

## **The End of India's 1962 Syndrome**

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In 1962 Mao decided to teach 'India a lesson'. India had achieved Independence in 1947 by peaceful means. China achieved their Communist government by incessant fighting for over two decades; a bloody struggle in which close to five million Chinese lost their lives. In India after 1947, there was talk about the needless expenditure on the Armed Forces and how a newly independent Nation could solve all ills by peaceful means. After all Mahatma Gandhi had made the Country independent with his mantra of 'non-violence'.

In China, however, the leadership was concerned with how to convert their relationship with Tibet from being a suzerain state to being an integral part of China. Their invasion of Tibet was successful upto a point; and immediately the Chinese encroached the area in Aksai Chin to build a road connecting Tibet and Xinjiang. Tibet did not accept the Chinese rule easily and a serious uprising took place in 1958-59. This uprising was brutally suppressed and Dalai Lama left Tibet for India. The Chinese felt that, to secure Tibet, they must go beyond it. Therefore, they made demands of territories both in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin, that India could not possibly accept as they had at that time hopes of regaining their influence over Tibet. After all the Dalai Lama, whom Tibetans considered next to Buddha was with them, and Aksai Chin plateau had been their territory since 1865. So the Indian leadership which had till then lived in a make believe world of "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" (Indian and Chinese are brothers) pushed forward their positions in the so called disputed area. China launched concerted attacks both in Arunachal and Aksai Chin and gave a crushing defeat to Indian forces. Chairman Mao had taught India a lesson and the lesson did not pertain only to the disputed area. It was that India should not mess with China, that its claim to Tibet was valid and, that it had claims beyond, in Arunachal, in Aksai Chin, in Sikkim and small areas of Indian provinces of Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

Indian Army's defeat in 1962 war was a shock to the Armed Forces but it was a much greater shock to the Indian leadership and the people. The leadership felt helpless; some consequential changes were made and Nehru died within two years. India has suffered from '1962 Syndrome' for almost five decades now.

Since 1962, China has taken large strides in economic and military fields. The critical take off in China's economy started in late 1970s and its GDP grew by an average 9.9 per cent. Even if this figure is considered to be inflated, its most skeptical analysts consider 9 per cent growth per year as a true reflection. In 1990 average Chinese per capita income was \$350, by 2000 the per capita income rose to \$1000 and by 2008 it had reached a level of \$3000 per head.<sup>1</sup> Today China is accepted as the second largest economy in the world after the USA. It has surpassed Japan who was earlier the second largest economy. With such phenomenal economic growth, a large access to sea and a huge population, China was bound to have expansionist ambitions.

That ambition in the beginning as it relates to India mainly pertained to Tibet and Sino-Indian border. China annexed Tibet in 1950; only a year after the Communists came to power. The Chinese justify this action from history. They say that Tibet has been traditionally part of China since 13th Century, under Yuan dynasty. The Tibetans say that their country has been independent; although under Chinese influence for the three centuries (1644-1911) of the Qing dynasty and fully independent for 40 years after the fall of that regime. Tibetans emphasise that there is nothing common between the Tibetan way of life and the Communist China. At the time China annexed Tibet and in subsequent four years they did not think that it would be an easy task, that India would accept it as 'fait accompli', would not react or help Tibetans in their fight, even during their uprising in 1958-60. India under Jawaharlal Nehru in fact did nothing and the ease with which the Chinese were able to consolidate in Tibet, emboldened them further.

In 1957, India became aware of Chinese building a road through Aksai Chin area and this somewhat changed India's thinking about Chinese intentions. India started manning its border posts. This approach was both tentative and sluggish as India did not still feel that China would go to an all-out war on the issue of the so called disputed territories. But they were proved wrong. By fighting a war in 1962, China had proved many points. It had acquired control of Aksai Chin, opposition to occupation of Tibet had become a thing of the past, its point of view on the border dispute had gained legitimacy and it had got the status of a big brother in Asia.

Beginning with their success in 1962, Tibet is now firmly under Chinese control. Airports have been built and now Lhasa is connected with mainland China by rail which as a technical feat, is awe-inspiring. Extensive road network is coming up in Tibet and in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and the latest reports indicate that China has stationed a division worth of troops in the Northern portion of POK. Incursions in Ladakh have become both frequent and aggressive. Story of the Chinese primacy in Asia starts from their occupation of Tibet and 1962 Sino-Indian conflict.

