position as an industrial powerhouse. India's trade with China today stands at whopping **USD 128 billion** and has a deficit of **99.1 billion** US dollars which curiously remains cloistered during skirmishes on the borders.<sup>6</sup> Other than the border

issues, India's position on Tibet, Taiwan and South China Sea, are seen as propagating the West generated narrative is often adversely commented upon by China. Whilst India takes pride in pursuing an independent foreign policy, our existing approach towards all the three contentious China-centric issues needs to be articulated in a manner that it is not aligned to any group or block agenda and serves our larger national interest. There is limited scope of deterring China in pursuing its national interests in areas beyond our geographies for the following reasons:

- **Tibet.** Tibet as an independent nation has limited recognition in the comity of nations as China over the decade's consequent to its annexation has very successfully integrated the region and obliterated the Tibetan identity through demographic inversion. China's aggressive involvement in Tibet leading to its occupation by PLA and India's support to Dalai Lama consequent to his exile coupled with undertaking of some military activities in the run up to 1962 were probably the reason for the war. Today, the West and the world at large seem to have forgotten Tibet as an independent nation. Even the Tibetan Government in exile at Dharamsala has started to adopt a reconciliatory approach, replacing the idea of independence with recognition of religious ethnicity and adequate representation within China. The present generation of Tibetan refugee population living in India also seem to lack any ambition to free Tibet from the Chinese occupation.
- **Taiwan.** Located approximately 4300 kms to the East of India, the island nation has long remained a major irritant for China in its stated 'One China' policy. While India has been aligned to the popular Western-peddled idea of supporting Taiwan's aspiration to remain independent till it voluntarily joins China, but there is very little India can do to prevent China from integrating Taiwan into its mainland. The US too seem to have reconciled to the fact that in long term, it independently or through a coalition of nations may not be able to prevent the eventual integration of Taiwan with China considering the rising economic and military clout of China. Therefore, there is a need to undertake a fresh reappraisal of our stated policy towards Taiwan which is more aligned to our national interests.

- **South China Sea (SCS).** Freedom to use Sea Lanes of Communications remains fundamental to free trade and navigation. SCS remains critical to India as a good volume of our trade passes through SCS mostly with China, Japan and South Korea. It is therefore essential that we do everything to keep the SCS free from Chinese interference. While it is important that we invest in maritime resources to overcome any future impediments concurrently, we must also explore alternate means including negotiations with China to secure freedom in SCS as majority of our trade with China also uses SCS. While SCS will always be critical to India, however, it is also a problem for the world as nearly five trillion-dollar worth of global trade uses the SCS corridor annually. Therefore, India should carefully analyse its own requirements and options to engage with China concurrently.

## Way Ahead

A dispassionate analysis of various areas of divergence between India and China shows that there are reasonable grounds for India to re-calibrate its policy on engagement with China. While the West, led by the US, has always had a hot-and-cold relationship with India, it is only after President Trump's disruptive policies of sparing none of the traditional US allies, India today finds itself at crossroads without dependable allies. Russia, our traditional ally itself has been facing economic sanctions and isolation whereas, closest to us on our Northern borders conjoined by geography lies China, the new rising power, the world including the West is adjusting to. Historically, also the US engagements with India have had elements of unpredictability wherein, it employed smart diplomacy to use India to serve its own national interests, be it 1971, 1999 Op VIJAY or more recently during Op SINDOOR, where its conduct was far from neutral. Despite, India enjoying the status of a "Major Defense Partner" and "Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1", which is a designation similar to that of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies, concurrently, it imposed a humbling 50% trade tariff on India for importing Russian oil, whilst leaving out many other countries including China which continue to import Russian oil and other resources.<sup>7</sup> The US has also been unreliable in providing niche military equipment and transfer of technologies to India for making it self-sufficient. Therefore,

