



INDIA AND CHINA : THE WAY FORWARD

Jayadeva Ranade

Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi

This decade is witnessing major geopolitical changes as the US, the sole global superpower, readjusts policies to ensure that its pre-eminent status remains unchallenged and its strategic interests world-wide are not threatened. The steady rise of regional powers and especially China, which has acquired the ability to challenge the US' hitherto largely unrestrained exercise of power, has compelled Washington to undertake a reappraisal of US strategic policies. Economic factors, including the perceived decline of US economic strength, have been a significant factor. Perceived, because the current economic decline is something the US will in course of time come out of. It has the advantages of vast underestimated economic assets worldwide, sizeable untapped—or unexploited—natural resources and an unmatched lead in very advanced scientific and military technologies and capabilities. A major determinant for virtually all countries, including India, in shaping their strategic and foreign policies will be the nature of the US-China relationship that finally emerges.

There can be no doubt that China's growth has so far been steady and has the approval of the vast majority of Chinese people. China's rapid economic rise and military modernization have enabled it to command increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and international fora. While many countries in the Asia-Pacific are dependent on China's huge economy for their exports and their physical proximity to China inhibits a definitive independent stance, even European governments, weakened by their domestic economic condition, have capitulated to Beijing on matters like Human Rights, IPR and Tibet—all issues which they traditionally used to castigate Beijing.

The steady rise of regional powers and especially China, which has acquired the ability to challenge the US' hitherto largely unrestrained exercise of power, has compelled Washington to undertake a reappraisal of US strategic policies.

China today is a very self-confident nation and this self-confidence is translating into growing assertiveness. The mix of assertiveness combined with a strong dose of nationalism, or nationalist jingoism, is now part of China's strategic calculus and is visible in China's foreign policy initiatives with the US, Europe and in the region as also in its uncompromising stance on issues affecting its "core national interests" and sovereignty. Pronouncements on the latter by Chinese military academics and serving and retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) officers indicate the views of the CCP leadership and are not, as suggested by some analysts, off-the-cuff remarks by a pushy PLA. This is borne out by the fact that such remarks have often

been published in the official Chinese media and none of those who made such strong remarks have been contradicted or penalized. In fact, many have been promoted. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s grip on the PLA has also, in recent years, been getting increasingly firm.

This self-confidence is similarly reflected in the content of the Chinese media and comments in the millions of micro-blogs posted daily. The mushrooming of Chinese government-sponsored Confucius Centres worldwide and infusion of billions of dollars to revamp and expand outreach of the official Chinese print (the People's Daily is set to launch a US edition) and visual media is reflective of this. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC)'s Propaganda Department has concurrently tightened control on all content in the Chinese media and websites and these are strictly monitored and censored. It is, of course, adapting to changing situations and has reduced the number of topics that are off-limits to the official media.

India-China relations specifically need to be viewed in this backdrop. The Chinese leadership's view of India is significant. While discussing India in interactions with foreign strategists and diplomats, Chinese officials and members of Chinese government-controlled think-tanks list three main items as issues of concern. These are, in the Chinese-listed order of priority: the Dalai Lama and Tibet issue; the border dispute; and India's geopolitical ambitions. These can be classified as tactical and short-term, medium-to-long term and strategic. For example, during the US-China Strategic Dialogue in Washington a few months ago, when the US proposed a US-China-India trilateral, China vehemently rejected the idea and questioned how the US could place India anywhere near on par with China when the two were not at all comparable. Noteworthy also is the omission by China of vital natural resource issues like water and food, which will become serious factors that bedevil the relationship in the next ten to fifteen years.

For India, dealing with China will be a major challenge through this decade. China's growing economic strength, military might and attitude towards India, are factors that India will have to contend with. Catching up with China's economy—far from overtaking it as various economists and academics have suggested—is out of the question, unless the CCP stumbles and its grip over the administrative apparatus and society is weakened. Going by the internal political developments of the past some months this might not be such an outlandish idea. Many observers would be aware of the new high in political infighting in the CCP, with Beijing being awash with rumours on the 14th March night that Bo Xilai has been removed as Party Secretary of Chongqing. This comes within a day of Wen Jiabao saying at a press conference on 14th March that the Chongqing leadership should learn lessons from the Wang Lijun incident. However, the CCP is unlikely to get too debilitated and will last for the next five years and probably through the decade.