China's present stance in Asia and the world flows from its amazing progress in the economic field. It has money to pay for all the aggressive activities it is indulging in. With expenditure on defence at two per cent (leaving out the hidden costs) China is able to maintain an army of more than 2.3 million (plus very sizeable para military forces). This is after downsizing their Army. The PLA Air Force consists of more than 3,500 aircraft and these include SU 30 fighter bombers acquired from Russia and upgrading of other aircraft. It has mid-air refuelling capability which will allow them to extend their reach throughout the region. However, the main strength of the Chinese Armed Forces must remain their missile capability. The Chinese have approximately 1,000 short, medium and intermediate range missiles and some intercontinental ballistic missiles; with the nuclear arsenal available to them, this makes a substantial capability.

In framing their policy options India needs to crank in certain important happenings since 1962. China has moved from a neutral diplomatic stance as it related to Pakistan, to open hostility towards India. In 1970s and 1980s China gave a lot of support to Pakistan in arms and nuclear technology in order to support its involvement in Kashmir but during the Kargil war between India and Pakistan they did not openly favour Pakistan. That seems to have changed. China does not now recognise Kashmir as part of India. It has stationed troops in the Northern portion of POK. It has refused to endorse Chinese visa on Indian passports to those living in Kashmir and to prove this point further in a deliberately provocative manner, it has refused visa to the Indian Army Commander in Kashmir. The moot point is - whether the Indian Government is going to react by denying anyone residing in Tibet with visa on Chinese passport.

The other development in the last two decades has been China's efforts to bring in Asian countries, particularly India, under its hegemony by a process of encirclement. India has a large land border and an equally large sea coastline. In the west Pakistan is China's natural ally; in the north it controls Tibet directly and Nepal, where it is increasing its influence. In the east, there is Myanmar, with whom China stole 'a march by ignoring all human rights violations of the Junta regime and developed good relations with that country, when others, including India, were opposing the military regime. The soft belly in the east is Bangladesh which is getting massive aid in the shape of military equipment from China.

However, encirclement on land is of little consequence unless the Indian Ocean is secured. That is where China is focusing its attention now. China is actually aware of its need to create capability to move its energy and mineral requirements, for which it has invested heavily in Africa and Middle East, unfettered through the Indian Ocean. At present the sea lanes pass through the narrow Malacca Straits between Malaysia and Indonesia which could easily be blocked by the USA or India in the event of a Chinese war with India. To overcome this problem, encirclement from the south was also necessary. Consequently China has stepped up its support to island countries in the Indian Ocean like Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Maldives along with facilities for its Navy. It has developed Gwadar port in Pakistan close to the Strait of Hormuz and has ensured its naval presence at Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, Marco port in Maldives and Coco Islands in Myanmar. Creation of ports and obtaining facilities for their use do not necessarily show a strong Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean as on the ground these facilities remain in the hands of the host countries. China has a Navy consisting of 65 submarines (9 nuclear and 56 conventional), 28 destroyers, 49 frigates, 84 amphibious lift vessels, 77 fast missile crafts, 170 other patrol and coastal combatants and 5 ocean going fleet tankers<sup>2</sup>; yet it cannot claim to possess a blue water navy. India on the other hand has one (ageing) aircraft carrier in service - should have another in a couple of years and is trying to build one aircraft carrier indigenously. It should have three aircraft carriers along with other ships by 2015 and can claim the status of a blue water Navy. Augmentation of the Indian Navy can be a major factor in control of sea lanes in Indian Ocean and a major worry for China.

The military scenario has drastically changed the region since 1962. China is a nuclear super power in Asia but nuclear weapons are also held by India, Pakistan and North Korea. Although China's superiority in nuclear weapons and delivery systems is well established the nuclear asymmetry does not matter much, as the chances of conflict have reduced considerably. The damage caused to the country even by a fledging nuclear power, is too large and a major deterrent to the two galloping economies of India and China. Thus nuclearisation of China and India would automatically be a deterrent between the two countries for an all out war.

