

India should review it's one China Policy

Dr. Chandra Mohan Upadhyay

*Associate Professor- Political Science
Kisan PG College Bahraich UP, India*

Submitted: 10-03-2021

Revised: 30-03-2021

Accepted: 01-04-2021

It is one of the most defining moment for India's foreign policy, where we have to a final call on the issues dealing with and taking on China. Many experts are of opinion that instead of perusing **One-China** policy so scrupulously, India needs to review it, given the Chinese historical tendencies of expansion and transgression. They have expressed their concerns that India is not taking a dynamic approach and have not moved very much in the directions of revising its One-China policy. My paper covers the two aspects of the issue of Sino-Indian relations. One the growing dominance of China defying all sorts of civilized rule-based system and the second to counter the resulting security threats from the Chinese dominance and India's possible and credible response. Now the voices are growing louder demanding that India should be supporting the effort of the Tibetans to have self-rule and should give the Dalai Lama more recognition and position in diplomatic engagements, apart from visibility in India's political circles. When China itself doesn't adhere 'One India' policy and lays claim on Arunachal Pradesh and simultaneously is involved in carrying out activities in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), which is part of India, encroaching our territory in Ladakh and unilaterally changing the status-quo along LAC, then why is India apprehensive about having relations with a country like Taiwan? India should begin economic and technological engagements with Taiwan, besides supporting it politically. India should support to the democratic movement in Hong Kong. The July appointment by the Modi government of top career diplomat Joint Secretary Gourangalal Das, the former head of the U.S. division in India's Ministry of External Affairs, as its new envoy to Taiwan is seen as further evidence of India's emphasis on Taiwan's role. Now it is time for India to revise its Himalayan border strategy to keep a firm position on its territory. To that end, India should revise its outdated policy on Tibet's status and officially declare Tibet to be an occupied country.

The world is actually facing an existential threat due to COVID-19, incomparable to any of the previous threats like world wars, famines or

others faced by the humanity in the known history. With China's increasing power and the stronger note of aggressiveness in its voice and actions and at the same time, there's been the relative decline in US power in the Asia-Pacific and. As its military and economic strength has increased, China has been active in stretching its influence widely—openly through the Belt and Road Initiative and in a more clandestine way through foreign interference operations, border incursions and by other expansionist methods. The rise and domineering behaviour of China has created a disequilibrium. China has a great sense of 'History' and is known for its timely moves in International politics. It has chosen the period of pandemic to put forward its claims forcefully, when the whole world is engaged in self-preservation. Let us not forget that China chose the month of October 1962, to attack India, when both the superpowers were engaged in deadly Cuba crisis. From Hong Kong to Taiwan and from the South China Sea to the Indian borders, the Chinese government, led by President Xi Jinping, is pursuing more aggressive policies. There is growing concern about Beijing's behaviour, not just in Washington and Delhi but also in Jakarta, London, Tokyo and Canberra. China feels that corona virus has given it a God sent opportunity to act, while the world is looking away. The turmoil in deeply divided America has further made its task look easier, while Europe has already become a confused continent. But the democratic world cannot afford to lose focus on what is happening in East-Asia and South China Sea or at India's border. A new global crisis could easily break out there, with even graver long-term consequences than the pandemic.

The globally paralyzing pandemic has reinforced Xi's efforts to realize his "Chinese dream" by the 2049 centenary of communist rule. Xi said in a speech at Xi'an Jiao tong University in April 2020, that "great steps in history have always emerged from the crucible of major disasters." Many in the world now believe that the current crisis is crafted within the four walls of China. After 40 years of rapid economic growth, China is now — by some measures — the world's largest

economy. Its navy has more warships and submarines than that of the US. Its internet bubbles with nationalistic chatter about the inexorable rise of the nation. Beijing's growing assertiveness reflects both pride and paranoia. But, alongside the pride, there are plenty of reasons for paranoia at the top levels of government in Beijing. The past 12 months have presented Mr Xi with an unprecedented range of threats and challenges. The pandemic has seen China widely accused of responsibility for a global calamity. This may explain why China has sought to make the most of the pandemic. From breaking Beijing's binding commitment to Hong Kong's autonomy and attempting to police the waters off the Japanese-controlled Senkaku Islands to picking a nasty border fight with India by encroaching on its territory, Xi has pushed the boundaries.

