

THE MAIN PLANKS IN A COUNTER-CHINA POLICY

**Trying to make sense of Beijing's actions is critical,
and India must use the 'subtler tools' of power available to it**

The situation along the China-India border in Ladakh region is still tense. The disengagement process is proving difficult, and the latest meeting of the Corps Commanders on July 14 has not resulted in any demonstrable progress regarding troop disengagement/de-escalation. India is standing firm on both sides ensuring complete disengagement of troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), while China is laying emphasis on strengthening Confidence Building Measures in the border areas, and proper handling of border issues in a timely manner to "avoid differences becoming disputes".

China's objective

Details regarding the actual ground situation, meanwhile, remain sketchy, lending itself to differing interpretations. However, it would appear that this time around, China is intent on managing the ground situation to its advantage, and bring about a realignment of the LAC. With the idea of 'buffer zones' having been accepted — which apparently are to be located on Indian territory — it would appear that China is well on its way to achieving its objective. If China does succeed, it could be for the first time that China has a foothold on the west side of the Kongka Pass.

The events of May and June were hardly a 'one-off manoeuvre'. A great deal of planning would have preceded the incursions across the LAC at multiple points, several hundred kilometres apart. However, what prompted China's aggressive behaviour is unclear, but it had the effect of shredding the painstakingly devised Border Agreements of 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013. Whether China is behaving like an 'irredentist power' seeking to expand its frontiers to the limits that existed in the Qing Dynasty, or as an 'expansionist power' (as the Prime Minister obliquely hinted which produced an instant reaction from Beijing, warning India against making "a strategic miscalculation with regard to China"), is less critical than what China's current objectives are. Undoubtedly, humbling India in the eyes of Asia and the world was all important. India needs to ponder deeply on this, to avoid making a strategic miscalculation during a difficult period.

The 21st Century was once heralded as the Asian Century, with China and India in the vanguard. Rumour has it that as far back as 1988, Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, had mentioned to then Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, that he doubted this. If so, Deng has been prescient, for in the 21st Century the two Asian giants have been more at loggerheads than anything else.

Much of the blame should be cast on China. The latter, having shaken off its image as a 'status quo power', is intent on dominating the geostrategic space in its neighbourhood and across Asia, before embarking on its ambition to displace the United States as the Global Numero Uno. Instead of reinforcing economic relationships in the region, China has been intent on transforming the Asian region in its own image, and, simultaneously, seeking to become a continental and a maritime power.

Raise the divisions

Trying to make sense of China's actions is critical for India's response. To begin with, and despite the fact that China has been inclined for long to nibble at territories in the western, middle and eastern segments of the border, it would be a mistake to think that China is preparing for a conflict over territory. India should not be taken in by Western propaganda about China's territorial ambitions, for China is well aware that it cannot be certain whether it will emerge a victor from an all-out conflict with India. With two key dates in mind (2025 and 2035 — Made in China 2025 and China Standards 2035), China cannot afford to jeopardise its future for the present. India's strategic thinkers and planners must keep this in mind, while drawing up plans to checkmate China's predatory actions in the mountainous border regions. Instead, they should urgently implement the

plans to set up the Mountain Strike Corps divisions, which had been inexplicably shelved. This is bound to deter China here far more than the stockpiling of state-of-the-art weapons.

Undoubtedly, a strong military is an important component of a nation's power. It is important to maintain a strong military but it is even more important to know when or how to use it. With a country such as Pakistan, the military option is more often than not the most suitable one; with countries such as China, one has to consider a variety of options. Undue sensitivity to domestic politics in a situation such as the one we currently face in Ladakh, should not dictate our course of action.

Go on a diplomatic offensive

India must go back to the drawing board and consider what are the 'subtler tools' of power available to it, rather than only considering the military option. India may well find non-military tools not only more cost effective but also less risky. One option, readily available, is diplomacy which is an equally indispensable instrument of a nation's power. Exploiting the current widespread opposition to China, India must embark on a diplomatic offensive to create international opinion in its support regarding border violations. A diplomatic offensive, involving different Ministries of the Central government, business leaders, persons of international standing, etc., can achieve a great deal in convincing international opinion that India is right and China is wrong, as also in conveying a message about India's peaceful intentions *vis-à-vis* China's expansionist ambitions.

