



# THE CHINA-PAKISTAN COLLUSIVE THREAT

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## Introduction

“There is increased cooperation between China and Pakistan in both military and non-military sectors. The two-front threat is something that we should be prepared to deal with.”<sup>1</sup> The above statement was made by the Chief of Army Staff on the eve of Army Day 2021. It shows that the Indian military is accepting and acknowledging the very visible collusive threat posed by China and Pakistan. However, the concern remains that, are we too late already? While the Defence Forces recognise the threat as an immediate and grave one, this clear and present danger is yet to be echoed similarly in the corridors of power.

The word collusive means, “involving secret or unlawful cooperation aimed at deceiving or gaining an advantage over others”<sup>2</sup>. When talking in the context of independent nations, it means, countries acting in secret to achieve a “fraudulent, illegal, or deceitful goal.”<sup>3</sup> It could also mean a conspiracy, or a nexus, but always to gain undue advantage over some other. Therefore, it would be fair to conclude that collusivity is a secret deal between two or more nations to safeguard/protect/project their own interests at the cost of one or more people/nations.

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This paper lists out certain important battles in which the role-play of collusivity changed Indian history, before finally amplifying how the multi-faceted, multi-layered, and multi-dimensional collusivity between China and Pakistan is impacting India’s security concerns.

## Battles That Changed the History of India

The Indian sub-continent has witnessed incessant battles and infighting right through the ages. North-West India has borne the brunt of a number of foreign invasions. Listed below are four such battles spread over 2300 years where collusivity acted as a catalyst to the outcome.

### Battle of Hydaspes, 326 BC

The Battle of the Hydaspes was fought between Alexander the Great and King Porus of the Paurava kingdom in 326 BC. It took place on the banks of the Jhelum River (known to the ancient Greeks as Hydaspes), in the present Punjab Region. The battle resulted in a Greek victory and the surrender of Porus<sup>4</sup>. Alexander had no information about the might of Porus’s army and in the normal scheme of things would have suffered a crushing defeat at

the hands of Porus. However, Alexander formed an alliance with Ambhi Kumar, the King of Taxila. They combined their forces against Taxila's neighbour, King Porus. Alexander's decision to cross the monsoon swollen Jhelum river, despite close Indian surveillance, in order to catch Porus's flank, approximately 30 miles upstream (a battle winning manoeuvre) was due to Ambhi Kumar's advice and knowledge of the terrain. Till this battle the Macedonians had never been exposed to war elephants and would have been shell shocked on encountering them on the battlefield; but here too, Ambhi Kumar briefed them about the impending danger. Resultantly the Macedonians modified their spears into long lances to attack the elephants.

Won through collusion, the battle is historically significant because it was amongst the first recorded foreign invasions of the Indian sub-continent which continued to have an impact for many centuries. The foreign invasion also helped in political unification of the Indian subcontinent which saw the emergence of Chandragupta Maurya and his descendants. India remained safe from foreign invasion for a considerable period thereafter.

### First Battle of Panipat, 1526 AD

On 21st April 1526, a fierce battle was fought between Ibrahim Lodi the Delhi Sultan and Babur, a Mughal chieftain<sup>5</sup>, near Panipat. As Lodi's army was largely dependent on cavalry, Babur's military genius and modern technology (gunpowder and artillery) led to his enemy's defeat. It is estimated that Babur's 12000 men army defeated nearly 50,000 army troops led by Lodi. It is also believed that the sound of cannons frightened the war elephants on Lodi's side and they crushed their own men.

What is not documented as such, is the extent of collusion between Daulat Khan Lodi, the governor of Lahore, and Babur. After failing to conquer Samarkand, Babur took shelter in Kabul. At that time, North India was under the rule of Ibrahim Lodi. Babur received invitations from Daulat Khan Lodi, Governor of Punjab and Ala-ud-Din, uncle of Ibrahim<sup>6</sup>. Daulat Khan Lodi and Babur hatched a plan, based on which, Babur supplied Daulat Khan Lodi with about 30,000 troops and they besieged Ibrahim Lodi at Delhi. Ibrahim defeated them and drove Daulat's army off; but Daulat Khan Lodi skilfully retreated to Panipat where Babur was already waiting. Ibrahim Lodi pursued Daulat Khan and fell into the well laid trap by Babur. The rest, as they say, is history. This marked the end of Lodi Dynasty or the Delhi Sultanate and established the Mughal Rule in Northern India. collusion between Babur and Daulat Khan Lodi. Had it failed, possibly the Mughals may never have set foot on Indian soil.