But, one aspect which may mean direct intervention by India even if it means a full scale war in Tibet with China, it is the Chinese plan to divert the waters of Himalayan rivers to China. The plan called 'Western Route Scheme' proposes to build a massive hydro-electric dam on Brahmaputra River and divert its waters towards North instead of its present natural flow to the South irrigating Arunachal, Assam, Meghalaya and Bangladesh. A plan of this scale has never been attempted before anywhere in the world and may take half a century to make. But if it succeeds, the whole of eastern India and Bangladesh will be laid waste. India cannot afford to let this plan take shape and must make it clear that such a move will be prevented at all costs. This intention should be known to all including world organisations like the UN Security Council.

While the possibility of an all out war appears remote China has been working towards keeping India on the defensive and apprehensive. The stand offs in Ladakh have increased 100 per cent this year and China is laying a rail network upto Indo-Tibet border. In international arena India's effort to get a permanent seat in the UN, or India getting Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) 2009-12 that sought Asian Development Bank (ADB) to give \$ 2.9 billion funding to India's infrastructure projects including some in Arunachal Pradesh have been opposed by China. China had also opposed Indo-US Nuclear treaty at all stages.

With China's fangs becoming more visible, India has realised that while the outward show will be that of cooperation, in actual fact it will be competition in the economic field and confrontation in the military field between the two countries. India did realise this danger from 1962 onwards, although China's economic march was not visible then. India's response has been somewhat sluggish because of two main reasons. China and Pakistan straddle India's northern and western borders and have been in close relationship. China has been helping Pakistan with arms aid and has liberally transferred knowhow and materials to produce nuclear weapons. Their friendship cannot be explained in any other way except by a common anti-India stance by the two countries. India has now recognised that it may have to fight on two fronts in the event of a war.

The influence of the USA in shaping Sino-Indian relations is an important factor and will remain so for some time to come. In recent times, George Bush was the main architect of the Nuclear deal and described it as an act of grand strategic importance. China's importance had been recognised by Richard Nixon much earlier. Sino-American rapprochement pre-dates the Nuclear deal by almost three decades. Even so, this Nuclear deal under George Bush and a determined Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has taken place amid a wider rapprochement between India and America and represents a new balance of power shift in Asian politics. It was felt that a stronger India can, in time, counter China's growing strength and maintain a balance in Asia.

Diplomatic relationship between India and the USA has been jerky from the time India became independent six decades back. Many reasons have been attributed for this uneven relationship between the two largest democracies. However, one underlying factor the political thinkers appear to have missed out; India has survived as a democracy, under very difficult circumstances for the last six decades in an area where survival of a democracy is almost impossible. Indians are proud of this democracy with all its warts. With such asymmetry in economic field, education, development and infrastructure it will take some time before an equal relationship develops. It is interesting to note that the two countries became closer to each other in private business field much before the USA realised that India should be taken note of in Asia. But now this realisation is palpable and India can deal with the USA with dignity as an equal. India has arrived and can now be considered as a counterweight to China. Equally, India needs the USA on their side so that China's activities remain in check.

In all this one factor however, seems to have not been given due importance in this otherwise realistic strategy in Asia: How to manage Indo-Pak relations so that India develops fast enough to counter China? Here the USA seems to be only concerned with how it can withdraw its troops from Afghanistan and feels that Pakistan can help them to do so. Therefore, the massive aid in money and military hardware continues even when everyone in America knows that this aid is hardly used by Pakistan to fight the Al-Qaeda or Taliban but to strengthen themselves against India and help terrorist organisations in Kashmir. Thus the US policy has become mutually contradictory between a relationship where India should become strong to counter China and Pakistan becoming stronger to weaken India. In simple terms the US policy appears naive and to the advantage of both China and Pakistan.

With so much of direct and indirect aggression India has had to think of counter measures. India has taken a number of steps in Arunachal Pradesh. It has undertaken a massive road building programme in Indo-Tibet border areas in the East. It has revised its earlier thinking of not having roads close to border and is building roads and infrastructure right upto the McMahon Line. Indeed our Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is an experienced agency which is working overtime and can more than match the Chinese road building effort. The augmentation of force levels in the eastern sector has also been started. Advanced landing grounds have also been constructed in half a dozen places for quick movement of troops and logistics. Tawang which in reality is the main focus of the Chinese in Arunachal, is today well defended. The tunnel under Rohtang pass will make access to Leh possible throughout the year and provide an alternate route.