A regime that used to believe it needed 8 per cent growth a year to maintain social stability now has to deal with a deep economic contraction — compounded by a trade war with the US. Pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong have continued for more than a year and represent a severe challenge to Communist party authority. And in January, Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, won a crushing re-election victory — a humiliation for Beijing, which had worked hard to undermine her. All of this seems to be creating a siege mentality in government. In response, Beijing has intensified its appeal to nationalism. The propaganda goal is to rally the people against external threats and deflect anger about Covid-19 outwards, to the world beyond China. Countries that dare to criticize China over Covid-19 are getting a dose of wolf-warrior diplomacy — Beijing even imposed tariffs on some Australian exports, after Canberra called for an international inquiry.

The growing dominance of the rising China, has every potential for global instability in the 21st century. My hypothesis treads cautiously on the premise that China is emerging as a revisionist power. It has got security implications and complications for the regional states in particular and the world in general. Any hypothesis to be sound should be tested on the basis of facts and not on fancies. I am putting my hypothesis to this rigorous parameter, leaving the judgement to honest readers and critics. By challenging the might of America in South-East Asia, China has given the first major hint of its intentions to dominate the region. China's growing economic and military power, has encouraged its initiation of military conflicts. However, the liberal view leads us to expect that China's growth will deepen Asia's economic interdependence, thereby increasing

international stability and regional integration. According to this perspective, we should be worrying not about China's rise but about fear of the rise. Given that China is expected to continue growing and eventually equal the United States in terms of the size of its economy, will we also see China become internationally more aggressive. Some scholars have compared the Chinese growth and aggression and have found that China has become more hostile to its opponents in territorial disputes. Their findings support the position that as China gained greater economic capability, it has become more hostile to its opponents. "To test the above hypotheses, let us examine China's practice of initiating militarized conflicts with Asian states and major powers after the death of Mao Zedong, when it began to re-emerge... Using the Militarized Interstate Disputes data set, which provides information on four types of military action (military threat, military display, use of force, and war, we measure the dependent variable: China's first military action against a particular state in a given year... The data set contains 55 initiations of militarized conflict by China against Asian and major countries: 22 from 1976 to 1989 and 33 from 1990 to 2001." (Sung C. Jung and Kihyun Lee: The offensive realists are not wrong, Pacific Focus, Inha Journal of International studies, 2017)

China's greater power has made the country more assertive, rather than cooperative, toward Asian states and major powers. This leads to hypothesize that China will maintain its current uncompromising and adamant position in the South and East China Seas and elsewhere. Renouncing its earlier charade of peaceful rise, China is now asking others to 'get used to its muscle flexing'. China has searched strategic opportunities everywhere in the world. Now it is time for China to reap the rich dividends and South-China Sea provides the ample opportunities for the realization of its great game ambitions. Belying any reference to history, China claims almost the entire South China Sea, through which about \$5 trillion worth of trade passes each year. The littoral and regional countries along with United States have unequivocally criticized Beijing's build-up of military facilities in the sea and expressed concerns they could be used to restrict free movement. China has shown a great deal of disdain towards its neighbouring countries. The claims and counter claims of territories in South China Sea continue to fester. China's island-building, construction of facilities, and militarization of features in the area proceed unabated.

The rise of China is not disturbing the least because we once fought a war and still

engaged with China in a deadly fight at border in 2020, but the implications of resultant dominance, are far and wide. What makes Indian position even weaker is the culture of procrastination, where as China is known for its bold road maps. China is consistently publishing its Defence- White papers since 1995, whereas India still doesn't have any.

It is appropriate to understand the mindset of China, before our painstaking. Noted Scholar Lucian Pye, points out a strange uniqueness of China, which still remains a "civilization pretending to be a nation-state". Lucian Pye, "Social Science Theories in Search of Chinese Realities," (China Quarterly 132(1992): 1162). The legendary, former US secretary of of state, Henry Kissinger aptly describes this situation 'the extent and variety of territory bolsters the sense that China is a world unto itself, and its rulers presiding over **tian xia**, or All under Heaven". For China, this is essential for a harmonious world order, where harmony emanates, to quote **Confucius** 'from knowing your rightful place in the hierarchy' (Henry Kissinger, On China). The Multi- polarity of 21st century is incompatible with this **tian xia** approach. It seems quite plausible that behind all the plans to integrate the world, there is a hidden agenda somewhere down the line to rediscover and regain that Utopian centrality, lost long ago in the vicissitudes of time.

