BORDERSCAPE
ISSN : 3048-8931, Volume 01, No. 01, January-June, 2024, pp. 11-16

INDIA'S BORDER CHALLENGE: AN OPPORTUNITY

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ABSTRACT

India's present geographic defines are a manifestation of the British economic and strategic interests during the Colonial Rule. Also, a function of their support to partition India on lines of religion as it facilitated amongst other factors the British compulsion to spy on Soviets atomic secrets nuclear activity[1]at the Semipalatinsk Test Site and related mining activities in the Sinkiang region. The British initially intended to retain the regions of Gilgit-Baltistan that had three seismic activity monitoring stations.

***KEYWORDS**: India's Border, Geographic Defines, British Economic, Colonial Rule, Sinkiang Region.*

Introduction

The partition coupled with the Kashmir dispute reduced India's size considerably, denied access to the mineral rich CAR and created a permanent adversary in Pakistan, in addition to China. To an extent, India's post-independence policy decisions, resulting from strategic ignorance or strategic complacencies or compulsions or misplaced ideologies at the leadership level added to her geopolitical and geo-economic challenges. India's situation gets further aggravated by the growing Chinese assertiveness on all fronts overlaid by greater regional volatility, higher risk taking, stronger nationalism and a rejection of globalization[2]. Till recently, Indian approach to matters strategic was mostly reactive and crises driven. During the period up to 1974 nuclear explosion, the numerous economic and strategic decisions taken, barring a few bold initiatives towards securing of States like Goa, Hyderabad, Junagadh, creation of Bangladesh etc, were reactive and damaging in nature at best. India also paid the cost of misplaced ideals and personal image building in the Nehruvian Era despite the pragmatic advise provided by balanced leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. However, given the compulsions or circumstance, partially unknown, that may have prevailed at the time of independence and a few decades that followed, it would be appropriate to stop criticizing in hindsight the approach adopted.

The existing challenges of an assertive China and colluding Pakistan, who has been shrewd enough to exploit global and regional powers to her advantage, create a major military challenge for

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1 Iqbal Chand Malhotra, Red Fear-The China Threat (Bloomsbury, New Delhi- 2021), Loc 1892

2 S Jaishankar, The India Way- Strategies for an Uncertain World (Harper Collins Publishers India- 2020), 10

India with economic and diplomatic implications. The current Sino-Indian confrontation needs to be treated as a crisis and transformed into an opportunity to grow as a powerful and self-reliant nation. Fortunately, we have now commenced moving on the required path and are asserting ourselves in a very proactive and comprehensive manner on the regional and global stage. India needs to forge a pragmatic path to attain economic prosperity, adequately supported by diplomatic and military strength, and thereby attain her rightful place in the comity of nations. The situations arising out of geographic compulsions cannot be viewed through the military prism alone, the way ahead lies in the effective formulation and execution of policies in four interlinked domains, namely economic, diplomatic, military and cultural(soft power).Like for all nations there are certain realities or hard facts for India that cannot be wished away and need to be resolved or capitalized on. A brief elaboration of the major factors and the way ahead is being attempted.

Realities

Nation's internal dynamics in the political domain, at times, tend to be at the expense of National interests, sense of accountability and responsibility, which are associated only to the ruling dispensation. Democratic rights and freedom should facilitate National objectives rather than being exploited for agenda driven gains - case in point being the stance adopted against the Farm Bills, Article 370, CAA and other policy initiatives.

Economically, India is yet to realise her true or desired potential. Since independence we have been unable to get the manufacturing industry in place: a manifestation of the industrial policies formulated and approach adopted, especially the License Raj, during the initial years post-independence. The lack of economic freedom has inhibited growth and it is only in recent times, post the Balance of Payments crises, that liberalised policies are very gradually and cautiously being effected. As a Nation we are presently incapable of meeting the requirements of the domestic market in most of the fields, both in quality and quantity. One of the many reasons why India has not become a member of the recently signed the 15 nation**Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership** (**RCEP)** free trade pact agreement, despite the benefits that accrue, is her weakness in the manufacturing sector. During the negotiations stage India pressed for inclusion of the Services Sector which possibly did not find favour. Now the drive towards "Aatm Nirbharta" and "Vocal for Local" is underway and if implemented with a sense of responsibility by all links in the chain, sans the bureaucratic hurdles and politics, it would still take a decade plus to place India in the category of manufacturing hubs in the world. In the Global trade and manufacturing systems India rarely finds a mention except for the consumer and defence market she provides.