As a corollary to this, India should also revitalise another instrument of power that it had employed in the past, *viz.*, cultivation of foreign leaders with a view to draw their specific attention to China's aggressive policies and designs. Countering China's moves to 'buy' influence will not be easy, but India's involvement with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) should prove invaluable in this respect. India's relationship with NAM needs to be revitalised. India previously also had a programme of helping countries across Asia and Africa through a well-designed technical aid programme which possibly still exists, but may need to be upgraded. Such programmes not only provide an enduring link between India and these countries but also help contrast India's 'untied aid' with that of countries such as China whose aims are political and economic subjugation.

It's peace versus aggression

To compete effectively in today's world (and to counter China's offensive across the world), India must also overhaul its 'messaging' capacity. It should make greater use of technology to send across its message and ideas to people and countries, in its vicinity and across the globe, highlighting its peaceful intentions in stark contrast to China's aggressive policies and tactics. This was not one of India's strong points in the past, but in today's world where social media plays a dominant role, sustained messaging has become critical.

At this time, India must pay particular attention to relations with countries in its neighbourhood, such as Nepal and Bangladesh, and allies such as Iran and Vietnam, which seem to have frayed at the edges, with India being more intent on strengthening relations with the West, especially the U.S., and bodies such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), or the informal strategic dialogue between the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia. Smaller countries of Asia, which constantly face China's aggressive interference in their internal affairs, have not received much support from India, and this needs India's attention.

A united face

India's true strength, over and above all this, however, is its unity in diversity. A truly united and resilient India is the best antidote to China's attempts to humble India. The impact of a united India will be far greater than establishing closer links with the U.S. or the West. China has never been able to properly fathom, or understand, the strength India seems to derive from its spiritual, religious and cultural attributes, which are a part of its civilisational heritage. China has also never been able to comprehend the innate value India attaches to reaching out to leaders of different

religions, in particular the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, with no strings attached. In recent years, possibly with a view to appeasing China, India has somewhat distanced itself from the Dalai Lama, which has, without doubt, been a mistake that needs to be rectified. The Dalai Lama is an enduring symbol of hope for many millions of people across the globe, apart from Tibetans. Restoring the Dalai Lama to the same level of eminence in India's official thinking, should be an important plank in India's anti-China policy.

Simultaneously, India would do well to take pole position in propagating 'Himalayan Buddhism' which China has been seeking to subvert to achieve its ends. India's credentials here far outweigh that of China's and should produce excellent dividends. It needs to become a key plank in India's 'forward policy'.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **plank** (noun) – a fundamental point.
- ❖ **make sense of** (phrase) – understand, comprehend, fathom out.
- ❖ **subtler** comparative adjective of **subtle** (adjective) – delicate, clever, accurate.
- ❖ **disengagement** (noun) – withdrawal, departure, retreat (of military troops from an area of conflict).
- ❖ **Corps** (noun) – it literally means "army body"; The corps is treated as an operational unit of employment by the Army and can be comprised of 20,000-45,000 soldiers. It is sometimes known as a field corps, which consists of two or more divisions. It is commanded by the Corps Commander, who holds the rank of Lieutenant General. "Corps" was first introduced in France about 1805 by Napoleon as a more flexible tactical grouping of two or more divisions.
- ❖ **demonstrable** (adjective) – proven, verifiable, clear, noticeable.
- ❖ **de-escalation** (noun) – reduction, lessening, decrease (the intensity of a potentially violent situation).
- ❖ **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).
- ❖ **lay emphasis on** (phrase) – to emphasize the importance of something.
- ❖ **confidence building measures/mechanisms** (noun) – confidence-building measures (CBMs) are planned procedures to prevent hostilities, to avert escalation, to reduce military tension, and to build mutual trust between countries.
- ❖ **sketchy** (adjective) – incomplete, inadequate, vague, imprecise, superficial.
- ❖ **interpretation** (noun) – understanding, reading, meaning, explanation.
- ❖ **intent (on)** (adjective) – determined, resolved, fixed, focused, steadfast.
- ❖ **buffer zone** (noun) – a military no-go area; demilitarized zone, border zone.
- ❖ **be well on your's way to** (phrase) – have made so much progress that you are almost certain to achieve your objective.
- ❖ **foothold** (noun) – grip, anchorage, purchase, support, firm contact.
- ❖ **pass** (noun) – a navigable (passable) route (road/passage) through a mountain range.
- ❖ **one-off** (adjective) – distinctive, individual, special.
- ❖ **manoeuvre** (noun) – activity, measure, plan/operation (carefully planned).
- ❖ **precede** (verb) – come/go before, pave the way for, lead to.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **aggressive** (adjective) – hostile, belligerent, bellicose, hawkish, combative.
- ❖ **shred** (verb) – tear something into small pieces.
- ❖ **painstakingly** (adverb) – with great care & thoroughness.
- ❖ **irredentist** (adjective) – relating to any political or popular movement that seeks to claim or reclaim and occupy a land that is considered to be a "lost" (or "unredeemed") territory from their nation's past.
- ❖ **frontier** (noun) – boundary, borderline, border.