China has initiated a multifarious project, with a pious declaration of connecting the world economy, popularly known as 'One Belt, One Road' or OBOR. The OBOR, is basically a smoke-screen to hide the real ambitions of ruling the world. It is the part of their cultural front to believe that 'China is a world into itself. China wants to integrate Eurasia through a trillion Dollars of infrastructure. It has rightly been termed by critics As China's New **Marshall Plan**. In a world of competing economic and trade alliances OBOR needs to be compared with its contemporaries- the most famous European union has got 27-members, OPEC has 13, the organization of Islamic states (OIC) has 57. OBOR surpasses all with its 60 members. (Indian express 16 may 2017). The initiative has since been widely discussed between policy makers and academics both inside and outside China. Many questions have been asked like 'why did China come up with such a strategy at this point of time, when it is already slowing down or what are the real intentions behind it? Is it not the Pax-China in disguise? To put simply it is the long-cherished dream of Middle-Kingdom or '**zhongguo**' by another name.

India decided not to participate. India was invited to the Beijing conclave. India has got a

number of reasons for staying away. None of them was more important than the question of India's sovereignty over Pak-occupied Kashmir (POK), through which an important part of China's OBOR runs. The foreign office in Delhi affirmed that "No country can accept a project that ignores its core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity writes. the Foreign policy expert C. Raja Mohan writes, 'international isolation is not India's biggest problem ... India is too large an economy and political entity to be isolated by another power, occupying a vertical Geographical location, India can contribute to the success of China's belt and Road initiative or create needless complications.'" India's real challenge is to match its claim on territorial sovereignty with effective action on the ground." (C Raja Mohan: 'the politics of territory'; Contributed to Carnegie Foundation May 16, 2017)

It is not India alone but the world community at large is quite concerned with the magnitude of initiatives around the globe. One of the most venerated scholars of international politics, Joseph S. Nye Makes a stinging observation "Marco Polo would be proud. And if China chooses to use its surplus financial reserves to create important infrastructure that helps poor countries...China's motives are not purely philanthropic. (Joseph Nye: 'Xi Jinping's Marco Polo Strategy' project-syndicate.org, June 12, 2017)

As the financial times put it, BRI "unfortunately is no more a practical plan for investment than a broad political vision". May 12, 2017. the financial part of the plan is exposed more than ever. Many countries who earlier enthusiastically participated like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, are now reeling under the debt burden.

Asian and particularly South-Asian countries have tried to balance the over bearing presence of China but in the absence of a strong US backing, these countries would fall back on China, as rightly maintained by Samuel P. Huntington 'a band-wagoning propensity' is likely to exist among Asian powers, which would preclude any US effort at secondary balancing'. (Huntington: The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World order, p.233).

America is aware of this propensity and therefore it is already ready with strategy. American defence secretary James Mattis elaborated it at 17th Asian Security Summit, Shangri-La "America's Indo-Pacific strategy is a subset of our broader security strategy, codifying our principles as America continues to 'look west'. In it we see deepening alliances and partnerships as a priority; ASEAN's centrality remains vital; and cooperation with China is welcome wherever

possible.” (James Mattis: speech at Shangri-La June 2, 2018)

Considering the enormity of the challenge from China, Americans are invoking the cooperation from other Pacific allies, such as the United Kingdom, France and Canada to build a strong and lasting alternative. China on its part has promised several times to play by rules but never shied away from overt to covert arm-twisting of the regional countries. China’s militarization of artificial features in the South China Sea includes the deployment of anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, electronic jammers and, more recently, the landing of bomber aircraft at Woody Island. Despite China’s claims to the contrary, the placement of these weapons systems is tied directly to military use for the purposes of intimidation and coercion. China’s militarisation of the Spratlys is also in direct contradiction to President Xi’s public assurances. Given the precarious nature of America leadership, India should take a lead. We must seriously invest in several groupings which are lying dormant like- SAARC, Indian Ocean Rim countries (IORC), & BIMSTEC, BBIN and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (GMC), which was conceived more than a decade (year 2000) ago. Our record of translating conceptions into creations is dismal. It is here that our real test lies. It is in this regard a significant development worth mentioning. India and Japan have launched a vision document for Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). The AAGC initiative is part of Indo-Pacific freedom corridor being put in place by India and Japan with an eye on counterbalancing the Chinese OBOR. It aims for Indo-Japanese collaboration to develop quality infrastructure in Africa, complemented by digital connectivity. It remains to be seen that how far this initiative is given flesh and blood, or it remains a paper tiger like its predecessors. It is quite appropriate to examine the ground zero of Chinese behaviour to comprehend the restructuring taking place under the heavy hammer of China.