The approach to matters strategic in the earlier decades of independence has been amply elaborated upon in the initial paragraphs. For some reason It is fashionable in India to make a debate of every issue however technical or strategic it may be[1]. Strategic view points and involvement of stake holders or specialists, like the defense services, has not found favor in the Indian governance system. Whenever it did the results were beneficial, for eg Ex CNS Admiral Ramdas's proposal in 1992 for Exercise Malabar to include US participation has paid rich long term dividends in the IOR domination as also Ex COAS, Gen Sunderji's strategic brilliance with respect to timing and scale of Exercise Brasstacks that sent a well-timed message of Indian Army's capabilities to China and Pakistan. Fortunately, the culture of strategic thought is now taking roots with the Government actively embedding domain experts.

The near complete dependence of India on imports for defense related equipment, ammunition and technology is a criticality. The only Service that undertook manufacturing was the Indian Navy and the results are evident in the quality indigenous production of war ships and submarines. Taking advantage of the Indian deficiencies the defense equipment producing nations provide products at exorbitantly high rates. Profits are not compromised even by the much publicised and perceived old allies of the Nation.

[1] S Fisher and Bart. INDIA WAKES: Post Corona Virus New World Order (Sakal Media Pvt Ltd – 2020),58.

Most of India's media in all its forms appear focused on TRP based journalism. The garb of democratic rights to peruse journalism for business or agenda oriented gains is on the rise: ethical accountability has been cobwebbed. Stirring up media frenzy for or against an issue, without adequate inputs and a sense of accountability, in a shouting slanging TV debate is the norm. Most of the debates and discussions on the ongoing Sino-Indian confrontation have been based on limited knowledge resulting in misplaced public opinion for or against the Government leading to avoidable clutter.

India's credentials as a vibrant democracy with roots in an ancient civilization and unity in diversity, despite the manageable fault lines in religion and caste based societal challenges, have universal acceptance and respectability which is ever growing. Indians are seen as intelligent, hardworking and committed workforce capable of contributing in a wide range of technological, financial, commercial and other fields. A major plus for the Nation. India's soft power is universally respected and provides for a sense of acceptability that facilitates accessibility and should be used effectively. It was India that spread Buddhism in fact when it took roots in Tibet the Qing Dynasty rulers in China realized its potential of weaning away Tibet completely. For some reason, we have not optimally ensured or made use of this powerful tool as part of the strategic initiatives till recently. The World Yoga Day is one such initiative and India need to ensure this image of a soft power and not dilute it as it has immense intrinsic power.

India's uncanny ability to achieve desired objectives especially when placed in critical circumstances is enviable, implying that we have it in us to attain great heights as a Nation. India's successful space and missile programs that are envied worldwide despite the sanctions imposed post the nuclear tests are shining examples. The path breaking economic policies after the BOP crises or the dexterity despite the hurdles to get special waivers for the 123 Agreement also showcase the abilities. The capabilities exist however they seem to come to fore more during criticalities or reactive circumstances.

From the very beginning USA is unambiguously clear of the advantages that India provides in facilitating her strategic necessities in Asia and the Indo- Pacific region. India also provides for a major market in the entire range goods from consumer durables to defense equipment: a lucrative market. US policies towards India are favorable and reciprocity will pay rich dividends.

China will continue to remain an economic and military threat to India in the near future. The theories of China's internal implosion due to human rights issues or growing disparities between the rural and urban areas, image being tarnished post Covid, economic downturn etc have a bearing but are unlikely to majorly impact her growing assertiveness and economic initiatives for the next few decades. India's GDP is 4.78 times less than that of China and we need decades to level up even if Chinese Growth stalls. Militarily and technologically also India is lagging behind: "most alarming to the developed world is China's burgeoning tech sector enhancing its military prowess"[1]: very suggestive of her intentions. Chinese approach to all matters strategic and regional/global in nature is through the prism of economics. And old Chinese proverb sums it up "With money you are a Dragon; with no money you are a worm".CCP believes in the norm that the most effective weapons of political control are economic and financial[2]. Economics and politics mean the same to the Chinese and are directly proportional to each other: politics designed for success in business and business to acquire abundant political power. As mentioned by S Fisher in his book the purpose of trade and commerce is to generate power, enhancing the ability of those who wield it to shape the behavior of others, and resist the efforts of others to influence or control China's rulers and the Chinese Nation[3]. USA surely is a major military and diplomatic power however on the trade front there is definitely a Chinese domination, especially so in Asia. The Chinese economic muscle is a reality and shall remain so in the near future and the Indian dispensation which surely understands these dynamics would have made it one of the corner stones of policy making.