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### Battle of Plassey, 1757 AD

The Battle of Plassey was a decisive victory of the British East India Company over the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies on 23 June 1757<sup>7</sup>. Siraj-ud-Daulah had a formidable army of 50,000 soldiers, 40 cannons and 10 war elephants; while Colonel Robert Clive had only 3,000 soldiers. The British, worried about being outnumbered, won over and colluded with Siraj-ud-Daulah's Army Chief, Mir Jafar, along with other prominent noblemen. Mir Jafar, thus assembled the troops on the battlefield but made no move to join the battle. Siraj-ud-Daulah soon realised that he had been deceived and ran for his life.

A comparatively small battle, but with long lasting implications, thanks Mir Jafar's collusion. As a result of the Battle of Plassey, the French were no longer a significant force. The battle helped the East India Company seize control over Bengal. The Crown got involved and India became a British colony.

## Indo-Pak Conflict: 1971

In 1971, India won a famous victory over Pakistan due to its strong military, tough political leadership, and strong diplomatic campaigning.<sup>8</sup> Equally important was Russia's support that prevented a joint British-American attack on India. On 3 December 1971, Pakistan launched simultaneous attacks on six Indian airfields, a reckless act that prompted India to declare war. A week later, the war was not going very well for Pakistan<sup>9</sup>, as Indian forces pushed through East Pakistan and inflicted heavy losses on the Pakistani Air Force.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani military in West Pakistan was demoralised and on the verge of collapse under relentless Indian pressure.

Pakistan was a strong ally of the US, and Nixon wanted to do all he could to save West Pakistan. As Nixon's conversations with the wily Kissinger show, the forces arrayed against India were formidable. The Pakistani military was being bolstered by aircraft from Jordan, Iran, Turkey, and France. Moral and military support was amply provided by the US, China, and the UK. Though not mentioned in the conversations, the UAE sent in half a squadron of fighter aircraft and the Indonesians dispatched at least one naval vessel to fight alongside the Pakistani Navy<sup>10</sup>. The US tried to apply pressure on India and Kissinger even held secret meetings with the Chinese

Ambassador to the UN, Huang Hua, in New York. To quote Nixon's conversation with Kissinger with reference to China, "They've got to threaten, or they've got to move, one of the two. All they've got to do is to move something. Move a division. You know, move some trucks. Fly some planes. You know, some symbolic act."

On 10 December 1971, Indian intelligence intercepted an American message, indicating that the US Seventh Fleet was steaming into the war zone. The Seventh Fleet was led by the 75,000-ton nuclear powered aircraft carrier, the USS Enterprise. The world's largest warship then, it carried more than 70 fighters and bombers. The Seventh Fleet also

included a number of guided missile cruisers, and the large amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, Soviet intelligence also reported that a British naval Carrier Battle Group led by the aircraft carrier Eagle was moving

towards India's territorial waters<sup>12</sup>. The British and the Americans had planned a coordinated pincer movement to intimidate India, while the British ships in the Arabian Sea would target India's Western coast, the Americans would make a dash into the Bay of Bengal in the East, where 100,000 Pakistani troops were caught between the advancing Indian troops and the sea.

