

REMAINING NON-ALIGNED IS GOOD ADVICE

This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a belligerent coalition seeking to put China in its place

For weeks, the India-China stand-off dominated newspaper headlines, warning about the possibility of a major conflict along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors. With both India and China agreeing to step back marginally from positions adopted at the beginning of May, and “reaching an agreement”, the newspapers and most other believe that tensions have abated. The reality is, however, very different.

Behind the statements:

Confirmed facts about incursions during May are that Chinese forces came in sizeable numbers and crossed the undemarcated LAC at quite a few points in the Ladakh and Sikkim sectors. These were in the vicinity of Pangong Tso (Lake), the Galwan Valley, the Hot Springs-Gogra area (all in Ladakh), and at Naku La in the Sikkim sector. Talks at the level of military commanders, from lieutenant generals to brigadiers and lower formations, have produced, to repeat the official jargon, a “partial disengagement”. Both sides have also agreed, according to the same set of officials, to handle the situation “in line with the agreement” that had been reached.

The blandness of the statements conceals many a truth. This time, it would appear, the Chinese are here to stay in places such as the Galwan Valley. It is also unclear, as of now, whether the Chinese would withdraw from Pangong Tso, any time soon. Restoration of the status quo ante which existed in mid-April is thus nowhere on the horizon. Another bone of contention also seems unlikely to be resolved for quite some time, viz., China’s insistence that India stop road construction in the border area on the ground that it is taking place in Chinese territory, which India contests, insisting that it is taking place within Indian territory.

Public attention has been deflected from China’s sizeable military presence along the LAC, (comprising armoured vehicles, artillery units and infantry combat vehicles in far larger numbers than at any time in recent years), and the partial disengagement may provide many in India an opportunity to claim that China “blinked” while India showed “steely resolve”. This is not, however, the time for political grandstanding. There is a great deal at stake.

More weightier reasons:

India needs to undertake a detailed analysis of recent events to find proper answers to many vexed questions. To merely affirm that India’s decision to strengthen its border infrastructure was the main trigger for the recent show of strength by China, would be simplistic. Both India and China have been strengthening their border infrastructure in recent years, and while the strengthening of the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi road may have angered the Chinese, to ascribe China’s recent show of strength to this would be misplaced.

Admittedly, Chinese President Xi Jinping disdains Deng Xiaoping’s aphorism, “to keep your head low and bide your time”, but Mr. Xi is not known to act irresponsibly. A demonstration of military strength, merely because India was improving its border infrastructure, would fall into this category. Nor does this action fit in with western assertions that such steps demonstrate China’s newly assertive post-pandemic foreign policy.

There have to be far weightier reasons for China’s actions, and India needs to do a deep dive to discern whether there is a method behind China’s actions, viz., as for instance, the existence of certain geopolitical factors, an increase in bilateral tensions between India and China, economic pressures, apart from China’s internal dynamics. China’s action clearly belies the code of conduct drawn up at the Wuhan (China) and Mamallapuram (Tamil Nadu) summits by the leaders of India and China, and the recent incursions do convey the imprimatur of the top Chinese leadership.

The American orbit :

If we were to examine geopolitical factors, it is no secret that while India professes to be non-aligned, it is increasingly perceived as having shifted towards the American orbit of influence. India’s United States tilt is perhaps most pronounced in the domain of U.S.-China relations. Quite a few instances could be highlighted to confirm the perception that India tends to side with the U.S. and against China whenever there is a conflict of interest between the two. An evident degree of geopolitical convergence also exists between the U.S. and India in the Indo-Pacific, again directed against China. India is today a member of the Quad (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India) which has a definite anti-China connotation. U.S. President Donald Trump’s latest ploy of redesigning the G-7, including in it countries such as India (India has conveyed its acceptance), but excluding

China, provides China yet another instance of India and China being in opposite camps. A recent editorial in China's Global Times confirms how seriously China views the growing proximity between Delhi and Washington.