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1 S Fisher and Bart. INDIA WAKES: Post Corona Virus New World Order (Sakal Media Pvt Ltd – 2020),92.
2 Ibid,112.
3 S Fisher and Bart. INDIA WAKES: Post Corona Virus New World Order (Sakal Media Pvt Ltd – 2020),125.

Pakistan as nation state realized her vulnerabilities immediately on independence and became part of US led alliances like SEATO and CENTO that facilitated acquisition of near state of art (then) military hardware. Pakistan also very craftily exploited earlier the erstwhile USSR's and later USA's adventures in Afghanistan. On loosing desired levels of utility to USA, Pakistan tilted towards China and now is her strategic cum economic partner and together are colluding well to maintain a sustained pressure on the Indian borders, which translates for India into an economic burden thereby affecting her growth. Militarily Sino-Pak collusions have translated into joint military exercises: as of now Chinese military personnel and aircrafts are stationed at a Base in Pakistan, close to the borders in Gujrat for Ex Shaheen. India is now effectively working towards neutralizing Pakistan's proximity to the Muslim World, the Indian Army Chief recently visited Saudi Arabia to great effect. A currency note of Saudi Arabia now shows J&K as an integral part of India[1]: A laudable diplomatic victory indeed.

Indo – Soviet Union association had a long history that withstood the test of times on numerous occasions and Indian Armed Forces remain dependent on Russian equipment in most of the fields. The Soviet and now Russian collaboration has evidently been based on strategic reasons during the Cold War compulsions and later for primarily denying USA a foot hold in Asia and the Indian Ocean region beyond the alliances that fructified post WW II. Russian support appears to be 'need of the hour based'. In 1962, during the ongoing Sino–Indian tensions, Khrushchev, had to be sure of Chinese not stabbing in the back, taking advantage of the criticality that would arise with USA on deployment of nuclear tipped missiles in Cuba. For this reason, as an insurance cover, Khrushchev decided to tempt Mao with a bait in the form of Moscow's blessings for the PRC to attack India (in 1962), even if this meant betraying Nehru[2]. Russian military equipment which is hardy but not as tech savvy as European or USA products does not come cheap. Russians offer or provide defense related courses at exorbitant rates: compromises are not common for the sake of friendship or alliance. Russia has a major defense market in India that matters to her. Russia is selling military equipment to Pakistan. The case is rested here for interpretations.

Way Ahead

In the words of Shri S Jaishankar "This is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbors in, extend the neighborhood and expand traditional constituencies of support"[3] also that "Being a Democratic polity , a pluralistic society and a market economy India will grow with others , not separately"[4]. Another loaded statement by him is that "International relations is an exercise of both convergences and managing divergences. Such dynamic processes will keep evolving while coexisting"[5]. The way ahead as defined by the Honorable EAM and the challenges therein are based on his immense knowledge and experience. Certain aspects however may be considered to facilitate attaining the desired national objectives.

India needs to establish a modern and quality product based industrial hubs which cannot fructify without internal economic freedom and latest technology. The manufacturing centers need to be based on high end technology that would make the products competitive and salable in the domestic as well as global market. Germany's initiative of INDUSTRIE 4.0 and China's intended shift from mass low quality products to high-tech and high productivity economy to include AI and other niche technologies; suggestive of where the world is headed. This, machinery and high-end technology, is available with very few with USA being the primary source and India can ill afford to waste time in R&D to achieve the very immediate goals. While the USA is more than willing to be in a Strategic Alliance, beyond what has already been inked. USA also surely links the alliances to economic benefits: more trade incentive for more technology would possibly be the mantra. All nations who have been or are aligned with USA in various pacts have gained immensely in technology and economics, case in

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1 Open source.
2 Malhotra, Iqbal Chand. Red Fear (2020) loc 3191-3196.
3 S Jaishankar. The india Way: Stratagies for an Uncertain World (2020),16.
4 Ibid,14.
5 Ibid,25.

point being Europe post World War II - were it not for military alliances with USA, Europe would have taken much more time to develop. China gained immensely, taking full advantage of the provisions, after Bill Clinton's support got them into WTO. India too should consider a major military alliance with USA rather than issue specific, to make ends meet on the defense and development fronts. The Chinese assertiveness and economic expansion is a concern for the USA and has led her into the Indo-Pacific region and for that She needs India more than ever. Engaging USA in the manner Europe and Japan did post WWII is considered essential to manage China. Given the ever-changing global dynamics and interests may hay while the sun shines.