However, India had anticipated such a move. It sent Moscow a request to activate a secret provision of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (signed in August 1971), which was amongst the most significant documents diplomatically and strategically signed by India after Independence, wherein the ties between both countries became radically different and they were "committed

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to each other's territorial integrity as enshrined in their respective constitutions.”<sup>13</sup> To counter this two-pronged British-American threat, the USSR dispatched a nuclear-armed flotilla, under the overall command of Admiral Vladimir Kruglyakov, the Commander of the 10th Operative Battle Group (Pacific Fleet). The Soviet fleet comprised a good number of nuclear-armed ships and atomic submarines. In an interview to a Russian TV program<sup>14</sup> after his retirement, Admiral Kruglyakov, said, “The Chief Commander's order was that our submarines should surface when the Americans appear. It was done to demonstrate to them that we had nuclear submarines in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet submarines surfaced in front of the US and the British fleets almost simultaneously and when our subs surfaced, they recognised us. The British ships fled towards Madagascar, while the larger US task force stopped and turned back to the South China Sea.” The Soviet manoeuvres clearly helped prevent a direct clash between India and the US-UK combined threat.

The 1971 war is modern India's finest hour, in military terms. Resolute leadership of General Sam Manekshaw, and ceaseless international lobbying by the political leadership worked well to set up the victory. After two weeks of vicious land, air, and sea battles, nearly 100,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered to the Indian Army. Though this is a classic example of collusion and counter collusion, what stands out is China at that time did not move its troops to India's Northern borders to aid Pakistan, which showed the limit of their relationship, and it may be due to the influence of USSR who decided to act decisively against US and UK maritime manoeuvres. What

remains unsaid is that India fought alone and achieved its aims which were confined to gains on the Eastern front, within a specified timeframe. Things have now changed, and the same template may not be applicable, as post 1971, China has played a major role in developing Pakistan's military capability and also helped them achieve their nuclear ambitions. The 1971 war brought the two countries closer together.

## Contours of Sino-Pak Collusivity

Having seen various shades of collusion in the past it will be simpler to comprehend the Sino-Pak collusion conundrum in the correct perspective. Pakistan-China have a foundation of shared enmity with India. Pakistan is now integral to China's transition to a global power as it lies at the heart of its BRI, with the development of infrastructure and the merging of both the CPEC and the Maritime Silk Route at Gwadar. The relationship has endured the transitions and challenges thrown at it, varying from China's transition to a global market economy and consequent increasing trade linkages with India, rise of Islamic militancy in the region with Pakistan being the epicentre of 'global terrorism' and the relationship with the US of both India and Pakistan. Strangely, events that could have pulled these countries apart, have pushed them closer.

## Our Orientation

The Indian Army Chief has already openly acknowledged that, “There is increased cooperation between China and Pakistan in both military and non-military sectors. The two-front threat is something that we should be prepared to deal with.”<sup>15</sup> He is not the first Chief to have said so; however, the significance

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lies in his stating this after the standoff at Galwan, and while the talks with China were still ongoing. He has merely amplified what has been clear for the past six decades, especially after Pakistan handed over the Shaksgam Valley to China in 1963.

Have we missed the seriousness or intensity of this threat, or have we just looked away? Unfortunately, our strategy, planning, and thought process has not always factored China as the primary threat and China and Pakistan as one enemy. The US Government at the end of the Indo-Pak war of 1965, believed that although India had proved its military capability in a bilateral conflict with both China and Pakistan, there was a real danger of a Pakistan/China close military axis, which would leave India with a potential war on several fronts.<sup>16</sup> However, this warning seems to have been ignored.

India has always wavered in focus, except in the 1971 war. We have been obsessed with Pakistan, while the real threat lay elsewhere. The primary orientation of our defence forces has been towards the West, be it the Western Seaboard, or the array of airfields along the Western Front or the three Strike Corps of the Indian Army, all poised westwards.

## The Realisation

We need to be aware of the Pakistani and Chinese designs and sentiments to dispel any hopes of reconciliation between India and Pakistan or 'Hindi-Chini, bhai-bhai'. Pakistan has never shed its animosity and China has never shown any affection. Between the two of them it's 'enemy's enemy is my friend'. Resultantly we have a simmering fire with plenty of smoke. Pakistan has employed

various means to pursue its feud through direct military aggression, supporting insurgency, stoking communal tensions, infiltration and use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy. It has used every foreign forum against India, whenever and wherever it could get strategic advantage over India<sup>17</sup>. China on the other hand, has occupied Aksai Chin (38,000 Sq. Km), which was part of India's erstwhile Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. It keeps asserting a claim on Arunachal Pradesh (92,000 Sq. Km) and it has chosen to keep the Line of Actual Control (LAC) disputed and un-delineated. Since 1962, there have been numerous face offs. Latest being Galwan.