Beijing must know that New Delhi recognizes the threat that Chinese aggression poses for the wider Asian commons – in particular, the exacerbation of existing power asymmetries. In order, to contribute to a fair and equitable regional maritime order, New Delhi must take a stand that restores strategic balance in maritime-Asia.

New Delhi’s inability or rather the old habit of suppression of information and sometimes denial makes Indian positions unsustainable. Renowned scholar and journalist Arun Shourie has correctly summed up our position “wishful construction...paste a motive, fling a doubt at the

messenger, discredit him...minimize what the adversary has done...manufacture explanations and at each turn summarily pronounce “But what else could we have been done” (Arun Shourie: ‘Self-Deception’, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2013, p.7,8.)

For instance, the co-relation the Indian maritime analysts discern between aggressive Chinese patrolling in the SCS and its growing deployments in the Indian Ocean Region; or the suspicion in Indian strategic circles that China might use its SCS bases as a springboard for active projection of power in the Indian Ocean and never the less keeping studied silence. So is the case of India’s aggressive encirclement by China, its permanent presence in POK, its calculated incursions in Uttarakhand, Ladakh and the blood-bath at Galwan, everywhere our response is not only inadequate but at best reactive. New Delhi should really worry about China’s reclamation and militarization of features in its possession – particularly the deployment of missiles, fighters and surveillance equipment in its Spratly group of islands, allowing the PLAN (PLA Navy) effective control over the entire range of maritime operations in the SCS. New developments in China’s military strategy are also notable. “Recently, Beijing has strengthened its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy in order to protect its core interests, including Taiwan, from interference by external forces, such as the United States. More specifically, the A2/AD entails changes in military plans and strategies for air, maritime, submarine, space, and cyber warfare. For example, the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has decided to develop long-range mission capabilities and high-tech equipment, such as anti-satellite weapons”. (Sung C. Jung and Kihyun Lee: The offensive realists are not wrong, Pacific Focus, Inha Journal of International studies, 2017)

The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) aims to expand its scope of influence from the first island chain, connecting Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Philippines, to the second island chain, connecting Guam and Saipan. In this regard, PLAN has declared a territorial sea baseline and air defence identification zone (ADIZ), has conducted regular patrols of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and has constructed artificial islands in the South China Sea, among other activities. Such military expansions present challenges to the US-led regional order that has existed in Asia since the end of World War II. Indian experts should also recognize the important role Beijing’s militia forces play in achieving its regional objectives. India knows well that the main threat to maritime

security in Asia isn't so much from the PLA Navy, but China's irregular forces. Chinese surveillance ships, coast guard vessels and fishing fleets are the real force behind Beijing's dominance of the littoral spaces. "With the expansion of Chinese maritime activities in the IOR, New Delhi fears a rise in non-grey hull presence in the Eastern Indian Ocean. Already, China's distant water fishing fleet is now the world's largest, and is a heavily subsidized maritime commercial entity. While an increase in the presence of such ships doesn't always pose a security threat, India remains wary of Chinese non-military maritime activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean". (Abhijit: IDSA New Delhi August, 2016)

Beijing's blueprint for maritime operations in the Indian Ocean involves the construction of multiple logistical facilities. China's 10-year agreement with Djibouti in 2015 for the setting up of a naval replenishment facility in the northern Obock region is widely seen as proof of the PLA Navy's strategic ambitions in the IOR. And this anticipation has proven right. Djibouti is a resource-poor nation in the Horn of Africa. Its location also matters greatly to global commerce and energy, due to its vicinity to the Mandeb strait and the Suez-Aden canal, which sees 10 percent of oil and 20 percent of commercial exports annually. According to Huffington post "The greatest worry is America's diminishing military footprints. It has begun to affect the calculation of allies and rivals alike". (Joseph Braude and Tyler Jiang: Huffington post, online retrieved)

US has tried to address this fear also. In his brilliant speech at Shangri-La Dialogue on June 2, 2018, James Mattis was quite forthcoming "So make no mistake, America is in the Indo-Pacific to stay. This is our priority theatre. Our interests and the region's, are inextricably intertwined.

