



EDITOR'S NOTE

Almost six decades have elapsed since China marched its armies into Tibet and occupied it by force of arms. This altered the basic dynamics of Indian security since the border with a friendly land-locked neighbour suddenly turned into one with a revisionist power rather fond of military interventions in neighbouring states. The 1954 China-India agreement, commonly referred to as the Panchsheel Agreement defining five principles of peaceful coexistence diplomatically committed China to the basic norms and principles of the UN Charter while it remained outside the international organisation. With this agreement, New Delhi had sought to encourage China to adopt policies of cooperative peace. The agreement also committed China to respect Tibetan culture, religion and socio-political structures and norms. The boundaries marked on Chinese maps included large parts of India's Himalayan territory. Prime Minister Zhou en-Lai's answer to Nehru's question was that these were "imperialist" maps and would be soon rectified. Unfortunately, China, at the same time, clandestinely built a road across the Aksai China plateau, making cooperative peace that much more difficult.

Within a decade, it had to contend with an uprising of the Tibetans which resulted in great violence and the Chinese government putting it

down with massive force (of which the Tiananmen incidents in 1989 in Beijing were a minor occurrence). The Dalai Lama fled to India, along with a large number of refugees, in March 1959 and India gave them asylum. Nearly 200,000 Tibetans are in India, settled mostly in the Himalayan regions. It is in this context that Prem Shankar Jha, a leading political-strategic observer and journalist in India, has argued, while delivering the Air Chief Marshal P.C. Lal Memorial Lecture in March this year, that China's failure to assimilate the Tibetans and attempts to change their culture and demographic changes of Tibet have failed. Hence, the disturbances in Tibet since last year and Beijing's assertive attitude toward India have to be seen as a potential source of future conflict in spite apparently good relations between the two countries. China's attitude at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) regarding their waiver for India to access nuclear fuel for power reactors last year, and now in opposing the banning of Pakistani terrorist organisations have to be seen as part of the assertive diplomacy. As far as our policy options are concerned, we need to continue to seek good relations with China. However, we also need to be fully prepared for any reversal in relations, and defence for ourselves. That is why an inordinately large unplanned drop in the Indian Air Force (IAF) combat force level is the type of occurrence that should never have been allowed to happen and must be reversed at the earliest.

We also need to re-visit the events that led to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. The Marshal of the IAF Arjan Singh, DFC, who led the Air Force to an unequivocal victory over the Pakistan Air Force even with nearly half of his combat force tied down in the east for possible Chinese intervention, in his recently published biography, is categorical that we were not defeated by the Chinese Army, but we failed to fight in 1962. Experts in the IAF, serving and retired, are closely looking at ways and means to ensure air dominance against any adversary. This also implies that our procurements of weapons and systems must also match the doctrine as it is evolving for

credible affordable defence in the future. And in so doing, we need to be fully conscious that, unlike the wars waged by the Western powers in the past two decades in which they did not encounter and hostile air power, what we face is rapid and extensive modernisation of air forces on two fronts.