Coming next to bilateral relations, and notwithstanding the public bonhomie at the level of Mr. Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, relations between the two countries have been steadily deteriorating. India is almost the last holdout in Asia against China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI). India also loses no opportunity to declaim against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China further views India's assertions regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, as an implicit attack on the CPEC, China's flagship programme. More recently, India was one of the earliest countries to put curbs and restrictions on Chinese foreign direct investment. Adding to this, is the rising crescendo of anti-China propaganda within India. The *Global Times* has implied in one of its editorial pieces recently, that China's friendly policy towards India should be reciprocated, and that India "should not be fooled by Washington". On the eve of the recent high-level border talks between top military leaders, China again made an elliptical reference to the need for India to maintain equidistance between the U.S. and China.

Such sentiments do impact border matters. Almost all India-China border agreements are premised on the presumed neutrality of both countries. As the Special Representative for Border Talks with China (2005 to 2010), this sentiment was an ever present reality during all border discussions. The document, "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question" (2005), one of the very few documents relating to the China-India border, reflects this reality.

China's internal dynamics:

One should also not ignore the impact of internal pressures that have been generated within China — in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in part due to other factors. Mr. Xi has, no doubt, accumulated more power than any other Chinese Communist leader since Mao, but there are reports of growing opposition within party ranks to some of his policies, including the BRI.

As the full impact of the most serious health crisis that China has faced since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 becomes evident, and alongside this the Chinese economic miracle is also beginning to lose steam, the current Chinese leadership is faced with an unique crisis. The coupling of political and economic tensions have greatly aggravated pressures on Mr. Xi, and the situation could become still more fragile, given the rising tide of anti-China sentiment the world over. How the present crop of Chinese leaders led by Mr. Xi would react to this situation, remains to be seen.

History and the present:

These are dangerous times, more so for countries in China's vicinity, and specially India. India is being increasingly projected as an alternative model to China, and being co-opted into a wider anti-China alliance which China clearly perceives as provocation. We cannot ignore or forget the circumstances that led to the unfortunate India-China war of 1962. Faced with the disaster of the Great Leap Forward, and increasing isolation globally (with even Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev trading barbs), Mao chose to strike at India rather than confront Russia or the West.

A single misstep could lead to a wider conflagration, which both sides must avoid. This is not the time for India to be seen as the front end of a belligerent coalition of forces seeking to put China in its place — even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, now seems to be joining the anti-China bandwagon under prodding from the U.S. India has consistently followed a different policy in the past, and it is advisable that it remains truly non-aligned and not become part of any coalition that would not be in India's long-term interest.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **non-aligned** (adjective) – relating to a state (country) in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). (after the World War 2, the NAM was set up with an aim to "create an independent path in world politics that would not result in member States becoming pawns in the struggles between the major power blocs (Western/Capitalist bloc aligned with the USA or Eastern/Soviet bloc aligned with the former Soviet Union).
- ❖ **belligerent** (adjective) – combative, aggressive, hostile, warlike, hawkish.
- ❖ **put someone in their place** (phrase) – humiliate, deflate, crush, humble, lower.
- ❖ **stand-off** (noun) – deadlock, stalemate, impasse (in a dispute/conflict).
- ❖ **step back** (phrasal verb) – withdraw, disengage, pull out/pull back.
- ❖ **abate** (verb) – decline, reduce, lessen, decrease.