As mentioned earlier India needs to provide adequate economic freedom to her capitalists, industrialists and especially the enterprising tech savvy young generation driven startups. Numerous hurdles have been removed for facilitating ease of doing business but much more needs to be done. Unfortunately, in India, a large percentage of people in any seat of authority in any public department still have a streak of 'Raj Culture' and are more of an impediment than facilitators which leads to delays resulting economic loss and in frustration in those trying to start or grow a business.

Technology has and is overcoming geographical challenges, the Chinese Railway Line into Tibet, Atal Tunnel providing round the year connectivity to Leh etc are examples of the same. India has undertaken infrastructure development along the Chinese borders however it needs to match the pace on the other side for which technology is essential apart from the economics of it. It may be prudent to consider road and other infrastructure development, using latest technology, along the Borders on priority vis-à-vis in the hinterland to meet the military requirements: secure borders provide for prosperity despite the initial expenditures.

Considering specifically the neighbors to the North and East, that are on the Chinese radar for inclusion in her area of influence, India needs to regain and retain her goodwill. Apart from facilitating development in their infrastructure and economy India needs to consciously respect their individuality. The growing soft power influence of China in the Buddhist Himalayas also needs to be understood and countered effectively. Stobdan, Phunchok in his book 'The Great Game in the Buddhist Himalayas' has very comprehensively elaborated upon the challenges, In his words "The Indian Buddhist Himalayan complexity is fast changing and could be a source of considerable concern fo India's security. In part, this seems to be arising from an excessive Tibetan influence ('Tibetanisation') in the Himalyas via a gradual taking over of Indian Institutions by Tibetan lamas in the Buddhist Himalayas. Worryingly, more powerful lamas are seen setting up their parallel sectarian networks and infrastructure from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. They have also brought along their cultural and sectarian affiliations, differences and discords (intrinsic to Tibetan politics) that could potentially destabilize the Indian Himalayas"[1]. Without doubts it has a Chinese hand.

A well planned and effective communication strategy is essential to manage the public opinion, which in India has a very high emotional quotient. The Media should be made more accountable when resorting to falsehood or distorted facts in matters of national interests, case in point being the versions, opinions and questioning the intent of the Government: No responsible Political Party in power intends to compromise on National Security. This view point of 'Managing' should not be taken as to be suggesting infringement of democratic rights.

Indian Defence Forces in the words of Ex-Army Chief, Gen Bikram Singh, "have great experience and good fighting abilities". Indian Army is capable of defending her Northern Borders effectively unlike in the past. The IAF and IN are gradually turning into forces to reckon with. India's missile programs are already a major force multiplier providing strategic capabilities. The infrastructure development along the Sino – Indian border is being been improved at a fair pace: India now has all weather connectivity to the Ladakh region via the Atal Tunnel. Over all, the Chinese now need to be cautious of the military dents that can tarnish their image and psyche with unfavorable ramifications both internally and internationally. As Ex COAS Gen Bikram Singh mentioned in a talk show (Latitude)

[1] Stobdan, Phunchok, The Great Game in The Buddhist Himalayas (2020),7.

"India needs to prepare herself on what Chinese capabilities are and not her intentions". India's need to acquire enhanced state of the art offensive potent to meaningfully counter a combined Sino-Pak adventure.

Conclusion

Presently the border challenges cannot be met in the military domain in isolation the capability disparities with China have implications for India that create challenges. Unless India becomes militarily and economically stronger these would continue. Foremost the answer lies in internal balancing for developing a strong economy in the right earnest that would automatically provide for a strong military capability. On the diplomatic and leadership front we do not lack capabilities as has been evident in recent times. In the words of the Late American President John F Kennedy "Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word "crisis". One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger – but recognize the opportunity". India needs to do the same. India should use China's neighbors against China as China uses India's neighbors against India. China's worry is Indo-US alliance and India reaching its potential: we should exploit it.

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