- ❖ **Qing Dynasty** (noun) – The Qing dynasty, officially the Great Qing, was the last imperial dynasty of China. It was established in 1636, and ruled China proper from 1644 to 1912. It was preceded by the Ming dynasty and succeeded by the Republic of China.
- ❖ **expansionist** (adjective) – relating to a policy by a government or country to increase its land or power.
- ❖ **obliquely** (adverb) – indirectly, not in a direct way.
- ❖ **with regard to** (phrase) – in respect of, concerning, with reference to.
- ❖ **undoubtedly** (adverb) – admittedly, doubtless, beyond question.
- ❖ **humbling** (adjective) – humiliating, lowering, degrading.
- ❖ **in the eyes of** (phrase) – in the view of; in the opinion of.
- ❖ **ponder** (verb) – think about, consider, review, reflect on.
- ❖ **herald** (verb) – signal, indicate, foretell; acclaim.
- ❖ **vanguard** (noun) – forefront, front line, driving force, spearhead.
- ❖ **as far back as** (phrase) – It means that an object or event goes as far back in distance or time as some other object or event, which is used as a reference point.
- ❖ **prescient** (adjective) – predictive, visionary, far-sighted.
- ❖ **at loggerheads** (phrase) – (two individuals or two groups of people) in a strong or violent disagreement about something. Engaged in a serious dispute and fail to come to an understanding of any kind.
- ❖ **cast something on** (phrasal verb) – cause (something) to be associated on someone/ something.
- ❖ **shake off** (phrasal verb) – get rid of, deal with something successfully.
- ❖ **status quo** (noun) – the present situation, the current state, the existing state of affairs.
- ❖ **geostrategic** (adjective) – relating to the strategy of dealing with geopolitical issues.
- ❖ **embark on** (phrasal verb) – start, begin, initiate/commence.
- ❖ **numero uno** (noun) – Italian, literally meaning 'number one; chief, head, boss.
- ❖ **reinforce** (verb) – strengthen, fortify, support, underpin.
- ❖ **continental** (adjective) – belonging to a continent.
- ❖ **maritime** (adjective) – of or related to the sea.
- ❖ **to begin with** (phrase) – at first, at the outset, at the beginning.
- ❖ **nibble** (verb) – move towards inch by inch (nibble generally means to take small bites; eat in small amounts).
- ❖ **take in** (phrasal verb) – cheat, fool, or deceive someone.
- ❖ **propaganda** (noun) – dissemination/ spreading of information.
- ❖ **all-out** (adjective) – intense, aggressive, vigorous, powerful.
- ❖ **bear/keep in mind** (phrase) – take into account, be mindful, remember/consider.
- ❖ **jeopardise** (verb) – put at risk, put in danger, threaten.
- ❖ **draw up** (phrasal verb) – formulate, create, work out.
- ❖ **checkmate** (verb) – frustrate, thwart, prevent, counter, foil completely.
- ❖ **predatory** (adjective) – greedy, rapacious, exploitative, avaricious.
- ❖ **inexplicably** (adverb) – in a way something can not be accountable/ explainable/ understandable.
- ❖ **shelve** (verb) – abandon, drop, withdraw.
- ❖ **bound to** (adjective) – certain/sure, very likely, guaranteed.
- ❖ **far more** (phrase) – a lot more, much more.
- ❖ **stockpile** (verb) – collect, gather, store up.
- ❖ **state-of-the-art** (adjective) – modern, advanced/ highly developed, sophisticated.
- ❖ **undue** (adjective) – excessive, extreme, immoderate.
- ❖ **course of action** (phrase) – measure, scheme, procedure.
- ❖ **go on to the offensive** (noun) – begin to attack, attack first, be aggressive, start a quarrel.
- ❖ **back to the drawing board** (phrase) – used to indicate a new idea/plan has to be formed as the old one is not working well.
- ❖ **diplomacy** (noun) – international politics, foreign affairs, foreign policy.
- ❖ **indispensable** (adjective) – essential, significant/important, necessary.