- ❖ **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** (noun) – the de-facto (effective) border between India and China. The LAC is a 4,057-km border running through three areas-Western (Ladakh, Ladakh (Kashmir)), middle (Uttarakhand, Himachal) and eastern (Sikkim, Arunachal).
- ❖ **incursion** (noun) – invasion/attack; it is the act of entering another's territory; And it is the sudden arrival of someone into an area where they do not belong.
- ❖ **undemarcated** (adjective) – delimited, unmarked, undelineated.
- ❖ **vicinity** (noun) – surrounding area, neighbourhood.
- ❖ **formation/order** (noun) – the arrangement or deployment of military forces.
- ❖ **jargon** (noun) – specialized, unreadable, confused language which is very complicated to understand.
- ❖ **disengagement** (noun) – withdrawal, departure, retreat (of military troops).
- ❖ **in line with** (phrase) – in alignment with, in accordance with.
- ❖ **blandness** (noun) – lack of strong or valid qualities/features.
- ❖ **here to stay** (phrase) – be widely accepted, possibly be permanent, likely be present for a long time.
- ❖ **any time soon** (phrase) – in the near future.
- ❖ **status quo ante** (phrase) – a Latin phrase meaning “the state of affairs existing before” (or) “the way things were before”.
- ❖ **on the horizon** (phrase) – imminent, impending, approaching, near/close, just around the corner.
- ❖ **bone of contention** (phrase) – matter in question, point at issue, subject.
- ❖ **viz.** (adverb) – namely, specifically, in other words.
- ❖ **insistence** (noun) – demand, instruction, requirement; claim/assertion.
- ❖ **on the ground** (phrase) – in a situation/place where things are happening really/practically.
- ❖ **contest** (verb) – resist, defy, oppose, dispute.
- ❖ **deflect** (verb) – deviate, divert, distract/change.
- ❖ **armoured** (adjective) – protected by armour (protective metal covering); bulletproof, bombproof.
- ❖ **artillery** (noun) – big guns, heavy weapons, cannons.
- ❖ **infantry** (noun) – foot soldiers.
- ❖ **blink** (verb) – back down, withdraw, retreat, concede.
- ❖ **steely** (adjective) – firm, fixed, resolute, steadfast, single-minded.
- ❖ **resolve** (noun) – determination, willpower, firmness, resolution, courage.
- ❖ **grandstanding** (noun) – a way of speaking or acting to get attention from the spectators (people) and then influencing them.
- ❖ **a great deal** (phrase) – a lot, much, a large/great amount (of something).
- ❖ **at stake** (phrase) – at risk, at issue, in question.
- ❖ **ascribe** (verb) – attribute, assign; connect/associate with.
- ❖ **misplace** (verb) – put in the wrong place, mislay, position incorrectly.
- ❖ **admittedly** (adverb) – actually, truly/verily, indeed.
- ❖ **disdain** (verb) – disregard, ignore, reject.
- ❖ **aphorism** (noun) – proverb, maxim, motto; expression, phrase.
- ❖ **keep one's head down/low** (phrase) – remain out of the limelight; be out of the public eye, to avoid public attention; try to avoid getting involved in something.
- ❖ **bide one's time** (phrase) – to wait calmly for a good opportunity to do something; be patient, stand by, hold back.
- ❖ **assertion** (noun) – contention, claim, insistence, opinion.
- ❖ **assertive** (adjective) – confident, decisive, firm, determined.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **deep dive** (noun) – thorough analysis/examination.
- ❖ **discern** (verb) – come to know, find out, realize/recognize, understand.
- ❖ **geopolitical** (adjective) – relating to the study of the geographical factors (a country's position on the earth, size, climate, and natural resources & etc..) in world politics and inter-state relations.
- ❖ **bilateral** (adjective) – involving two groups or countries.
- ❖ **dynamics** (noun) – basic/fundamental cause or force which triggers change within a system.
- ❖ **belie** (verb) – fail to fulfil/satisfy (expectation/hopes/ prediction/ forecast).
- ❖ **code of conduct** (noun) – a set of rules outlining the norms, rules, and responsibilities or proper practices of an individual party or an organisation.
- ❖ **draw up** (phrasal verb) – outline, lay out, formulate.
- ❖ **imprimatur** (noun) – authorization, approval, seal of approval, endorsement.
- ❖ **orbit** (noun) – sphere of influence; ambit, authority.
- ❖ **profess** (verb) – state one's faith in, affirm one's allegiance to, acknowledge publicly.
- ❖ **tilt** (noun) – inclination, bias.