In fact, US and China are actually playing the role of the history. The United States embodies what Huntington considered 'Western civilization'. And tensions between American and Chinese values, traditions, and philosophies will aggravate the fundamental structural stresses that occur whenever a rising power, such as China, threatens to displace an established power, such as the United States. A conflicting situation is ensued, in the words of famous Historian **Graham Allison**, this is **Thucydides' trap**. According to Thucydides, "It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this instilled in Sparta, that made war inevitable." Rising powers understandably feel a growing sense of entitlement and demand greater influence and respect. Established powers, faced

with challengers, tend to become fearful, insecure, and defensive. (Graham Allison, 2017 Foreign Affairs)

The policy alternative before India and the Region

Freedom of navigation, is one of the most essential aspect of maritime cooperation. No wonder, Prime Minister Narendra Modi found time during the busy election season to travel all the way south to Male, the capital of the Maldives. Modi's presence at the swearing-in of the new president of the Maldives, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, underlined the renewed warmth in the relations between the two countries. Under Solih's predecessor, Abdulla Yameen, India's relations with the Maldives rapidly deteriorated even as China's influence began to rise. The intersection of Sino-Indian rivalry with domestic politics has also come to the fore in neighbouring Sri Lanka. India supported Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, while China openly sided with the former president Mahinda Rajapaksa. During Rajapaksa's decade-long rule of Sri Lanka (2004-15), Colombo seemed to steadily drift into China's orbit. Symbolising China's new influence in Lanka were the strategic contracts it won to build the Colombo port city and the construction of a new port at Hambantota in the southern part of the island. India, in turn, appeared to lose its historic primacy in the island state. Now again we are facing a challenge to regained our balance in Sri-Lanka after the reassumption of rein by Rajapaksa family.

The Modi government has rightly understood the importance of Andaman Sea in dealing with China. It is flanked by the Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands in the West, Myanmar to the north, the Thai-Malay peninsula to the east, and the Sumatra island to the south. It funnels into the Straits of Malacca that connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The large amount of shipping that enters the Andaman Sea from the east heads to Singapore, from where it turns the Pacific Ocean. After the Second World War, the partition of India and the Cold War between America and Russia, the Andamans became marginal to the new geopolitics. The rise of China and its projection of naval power way beyond its home waters is beginning to put the Andaman Sea back in play. Beijing has signed an agreement with Naypyidaw on building a deep-water port at Kyaukpyu on Myanmar's Arakan coast in the Bay of Bengal. The port will form an important part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, which would connect Kyaukpyu to the Yunnan province in southwestern China via rail and highways. China is already assessing the cost

of building Kra-canal to link the Andaman-Sea to the gulf of Thailand. China is also enhancing its military profile by selling nuclear Submarines to Bangladesh and Thailand, and conducting military exercises with Thailand and Malaysia.

For India Andaman sea has assumed a new significance. As a sequel to our Look-East Policy, we have conducted largest ever naval exercise with Singapore, aptly called 'Simbex', in Andaman Sea. These exercises began 25-years ago. Prime-Minister Modi's visited and renamed three islands, on the occasion of 75th anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose flying the tricolour in Port Blair has helped highlight the role of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in India's freedom struggle. New-Delhi has decided to end the isolation of the island chain and promoting economic development, tighter integration with the mainland, strengthening military infrastructure, regional connectivity and international collaboration. It is in this regard that we can also connect our efforts out of Malabar exercises. The 22nd rendition of the Malabar naval exercise, held for the first time in waters off the coast of Guam and involving aircraft and ships from Indian Navy, the U.S. Navy, and the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF), officially came to an end on June 16, 2018. The Malabar naval exercise began as a joint Indo-U.S. naval exercise in 1992. Japan became a permanent participant in 2015. India once again refused Australia's bid to take part in the 2018 iteration of the exercise. This is very disappointing, given our penchant, particularly for cooperation among maritime democracies. China has successfully studied the Indian mind-set, and has decided to downsize India. Chinese Stealth incursions in many areas simultaneously, like Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Hot-Spring, Depsang etc, caught India napping again in 2020. The face-off at Eastern Ladakh's Galwan sector, marks the most disturbing period of Sino-Indian relationship. The Galwan valley has never been an area of contention. The unacceptable casualties of Indian soldiers in Galwan, have caused irreparable damage to our relations. On the night of 15 June China just repeated its history of betrayal. What happened in Galwan, was waiting to happen for a very long time, as successive Indian Governments were ignoring the repeated Chinese ingresses and incursions. The wishful strategic thinking of successive Indian governments that by courting and appeasing China, we could limit Beijing potential threats to India but opposite has happened. The history of appeasements begins with 'Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai' and ends with the so called Jhoola Diplomacy's 'Plus one and personal' level. After