- ❖ **instrument** (noun) – mechanism, apparatus, system, means (to achieve/attain something).
- ❖ **exploit** (verb) – take advantage of, make use of, utilize.
- ❖ **vis-a-vis** (preposition) – in relation to, with regard to.
- ❖ **corollary** (noun) – consequence, conclusion/ end result; supplementary.
- ❖ **revitalise** (verb) – re-energize, strengthen, revive.
- ❖ **viz.** (adverb) – namely, specifically, in other words.
- ❖ **cultivation** (noun) – improvement, bettering, training, development.
- ❖ **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** (noun) – the NAM was set up after the World War 2 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).
- ❖ **invaluable** (adjective) – indispensable, extremely helpful/useful, vitally important.
- ❖ **untied aid** (noun) – assistance given to developing countries which can be used to purchase goods and services in virtually all countries. It is contrasted with tied aid which stipulates that goods and services bought with it can only be purchased from the donor country or from a limited selection of countries.
- ❖ **subjugation** (noun) – domination/control.
- ❖ **overhaul** (verb) – rebuild, remodel, rework, restructure, revamp.
- ❖ **vicinity** (noun) – surrounding area, neighbourhood.
- ❖ **highlight** (verb) – underline, underscore, emphasize, call attention to.
- ❖ **stark** (adjective) – clear, distinct, evident, obvious, striking.
- ❖ **sustained** (adjective) – continuous, constant, steady.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **frayed at the edges** (phrase) – become less effective, become less successful, become weaker.
- ❖ **interference** (noun) – intervention, meddling, unwarranted involvement.
- ❖ **affairs** (noun) – concerns, matters, activities.
- ❖ **resilient** (adjective) – strong, tough, flexible, quick to recover (from difficulties).
- ❖ **antidote** (noun) – remedy, countermeasure, cure, solution.
- ❖ **humble** (verb) – humiliate, lower, degrade.
- ❖ **fathom** (verb) – make out, make sense of, comprehend.
- ❖ **attribute** (noun) – feature, characteristic, aspect.
- ❖ **civilisational** (adjective) – relating to civilisation (culture, customs, way of life).
- ❖ **innate** (adjective) – natural, intrinsic, inherent; essential/inbuilt.
- ❖ **reach out** (phrasal verb) – contact someone to obtain/offer help/assistance/cooperation.
- ❖ **with no strings attached** (phrase) – without any special conditions or restrictions or provisions.
- ❖ **appease** (verb) – satisfy, fulfil, gratify, serve/indulge (a demand).
- ❖ **distance oneself from** (verb) – denounce, reject, condemn, disagree with.
- ❖ **enduring** (adjective) – lasting, ever-lasting.
- ❖ **eminence** (noun) – reputation, distinction, prestige, notability.
- ❖ **thinking** (noun) – ideas, thoughts, beliefs.
- ❖ **take pole position** (phrase) – to be ideally positioned for success.
- ❖ **propagate** (verb) – spread, disseminate, communicate, broadcast.
- ❖ **subvert** (verb) – undermine, weaken, impair, damage.
- ❖ **credentials** (noun) – identities, qualifications, qualities, achievements.
- ❖ **outweigh** (verb) – be greater than; offset, cancel out.
- ❖ **dividend** (noun) – benefit, advantage, gain.
- ❖ **forward policy** (noun) – a set of foreign policy doctrines applicable to territorial ambitions and disputes in which emphasis is placed on securing control of targeted territories by invasion and annexation or by the political creation of compliant buffer states.