These are all reactive measures; there is a need for India to be proactive. China has replaced Japan as the second largest economy and that itself would create tensions between the two countries. Japan did become a passive nation when it became affluent and after a massive destruction in World War II. But historically it has been a very strong Nation capturing large portions of China and confronting the USA in World War II. This change in status (China has recently overtaken Japan in economic terms) has obviously sent alarm signals in Tokyo. Consequently, Japan is in the process of shedding self-imposed restraint in security field. Article 9 of their Constitution renounces war and prohibits use of force to settle international disputes and bans that Country from having a formal military force. It has also taken measures to acquire 50 modern fighter bombers, mid-air refuelling facilities and an aircraft carrier for its Navy. A referendum is proposed for amending Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Japan should, therefore be considered a country ready for realignment to protect its security concerns. South Korea is also thinking on similar lines. However, these efforts are at present America centric but this strategic shift is also an opportunity for India.

India and China are both economically galloping countries and would be loathe to having any impediments in their path. At the same time flash points can arise with little warning. India may be on its way to forget 1962 debacle and confront China, should need arise. A cold appraisal of military potential of the two countries would show that India's security preparedness on their northern border is far superior to what existed in 1962. Chinese have also consolidated their position in Tibet but their capability to wage a sustained war in Tibet is still suspect. Except in Aksai Chin, the distance that Chinese forces have to traverse is long and their lines of communication are very vulnerable. Their rail link to Lhasa, though a big technical achievement, is extremely vulnerable and can be extensively damaged. The Chinese have themselves realised this fact and are concentrating on multiple road routes. Move of large bodies of men and material by road transport at that height is likely to pose considerable problems. Except in the immediate border areas, India does not suffer from this handicap and the present road building efforts should minimise transport problems.

Another aspect that India needs to crank-in, in its security consideration is: How the Tibetans will react in the event of a full fledged war between India and China? Tibetans are a proud, religious people who have not fully accepted Chinese rule. China on the other hand is trying to settle large number of Han Chinese in Tibet and is working against Dalai Lama, has declared its own Panchen Lama and is practically destroying the Tibetan way of life.

India formally recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet in 2003, 53 years after the Chinese moved into Tibet. But even today the possibility that a serious uprising can make Tibet unstable is very real. Such a scenario can pose serious limitations on the Chinese war fighting capability in Tibet. India will do well not to forget that the world is still not happy with China annexing Tibet and trying all possible means to bring in Communism in Tibet.

Indeed the entire question of Sino-Indian relations needs to be examined afresh without the baggage of 1962. China is a totalitarian state and their simmering discontent is not always visible. However, there is no doubt that it exists, and in an ample measure as the recent award of Nobel prize for Peace to a Chinese citizen has demonstrated. The affluence and suppression do not go together. Therefore, in the midst of glittering achievements there is certain hollowness in that society. India on the other hand is a vibrant democracy, having a younger demographic profile. Lately, it has started taking measures to modernise its Armed Forces and has taken note of the Chinese aggressiveness. If prepared, India should prove to be a very tough nut for the Chinese in case of a military confrontation.

Future Indian stance will entirely depend on the appraisal of Indian leaders regarding their security scenario. They will have to learn to work under pressure from all sides. Recently, the president of the USA has said that India's permanent membership in UN will depend on that Country solving the Kashmir issue; although, later while speaking in the joint session of the Parliament, he promised to support India for a seat in the UN Security Council. If India considers Kashmir as its integral part, then this statement should amount to interfering in an internal matter of our Country.

If the Chinese can think of encircling India with a protecting Himalayan Range and a vast coast, the possibility that India can do the same cannot be ruled out. If China has changed its stance on Kashmir, India should be doing the same for Tibet. A great nation like India needs a high standard of leadership. One of the steps Indian leaders can start with is to forget the 1962 Syndrome and deal with China on equal terms on reciprocal basis. Will they?

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