in pursuit of long term economic and security interests, it is inexorable to align with reliable allies- group of nations which serve our long-term national interests the best. Hon'able PM Shri Narendra Modi has set the target of year 2047 to transform India into a developed from being a developing nation. For India to achieve its vision, it would need secure borders, a resilient economy, matching military capability and a stable internal situation. In today's global world with intertwined interests, it is difficult to precisely predict the trajectory of India's future, keeping the impact of dynamic re-alignment of world order, disruptive policies, restrictive trade barriers, selective access to critical technologies, and unsolicited sanctions in mind. Accordingly, it is in our interest to re-evaluate our existing engagements with the Western world, including Russia, and exploit the geographical proximity with China, to chart our future growth. A re-alignment will provide assured stability along the borders, access to Chinese economy, finances, technology and, above all, effectively checkmate Pakistan's unpredictable conduct along our Western borders. While India will be seen to be piggybacking on China's economic and military might, for China it will be the shortest path to fulfil its aspiration of being recognised as a superpower, collaborating with its neighbour, which itself is on a promising economic and Military growth trajectory thereby, virtually negating any land-based threat to its sovereignty. The idea of future re-alignment with China will also be in consonance with shared geography, culture, resources and national interests of both the nations whose time has come as the two civilisational nations share more similarities than disparities.

The proposition, though strategically rewarding and best in our national interest, will be difficult to implement considering historical legacy issues, existing trust deficit between the two nations and deep rooted Western leaning eco system within India. The idea of reconciliation will face strong headwinds from the entrenched pro-West, policy makers in India and in the West. It is not the question of when, as it is an obvious inevitable, but how the relations between two Asian giants will get normalised. To achieve strategic realignment with China both the nations will have to thrash out long outstanding differences and carry out serious time-bound negotiations independent of any external influence. The border disputes being at the core of differences between the two nations, if resolved, will set the course for achieving better understanding on other issues and help develop mutual trust. The way ahead may involve resolution of following issues:

- **Border Disputes.** The importance of any land border dispute between two nations involves issues related to strategic important areas and resources including population. Our major dispute along the borders with China exists in the area of Aksai Chin in Eastern Ladakh where China has certain claim lines. Most of these areas adjoining the Chinese claim lines in Eastern Ladakh need to be seen holistically for their political and military importance. Some areas may be considered for barter duly factoring own position on ground. In exchange, India should cogently seek pragmatic portions of Aksai Chin, resolution of Barahoti in the Central sector and recognition of the State of Arunachal Pradesh as part of union of India. Incidentally, Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai during his visit to India in 1960 to discuss the border issue had proposed a "package deal" to resolve the longstanding border dispute. This deal suggested that China would recognise India's control over Arunachal Pradesh, implicitly acknowledging India's jurisdiction up to the McMahon Line in exchange for India's acceptance of Chinese control over the contested region of Aksai Chin. The existing gap in military capabilities, infrastructure and prevalent terrain conditions, rules out the option of reclaiming the lost territory in Aksai Chin through war. The best is to put the ghost of 1962 behind us and settle lingering border disputes to achieve lasting peace between the two military powers. This could be achieved through delineation of Line of actual Control on ground followed by negotiated settlement of borders.
- **Foreign Policy.** There is no harm for India to continue its stand on 'One China'. In times to come the impending integration is likely to be a reality as has been the case with Tibet. US and most of the Western bloc nations presently opposing it realise the eroding military edge and capacity to prevent China from achieving the same. India should also abstain from opposing China just to please West and debunk anti-China coalitions formed for reasons which do not serve our geographical and economic interests. It will also be in the interest of both the nations to open more borders crossings for the purpose of cultural, religious, educational, tourism and trade.