Given China's attitude towards India, the unresolved border issue and other foreseeable areas of competition, it is evident that India will need to fashion a policy which allows it to resolutely withstand persistently increasing Chinese pressure while simultaneously seeking areas of cooperation to

China today is a very self-confident nation and this self-confidence is translating into growing assertiveness. The mix of assertiveness combined with a strong dose of nationalism, or nationalist jingoism, is now part of China's strategic calculus.

defuse tensions. It will need to deftly balance safeguarding of national interests with the shortfalls in capabilities. Policies will require to be designed to meet short, as well as long term, interests and predicated on India's 'going it alone' as the US, and any other country will, in event of conflagration, only be a

distant witness.

It is important for India not to forget, or dismiss as an aberration: the close Sino-Pak relations; China-brokered missile-for-technology deal between Pakistan and North Korea; China's close support to Pakistan including on the Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Agreement; their joint effort to get NSG to veto the deal; ignoring of the Indian Prime Minister's phone call; opposition to India's entry to the UNSC as a regular Permanent member; steady upgrading of the border dispute and claims in Arunachal Pradesh and J&K into an international dispute in keeping with the principles of 'Sanzhong Zhanfa' or 'Three Warfares'; ignoring Indian concerns regarding water (Brahmaputra); etc. This attitude is buttressed by the warnings to India by Chinese academics and strategists that China may need to "teach it a lesson". Similarly, any thinking that India-China relations will improve in case India is able to broker a thaw between the Dalai Lama and Beijing is unreal. The initiatives taken by Beijing confirm that it has decided to wait the Dalai Lama out. Realistically, the current unease in relations is unlikely to dissipate at least in this decade.

India, however, has options that will consolidate its position without the adoption of a politics of confrontation. These will need to be implemented within the next five odd years. A few are mentioned.

The first step should be to consolidate our legitimate sovereignty over the states which abut the borders, thereby simultaneously calling into question China's claims. This can easily be done by aggressively abolishing the requirement of 'inner line' permits in the border areas of the Himalayan belt and the north-east and encouraging tourism by facilitating hotels, visas and connectivity. In this age of Google Maps the requirement of 'inner line' permits is archaic. Connectivity in the region is currently very poor. There should be multiple and upgraded road and air links between Delhi, the major metropolis and each of the states and regions

Chinese officials and members of Chinese government-controlled think-tanks list three main items as issues of concern. These are, in the Chinese-listed order of priority: the Dalai Lama and Tibet issue; the border dispute; and India's geopolitical ambitions.

like Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya etc in the north-east. Traffic will pick up in a short while, but in the interim, fares in these sectors must be subsidized for Indian citizens. Such a move will automatically severely retard China's efforts to internationalise the border/territorial dispute and acquire legitimacy.

Upgrading of defence and cargo related transport infrastructure in the border areas has not made an appreciable dent despite the passage of over five years since a crash programme was initiated. This needs to be done urgently and comprehensively by building a border roads network augmented by satellite and network communications and airfields or helipads. If necessary, private companies should be invited to participate.

India needs to seriously build its indigenous defence capability and factor in adequate deterrence. India's defence capability will be taken seriously only once it appreciably reduces the need for defence-related imports. The current programme for upgrading the armed forces also needs to be objectively reviewed. More importantly, Beijing will change, or pause in, its policy towards India only when India has a demonstrable capacity for imposing costs. China's current military doctrine is clear that any conflict will open with an

overwhelming cyber and electronic jamming offensive followed quickly by a barrage of targeted missile strikes aimed at military command and communications centres, airfields, airfield repair units, troop concentrations and political centres of power. In the second stage they will strike public utilities, government networks and population centres. The stated objective is to overwhelm and destroy the will of the military and political leadership and compel them to capitulate. Long range missiles are India's only quick, affordable and effective option. India should rapidly develop and operationalise a missile strike capability to target Beijing and other major cities in China's heartland. China will not be deterred by missile strikes in Tibet, Xinjiang or elsewhere in the peripheral regions.

China is rapidly strengthening its maritime capability and has plans to induct three aircraft carriers into the PLA Navy (PLAN) soon. The Varyag, which will be renamed, is going to be operationalised in the PLAN on PLA Day on 1 August. An under-assessed aspect is the PLAN's submarine warfare and Unmanned Underwater Vessel (UUV) capability. Added is the adverse and disturbing

impact of China selling UUVs to Pakistan. India has a few years to strengthen the Navy, including as the third leg of its nuclear triad, if it wants to secure its shores, sea-lanes and retain dominance in the Indian Ocean.