encroaching upon the territory of India, instead of vacating it right-now, China is buying the time in the protracted negotiations leading nowhere. According to Former NSA Shiv Shankar Menon "Well, I think it's actually dangerous, to speak of disengagement pullback, withdrawal, buffer zones. These suggest that we are withdrawing from territory which we have controlled consistently, and that we were part of the problem to start with...In fact, we are actually teaching the Chinese the wrong lesson. And this started with Doklam, where we negotiated withdrawals by both sides from the face-off point in 2017. The Chinese then proceeded to establish a very strong, permanent presence on the plateau, leaving the face-off point itself free." He rightly highlights the Indian government's media management to score some brownie points, where in fact there was nothing to celebrate. "So, frankly, [China] learned the lesson that as long as the Indian [government] could walk away with a propaganda victory, they could actually make gains and change the outcomes on the ground in their favour. And I think the risk is that we see the same kind of thing happening now here in Ladakh. I'm not saying it has happened yet, but there is a real risk here". (India-China ties will be reset after LAC stand-off, says former NSA Shivshankar Menon, July 11, 2020, The Hindu")

The changed dynamics along the LAC will also have repercussions on other aspects of the bilateral relationship. On the economic side, there is bound to be a push back. At the diplomatic and strategic level, there is bound to be a greater push towards counterbalancing China, something India has traditionally been chary of doing openly. India will have to decide whether to reinforce a failed policy of equidistance with US and China, or forge a new one which involves a much closer alliance with the US. India's Act East Policy and Taiwan's New Southbound Policy have the potential for strategic docking. Both policies aim to increase regional influence and gain political and economic benefits from their partners in the region. Right from the beginning, Delhi avoided contact with Taiwan in the name of its failed One-China policy, which China never reciprocated by adhering to one- India policy by continuously questioning the Indian Sovereignty on J&K and other North-Eastern States. The change came during PV Narasimha Rao's period when India began to engage with Taiwan. With arrival Modi government at the centre there has been a steady expansion of bilateral engagement. Although the Trade has increased from \$1 billion in 2001 to about \$7 billion, Delhi is yet to realise the full potential of commercial and technological

opportunities available in Taiwan. According to Noted expert C. Raja Mohan, “the Part of the problem is that India’s strategic community continues to view Taiwan as an adjunct to India’s “One-China policy” — oscillating between keeping needless distance with Taipei when ties with Beijing are warm and remembering it when Sino-Indian ties enter a freeze...Delhi does not have to discard its “One-China policy” to recognise that Taiwan is once again becoming — after many decades of relative quiet — the lightning rod in US-China tensions. As Taiwan becomes the world’s most dangerous flashpoint, the geopolitical consequences for Asia are real. Although Delhi has embraced the Indo-Pacific maritime construct, it is yet to come to terms with Taiwan’s critical role in shaping the strategic future of Asia’s waters”. (C. Raja Mohan: The Taiwan Flashpoint, Indian Express, 23 February 2021)

In addition, an alliance led by the U.S. to protect common values is evolving. Groups Quad – a strategic forum between the U.S., Japan, Australia and India – are widely viewed as a response to China’s increasing economic and military power. In this atmosphere, Taiwan, which has a geographically strategic position and shares democratic values with those countries, is naturally seen as a potential ally.

The “**Taiwan card**” has long been in play in India’s political, diplomatic and strategic discussions regarding China. Especially at a time when Sino-Indian relations are precarious, the issues considered sensitive by China like Taiwan or Tibet, naturally come to the fore. As the border issue resurfaces, India is seeking opportunities to balance and challenge China, and so the “Taiwan card” is once again emerging as a strategic bargaining chip. Prime Minister Modi is currently placing increasing emphasis on attaining “self-reliance” as a crucial aim of Indian economic policy, and the country is struggling with the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the Modi government is urgently seeking economically attractive alternative partners in the region. Taiwan, as a leading power in the field of science and technology and semiconductor manufacturing, is considered a reliable substitute to China.