- **Economic Cooperation.** Together, India and China form the biggest markets in the World. While China's trade with India is approximately worth 129 billion US dollar and growing, our exports to China are negligible.<sup>8</sup> China today enjoys a trade surplus with almost all nations including EU aggregating to over US one trillion dollars with exports of nearly 3.4 trillion US dollars. Opening of economy to China with better land-based connectivity will attract not only Chinese investments, including niche cutting-edge technology and expertise but will assist in enhancing Indian manufacturing capacities coupled with increased exports to the world. China will not only get access to cheap labour, ports and market but will diversify its access to the world through India. As a nation we need to take advantage of the size, scale and speed of Chinese manufacturing to consolidate our capacities. This will further generate employment, enhance skill amongst the population and accelerate growth. It also needs to be acknowledged that despite, the border stalemate, the Chinese imports have only increased which sufficiently establishes the gap between our strategic aspirations and economic needs. We need to be realistic.
- **Strategic Alignment.** Positive resolution of divergent issues with China will to a great extent neutralise any viable threat from Pakistan in conventional domain and complete its isolation. While the West will try to use Pakistan as a pawn to disrupt our alignment with China, militarily there is very little they will be able to achieve, given the enormity of economic and military muscle the strategic alignment between India and China will exert. The alignment will also insulate India from the recurring threats of disruptions initiated on the behest of West through tariff, sanctions and trade restrictions. Besides, efforts being made to consolidate alliances to contain the growing influence of China and ensure dominance of the West in Global affairs can effectively be leveraged through transactional means to gain strategic advantages. It will further assist both the nations to achieve energy security and ensure secure transit through Gulf, Central Asia, Africa and Russia.

## Conclusion

So how did China do it? It's a question that we need to seriously introspect considering both India and China gained independence around the same time with near similar economies. Post 1980, China, not only changed its economic growth trajectory but simultaneously commenced modernisation of PLA, thereby, widening the military capability gap with all its neighbours including India. Besides being a communist nation with questionable human rights record, as also suspected for its intent by the West, it has fared exceptionally well to be recognised as an important power centre. Amongst other measures as a first step China opened its economy, allowed foreign investment by providing cheap labour, favourable business environment and nurtured alliances with US and Russia simultaneously. Second, it negotiated peace with all its neighbours and settled most of the border disputes barring India, thereby negating threat along its borders. Third, it invested heavily into nurturing intelligentsia within the country, through state sponsorship in Western establishments of repute directly or through the proxies of flourishing 'China Towns' globally, with an aim to "beg, borrow or steal" niche technologies. Fourth, by establishing big industrial complexes for producing high-end technological products in collaboration with developed economies, it blatantly carried out reverse engineering to manufacture them locally. Fifth, it embarked upon fostering strategic relationship with all developed economies and nations of interest without displaying any competitive or disruptive intent.

Once confident of its economic and military might by the end of 2020, it has become more assertive and has commenced employing manipulative diplomacy through the use of its economic clout to further its national interests. China is the new player in the comity of nations which is asserting itself in shaping the new world order and has started to use coercion of trade, finances and military effectively. In light of large capability gap our current China-centric threat assessment need to be reviewed. The fixation to militarily compete and counter China in the present may not be in our best interest until we are able to narrow down the existing military, technological, resource and economic gap. The idea of realignment may sound like a naysayer's extrapolation, but rhetorics aside, India needs time and capability to confront China to strongly negotiate a favourable border dispute resolution, which is a pre-condition for lasting peace. While at tactical level it may be possible to push back PLA in a

localised engagement, however, in an expanded multi-domain war, it may be exceptionally challenging to sustain a long war against China. Therefore, a major lesson from Russia-Ukraine war for us is that territorial disputes between two nations are not settled because of their complexities but, intent of the side which is in a stronger position to impose its will, unfortunately for Ukraine, all the cards are stacked in favour of Russia. Thus, it is important for strategic planners and decision makers to rationally explore all options to settle the border disputes with China at the earliest taking cue from Russia's long war with Ukraine over disputed territory. Hence, there is a need to recalibrate our approach and use China to bridge the capability gap to enable ourselves by the year 2047 to do to China what it is doing to the US-led Western order today, provided such a need arises in future. We surely need to deliberate and act before it is too late.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The paper is the author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS, the Defence forces, or the Government of India. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished, and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

## ENDNOTES

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