- ❖ **pronounce** (verb) – announce, state, articulate, express.
- ❖ **side with** (verb) – support, favour, prefer, stand by.
- ❖ **conflict of interest** (noun) – a situation in which a person cannot do his/her job fairly because he/she has the power to decide something in a way that would be to his/her advantage, although this may not be the best decision.
- ❖ **convergence** (noun) – coming together, intersection, confluence (a process of merging).
- ❖ **Quad/Quadrilateral** (noun) – The ‘Quadrilateral’ is described as four democracies (the United States, Japan, Australia and India) with a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
- ❖ **definite** (adjective) – clear, firm, unambiguous, unequivocal, unquestionable.
- ❖ **connotation** (noun) – meaning, understanding, reading, explanation.
- ❖ **ploy** (noun) – a cunning plan, tactic, manoeuvre.
- ❖ **proximity** (noun) – closeness, nearness, adjacency (in space/time/relationship).
- ❖ **notwithstanding** (adverb) – nevertheless, nonetheless; in spite of, despite, regardless of.
- ❖ **bonhomie** (noun) – friendliness, warmth, geniality/affability.
- ❖ **deteriorate** (verb) – decline, degenerate, degrade.
- ❖ **holdout** (noun) – an act of holding out (resisting) something.
- ❖ **declaim** (verb) – condemn, criticize, attack.
- ❖ **implicit** (adjective) – understood, hinted, implied, assumed; unexpressed, unstated.
- ❖ **flagship** (adjective) – most important.
- ❖ **curb** (noun) – restraint, control/check, restriction, limitation.
- ❖ **foreign direct investment (FDI)** (noun) – Investment from one country into another (normally by companies rather than governments) that involves establishing operations or acquiring tangible assets, including stakes in other businesses.
- ❖ **crescendo** (noun) – peak, top, high point.
- ❖ **propaganda** (noun) – information, promotion, publicity/advocacy.
- ❖ **imply** (verb) – say indirectly, suggest, hint.
- ❖ **reciprocate** (verb) – return the favour, give back; respond.
- ❖ **on the eve of** (phrase) – a period or day before an important event.
- ❖ **elliptical** (adjective) – concise, succinct, compact, brief.
- ❖ **equidistance** (noun) – equal distance.
- ❖ **premise on** (verb) – base on (something).
- ❖ **presumed** (adjective) – assumed, postulated, speculated.
- ❖ **neutrality** (noun) – fairness, lack of prejudice, objectivity, open-mindedness.
- ❖ **reflect** (verb) – indicate, display, show, reveal, disclose, exhibit.
- ❖ **accumulate** (verb) – gather, collect, amass.
- ❖ **ranks** (noun) – the people belonging to a group.
- ❖ **steam** (noun) – energy, momentum, impetus.
- ❖ **coupling** (noun) – joining up of two things.
- ❖ **aggravate** (verb) – increase, worsen, exacerbate, compound.
- ❖ **fragile** (adjective) – weak, shaky/risky, unreliable, insubstantial, feeble/unsound.
- ❖ **tide** (noun) – tendency, trend.
- ❖ **crop** (noun) – batch, group.
- ❖ **co-opt** (verb) – subsume, incorporate, integrate.
- ❖ **provocation** (noun) – egging on, incitement, stirring, inducement.
- ❖ **Great Leap Forward** (noun) – The Great Leap Forward of the People’s Republic of China was an economic and social campaign led by the Chinese Communist Party from 1958 to 1962. Chairman Mao Zedong launched the campaign to reconstruct the country from an agrarian economy into a modern industrial society with greater ability to compete with Western industrialized nations. But, the Great Leap Forward resulted in one of the world’s worst famines and turned into a national disaster; in all, about 20 million people were estimated to have died. It was the largest single, non-wartime campaign of mass killing in human history.
- ❖ **trade** (noun) – give and receive (insults/blows).
- ❖ **barb** (noun) – hurtful remark, insult, slap in the face, rebuff.
- ❖ **misstep** (noun) – mistake, blunder, false step.
- ❖ **conflagration** (noun) – a large and destructive crisis (or fire); a violent event (or fire).
- ❖ **bandwagon** (noun) – a popular activity/event that is currently become fashion.