This year, there are various signs that Taiwan-India relations have taken a further step forward. In addition to the China factor, Taiwan’s economic, technological, and medical advantages serve as catalysts. However, China’s influence on India cannot be overlooked in the discussion on whether India will continue to build deeper diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The Tsai

administration does not want to undermine stability across the Taiwan Strait by developing relations with other countries in the face of Chinese opposition. Currently, both countries can be seen to be very careful in their dealings with China. Therefore, a possible way forward for Taiwan and India would be to deepen ties without pinching China too much. There is a beginning of thaw in Sino-Indian relations on the account of the process of disengagement. As Taiwan’s security situation worsens amidst mounting economic, political and military pressure from China, India must weigh its options wisely.

Along with it, India needs to review its **Tibet policy** also. India continued to follow the British-drawn colonial line. In reality Indian policy makers may have negated the very basis on which the British identified the frontiers — and which they kept altering with through 1848 to 1914. The modern-day boundary dispute between India and China in the Ladakh sector stems from the Tibetan-Ladakh war of 1684 and not from the power tussle between Britain and Czarist Russia that ensued through the 1800s earning the sobriquet ‘Great Game’.

The ongoing dispute in Ladakh has its origin in the Tibetan invasion of Ladakh and the snatching of Drukpa monastic lands. The Chinese claim Demchok (in south eastern Ladakh) based on a assertion made by the Dalai Lama in the 17th century. Former Dipolmat Stobdan clearly draws from history when he narrates that the Tibet in 1947 staked claim to Lakadh and vast tracts of Arunachal Pradesh. Referring to the ‘Temisgang treaty’ of 1684 he cites how the Ladakhis had the right to govern the enclaves in Menser in Tibet. The other enclave Darchen-Labrang in Tibet was Bhutanese. The two served as outpost to pilgrims visiting Mount Kailash. Since 1846, the Maharaja of Kashmir collected taxes as per the 1684 treaty. Stobdan cites British and Indian documents to argue that taxes were collected right through till 1953 when India gave up the control over Menser. (Phunchok Stobdan: The Great Game in the Buddhist Himalayas, Penguin Random House, Gurgaon, India, 2019, p-205)

After China took full control of Tibet it, betrayed India’s friendship and began to claim territories on the Himalayan borderline. For China, the logic is simple. If Tibet is a part of China, then Tibet could not have had the authority to sign treaties creating international borders. Thus, the McMahon Line and Tibet-Ladakh border treaties between India and Tibet are illegal and invalid. India suddenly found itself in a self-made political trap on border issues. Nevertheless, India still

follows the principles of peaceful co-existence and tries to appease China. China, on the other hand, views India as a weak opponent and thus continually initiates conflicts for various political purposes. China does not want to solve the Himalayan border conflict, as it is a useful bargaining chip for its political interests in India, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan.

It must be accepted with a pinch of salt that there is no unanimity among policy makers in India. Some of them feel that “it is imprudent for India to give the Tibet card and cave to China’s bullying tactics when the pay-off from China is uncertain”. (<https://thewire.in/diplomacy>, 6 March 2018) At the same time there were also countering voices calling to abandon this card. Noted Tibet expert and the former diplomat Strobdan alludes to a very significant fact of the history. According to him, “in fact there was never such a card from the day one. India was left with no choice in the matter after the Tibetans themselves relinquished their wish for independence by signing the ‘Seventeen-Point’ agreement with China on 23 May 1951. It was only after their explicit decision to join China that India accepted Tibet as a part of China on 29 April 1954”. (Phunchok Strobdan: *The Great Game in the Buddhist Himalayas*, Penguin Random House, Gurgaon, India, 2019, p-210)

Amid escalating border tensions between India and China, the President of Tibetan administration in-exile, Dr Lobsang Sangay, said resolution of the issue of “Tibet” will automatically solve the boundary dispute between India and China since India shares its border with the erstwhile state of Tibet. Speaking to India Today from Dharamsala where the seat of the government-in-exile is, Dr Sangay said, “The Indo-Tibet border has been in existence for thousands of years of recorded history. Since it has become the India-China border, all these tensions have come up. Hence, the core issue is Tibet. He emphasised that his government was not demanding independence from autonomy, but as has been proposed by the Dalai Lama, they want “genuine autonomy”. (Dr Lobsang Sangay to- India Today: 04 September 2020)