The recent episode in Eastern Ladakh has resulted in the realisation and start of 'Change of Orientation', with many of our formations now looking northwards.

However, we are still hesitating to get rid of our old baggage. Take for example, the Dual Task Force (DTF). The DTF are designated military

formations that move to the Western borders from our Northern borders, in case of a war with Pakistan, provided the Chinese front remains quiet. The argument is that will the Northern front ever be quiet? It is unlikely. China will make sure that we cannot move forces from the North to the West. Even if China does nothing, can anyone guarantee that it will continue to do nothing? Can India afford to take that chance, knowing the two-faced nature of the Chinese? What about the obverse? West to North. Again unlikely. Pakistan will seize every opportunity to score over India. Therefore, the forces are there to stay, wherever they are. While we proceed with 'Theaterisation', we must cater for self-sustaining Northern and Western Fronts.

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The next question is that can we rely on partnerships and security alliances? These cannot be guaranteed, as there is no doubt that we will fight alone as far as our land borders are concerned. What happened in 1971 was a word of honour by the Soviet leader Brezhnev. But every country will do what suits it best. We have to be self-reliant and take whatever help that comes as a bonus. There were years of opportunity to have permanent alliances, partnerships, and secret pacts. But in those years, we spoke of non-alignment. Therefore, now that the two front threat is an accepted reality, some of the wars or less than war scenarios that can emerge are:

- Pakistan initiates the conflict with India and China joins in to support it, but in a limited manner.
- Pakistan initiates the conflict and China joins in at a pre-designated stage to open another front altogether.
- China initiates the conflict and Pakistan joins in by activating the LC Sector.
- China initiates the conflict and Pakistan joins in as per a pre-determined time and stage by mobilising its forces and pinning down India on the Western front.
- Both initiate simultaneously and in full intensity.

In all these options, China-Pakistan military collusion in the Ladakh region can be considered as the most likely scenario.

## Sustaining the Friendship

**Shaksgam Valley.** The China-Pakistan collusion started soon after India-China war

of 1962. In 1963, China and Pakistan signed a Boundary Agreement<sup>18</sup> to formally delimit and demarcate the boundary between China's Xinjiang and the contiguous Northern Areas of POK. With this delimitation, Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley to China. Maroof Raza and Iqbal Chand Malhotra have said "China's quest for water originating in the Karakorum-Himalayan region has resulted in China acquiring Aksai Chin by force and Shaksgam Valley by an illegal treaty."<sup>19</sup> Whatever be the reason, it is ironical how Pakistan could give away something to someone, when it was not its own in the first place.

**Nuclear Co-operation.** China has played a major role in the development of Pakistan's nuclear infrastructure. In 1990s, China designed and supplied heavy water Khushab reactor, which plays a key role in Pakistan's production of plutonium. When China joined the Nuclear Suppliers' Group in 2004, it 'grandfathered' its right to supply Chashma 1 and 2 reactors<sup>20</sup>. China has also consistently asserted its opposition to India's membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

**Military Hardware.** There has been a steady flow of military hardware from China to Pakistan. Though Pakistan has happily accepted all the American aid it has received, and hopes to continue to receive, its assured, long term, military requirements are of Chinese origin. These include aircrafts, battleships, submarines, tanks, artillery along with the complete set of ancillaries, maintenance bricks and ammunition. This relationship is thriving because there are arrangements in place which allow a free flow of military wherewithal despite the empty coffers.

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### **Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-Neighbourly Relations.**

Signed in 2005, the treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-Neighbourly Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan says the two parties firmly believe that to strengthen the overall good-neighbourly friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Contracting Parties is not only in the fundamental interest of the two countries and the two peoples, but also conducive to regional and global peace, stability and development.<sup>21</sup> Signed post Kargil war, this treaty may have some secret clauses wherein both sides promise to help each other in case of a war and possibly even in less than war situations.