Cyber warfare is a critical component of China's strategy and, in this context, India needs to beware of the activities of Chinese telecommunications companies like Huawei and ZTE.

The study of all aspects of contemporary China is imperative and India is severely deficient in this. Required are many more think-tanks dedicated to the study and analysis of China with the focus on specific subjects of national interest. Government needs to encourage the start-up of such think-tanks and fund them generously so they can hire and retain competent and knowledgeable individuals, Chinese language knowing researchers and,

travel without seeking foreign funding or non-reciprocal hospitality to relevant countries. There should be a sharing of non-classified information — like data on personalities, visits exchanged and details of meetings — between government and think-tanks. Analysis by a think-tank with an ideological bias will not be objective or independent and, in fact, prove misleading. Analyses provided by the think-tanks will supplement

India needs to seriously build its indigenous defence capability and factor in adequate deterrence. India's defence capability will be taken seriously only once it appreciably reduces the need for defence-related imports. More importantly, Beijing will change, or pause in, its policy towards India only when India has a demonstrable capacity for imposing costs.

those by government departments.

At the same time, Government needs to very quickly acquire relevant capability to analyse China-related developments in-house and, more importantly, get advance information regarding China's military exercises, movements and missile deployments and operational readiness. Present day military operations give extremely short reaction times and the Government agencies must be ready to meet the new demands.

In addition to these measures, India should send a large number of young scholars between 20-25 years old to Taiwan, Singapore, and some to China, to study Chinese. While a number of them today are lured to the travel trade by higher remunerations, if they are sent in large numbers then many will be available for government, think-tanks, China-related research, industry and media. As a beginning, a hundred scholarships a year would begin to meet the requirements.

India can also ease visa restrictions to welcome groups of tourists and students from China. This will expose large numbers of Chinese to an entirely different,

democratic environment and way of life. In the long run it should undercut long-held propaganda or prejudices about India.

Finally, India and China should explore areas of long-term mutually-beneficial cooperation. A major area that offers itself for long-term joint endeavour is the harnessing of a dependable and secure source of alternate energy with a minimal carbon footprint. China has unveiled an ambitious plan for harnessing solar energy in space to tackle its need for a secure and abundant source of energy. Plans are to build a facility in space with 100MW capacity to capture solar power and relay it to earth to generate electricity. It envisages that a space solar energy station will be completed and ready for commercial use by 2040. India has similarly been investing in science and made remarkable progress in space science and technology. The project offers the leadership of both countries the

opportunity to invest resources and scientific know-how in a venture that has the promise to substantially alleviate their national energy concerns. Participation by China and India in such a joint solar energy project, anticipated to become operational in 30 years, will provide adequate time to promote understanding and dispel suspicion.

The investment of high grade scientific resources, huge amount of finances and the anticipated mutual benefit, should deter disruption of the project. Finally, in addition to the numerous beneficial diplomatic spin-offs, the project will usher a technical revolution in the fields of new energy, new material and solar energy leading to the emergence of several industries and simultaneously elevating the manufacturing technology and capabilities of both countries. Such cooperation would be a long-lasting, beneficial, confidence-building measure and, if suspicions are not dispelled in thirty years they never will be!

Note: Given above is the text of a valedictory address delivered by Mr Jayadeva Ranade, Distinguished Fellow, Centre of Air Power Studies, New Delhi at a National Seminar on "India & China: The Way forward", organised by the Chennai Centre for China Studies on 16 March 2012. The address is available also on the cccs website.



The Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) is an independent, non-profit think tank that undertakes and promotes policy related research, study and discussion on defence and military issues, trends, and development in air power and space for civil and military purposes, as also related issues of national security. The Centre is headed by Air Cmde Jasjit Singh, AVSM, VrC, VM (Retd)

Centre for Air Power Studies
P-284, Arjan Path, Subroto Park, New Delhi 110010
Tel: +91 11 25699130/32, Fax: +91 11 25682533

Editor: Dr Shalini Chawla e-mail: shaluchawla@yahoo.com

The views expressed in this brief are those of the author and not necessarily of the Centre or any other organisation.