Now it is time for India to revise its Himalayan border strategy to keep a firm position on its territory. To that end, India should review its outdated policy on Tibet’s status and officially declare Tibet to be an occupied country. This is significant revision of the “Tibet question” would serve two interests. First, such a declaration would automatically refute Beijing’s claim over the Himalayan borders and make China’s control over the Himalayan region illegal. Second, this political

revision would re-validate the McMahon Line and Tibet-Ladakh border treaty, making India’s claim over the Himalayan border internationally valid and legal. Third it would force China to come to the bargaining table and concede concession in terms of accepting Indian sovereignty on North-Eastern States along with J&K.

On the other front of taking on China, now it is heartening to note that India has finally shaken off its needless defensiveness and has decided to invite Australia, along with USA and Japan, in its annual naval exercise. (Indian Express, July 13, 2020).

Way back in 2007, the Indian Navy invited the maritime forces of Japan, Australia and Singapore to join its annual bilateral Naval exercises with the United States. Delhi discontinued this unique experiment as China objected. The decision to invite Australia into the Malabar exercise is a right move at a right time. China is again opposing to the evolution of **Quad plus Singapore platform**. India does not need to be scared of China’s Band-wagoning. This is not suggested here that India should adopt confrontational attitude towards China. India has to search every possible opportunity to work and collaborate with China on the one hand and also needs to address the long-term strategic consequences of China’s rise and its impact on India’s security.

Conclusion: Given the Chinese cultural trait of their own ways always, due to their thinking of ‘pre-eminence’ in the form of ‘**zhongguo**’ the region has reasons to be anxious owing to a colossal initiative in the form of OBOR, and the forceful restructuring of the Global Order, by it. India has always stood for a ‘Multi-Polar’ world with meaningful alliances without any kind of hegemony. It is here that we have to match our vision with action. Credibility is an important element of the international order. Credibility for a state is a *sina qua non*. It provides a guarantee that its assurances can be trusted by friends and its threats taken seriously by adversaries. Unfortunately, we have been found wanting at this point. As it has been pointed out earlier, that the time has come to impart meaning and significance to some of the regional organizations we have already formed with the active cooperation of like-minded countries. India. Unlike China which loves **shi** (relative advantage), India wants its rightful place among the comity of nations, with rule based global order, freedom of navigation and a liberal trading system. we can supplement our multilateralism with a dynamic bilateralism, for a comprehensive strategic framework. Our efforts at

different levels, are in no way antithetical to China. India is a large country having vast and diverse interests. India can cultivate a very good relationship with China on equal footing along with the goals of resuscitation and rejuvenation of the aforesaid organizations and countries. It is not a zero-sum game in anyway. Both the countries can engage constructively by being creative, which entails the willingness to confront and transcend the ambiguities. Chinese actions in the recent border crisis have given a rude shock to our diplomatic and strategic thinking. India now faces her biggest strategic and security challenge in decades. The cruelty at Galwan was premeditated, it must be seen as a deliberate provocation from China to test India's resolve and readiness to protect her territorial integrity. India will have to respond in most emphatic and unambiguous ways. The response is something that not only China will watch, but also India's potential and present allies. If India continues its policy of appeasing China by camouflaging the issue, like it has done on so many occasions in the past, India will remain a soft target of China. The Chinese will not only keep pushing harder and changing the LAC in their favour by eating away Indian territory inch by inch in the name of Salami Slicing, but also start dictating what India can and cannot do even in the territory under her control. Other countries will also be watching India's response very closely and carefully to see if India has what it takes to stand up to China and stare it down. Changing that pattern of behaviour will require a more unified and principled response from the world's democracies, perhaps through the formation of a permanent contact group to discuss policy towards China. Given the paranoia and nationalism in Beijing, there is clearly a danger that a tougher, more coordinated response will spark an even more aggressive reaction. But the bigger danger is that the outside world is too distracted, divided and intimidated to respond coherently. That may persuade Beijing to take one risk too many — plunging the world into a new and dangerous crisis. We should also not forget that the desire of tianxia may lead China to overreach and ultimately to disintegrate.