**CPEC.** CPEC is the child born out of wedlock between China and Pakistan. Both parents have endeavoured to give their best to the child and have grand plans. In addition to the primary alignment of G314, China and Pakistan have also signed several agreements for upgrading the infrastructure in Gilgit–Baltistan and POK. These include the 165 km long Jaglot–Skardu road, the 135 km long Thakot–Sazin road and the 101 km long Muzaffarabad–Athmuqam road project. A number of tunnels are also being constructed<sup>22</sup>, which could have dual usage. Thousands of Chinese nationals are working on the Neelum–Jhelum hydro-electric project and the Diamer–Bhasha Dam project in Gilgit–Baltistan, which include elements of the PLA to provide security to the Chinese engineers and workers on these projects. Chinese activity and investments in this disputed area is giving a degree of legitimacy to Pakistani claims over PoK. In addition to infrastructure and hydro-electric projects, growing economic ties between China and Pakistan have laid

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the groundwork for partnerships in the education sector<sup>23</sup>. In Gilgit, the capital city of the region known as Gilgit-Baltistan, the Pakistani military has sponsored free Mandarin courses for the general population.<sup>24</sup> Chinese educational support for Pakistan comes mainly through scholarships, vocational training programs, and Chinese language courses. While China exports its language and culture through Confucius Institutes and classrooms, there is an increasing demand for learning Mandarin especially among young, middle-class Pakistanis. Besides students, many Pakistani professionals including engineers, teachers, and retired army officials have also started learning Mandarin. The Pakistani government is also encouraging and offering Chinese language courses for officials working on

CPEC projects.

**Pandemic Situation.** The extent of the pandemic situation in Pakistan remains unclear. Countless have been infected and an undisclosed number have died. The Army started to call the shots from the very start. Soon Chinese help started pouring in to include medical teams, medicines, masks, PPE and ventilators<sup>25</sup>. Without these lifelines, the situation in Pakistan would have gone totally out of control.

### **Various Scenarios of Collusivity between China and Pakistan Peacetime Collusivity.**

Much of the above is about peacetime collusivity. In addition, is the continuous backing for Chinese actions and decrying Indian ones in the Pakistani media. The close relations with China have given Pakistan the strength at critical international forums, including the UN, where China has backed it with its veto. China has supported Pakistan militarily, economically and politically, while

Pakistan remains its only diplomatic partner (apart from North Korea), which has supported it in all international forums. There is no doubt that China remains the loudest of all Pakistan's supporters.

Chinese Information Warfare networks will be busy, in the implementation of its three warfare strategies,<sup>26</sup> namely, public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare, to assist pushing Pakistan's narrative. In the Grey Zone scenario, Pakistanis would also keep the Line of Control (LoC) hot, assisting infiltration, and stirring trouble in the Kashmir Valley, while the Chinese would continue its ever so frequent faceoffs.

**In Case of Pak initiated Conflict.** In such a conflict the level of Chinese participation is likely to be in direct proportion to the gains it sees for itself. Chinese support could be the result of a well-planned joint strategy or impromptu. Obviously a mutually agreed plan would be the most dangerous and in line with the true objective of collusion. In which case the very conflict itself would be the result of the joint strategy between China and Pakistan. The support provided by China can be all encompassing starting with provision of intelligence and surveillance even prior to commencement of hostilities. Some examples of collusion irrespective of options are given below:

- **Arms Supply.** China has been supplying arms to Pakistan for decades. During hostilities, it may enhance Pakistan's weapons and equipment reserves, force re-generation and war endurance capability. Support in high-end technological weapons and equipment can become a major advantage for Pakistan<sup>27</sup>.

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- **Posturing.** Mere positioning of additional PLA forces in proximity to the border would commit Indian formations and other military assets on the Indo-China front. On an escalatory ladder, aggressive patrolling by the Chinese leading to provocation and minor clashes; major/minor fire assaults, and intrusion of Indian airspace.
- **Information Warfare Support.** China can support Pakistan's strategy to shape the world opinion against India, in the UN and other world forums. They will try and control the narrative projecting India both as a belligerent power and one which is eroding the rights of the minorities in Kashmir.

- **Cyber Warfare Support.** China has potent cyber warfare capability, which if shared with Pakistan, can cripple India's crucial networks, including strategic forces assets, command and control systems, air defence, and civil support structures like the railways, civil aviation, power grids, banking sector, and so on. It can impact India's deterrence and war fighting capability very adversely<sup>28</sup>.

- **IOR.** As time goes by Chinese presence in the IOR will only increase. Depending on how much they want to up the ante they will use IOR to their best advantage. Another variation could be the use of Chinese naval power to divert and distract the Indian Navy's efforts to blockade Pakistani ports as part of its coercive strategy.<sup>29</sup>
- **Miscellaneous.** China can exploit India's internal fault lines along the Red Corridor and in the northeast. Water is another



factor that could be used adversely against India by China.

**In case of a China initiated Conflict.** As in the case of an Indo-Pak conflict, even in an Indo-China conflict, there are two scenarios that emerge. A war between China and India that Pakistan is not a party to, or a war where Pakistan is a strategic partner right from the planning stage. The latter seems to be more likely. While opening up of both fronts would be the worst-case scenario for India. Given below are some actions that Pakistan would take irrespective of the scenario:

- Increase transgressions on the LC and terrorist activities in the Valley.
- Reinforce the LC, along with some posturing in the IB Sect. Additionally, they could trigger an incident in mainland India.
- Pakistan can offer logistics support to China through its airbases in Gilgit-Baltistan.
- Open the entire front.

Pakistan could try to exploit such a situation on the **Line of Control (LC)** or international border. It could make diversionary moves in Kargil or Siachen, which will result in our formations based in Ladakh having to 'look' both sides. A pincer move along the Shyok, in theory, will cut off the Siachen Glacier and provide an alternate alignment to the CPEC.<sup>30</sup> The Tibetan airfields are at a very high altitude and Indian Air Force always talks about the advantage India has over China in this regard. However, there are two airstrips in PoK, Skardu, located at an altitude of 7000

feet, with two runways of 3.6 km and 2.6 km and Gilgit at an altitude of 5000 feet, with a runway length of 1.6 km. If American planes could fly out of Jacobabad, Chinese planes can fly out of the above airfields too!

## The Way Ahead

Much of strategic thinking has been dominated by the need for deterrence and our ability to win a conventional war with our Western adversary. However, today's reality is that direct high intensity conflicts may not be fought as per the previous template. The focus, though shifting to multi-domain operations, will be on non-contact warfare, to include missile attacks, cyber-attacks, economic, legal and proxy wars. The major players will prefer to be invisible, and it is in this grey zone that we are likely to see greater collusion. Anti-India collusive hybrid threat dilemma will get compounded in the times to come.

Collusivity between China and Pakistan does not necessarily mean war

with India. It could be an undeclared, invisible war through various means like, internal chaos, suicide bombing, cyber-attacks, social media campaigns, assassinations or false flagging, all aimed at showing the government in poor light. However, war cannot be ruled out. Has India been the proverbial pigeon, that has shut its eyes to believe that the cat is not there? It is not Pakistan or China individually, but both Pakistan and China collectively, that constitute the enemy. Therefore, in our calculations, planning, thinking and strategising we must address both nations jointly as one. In the future, there is unlikely to be a stand-alone war, as in any conflict with either, the other **will** be involved. The extent of the involvement

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cannot be determined and will vary depending upon the circumstances.

The change in US - Pak relations is resulting in a military vacuum in Pakistan. This vacuum could well be the opportunity that China awaits to complete its stranglehold on Pakistan, aided by debt trap diplomacy. Some lessons need to be drawn from the Sri Lanka–China, relationship. China is nobody’s friend. All actions are part of a well thought through; long term’ plan. Take the Hambantota episode. Sri Lanka was pushed into a corner through easy loans, by design, and when they were unable to sustain the costs, they were forced to concede a 99-year lease of the Port, resulting in the permanent Chinese footprint in the centre of the Indian Ocean.

So, what does China want in Pakistan? With the construction of CPEC, the consummation of the China-Pak marriage is complete. China will initially maintain a

cordial relationship with affordable military hardware, military technology, and economic support. However, Pakistan may soon bite more than what it can chew. Resultantly Pakistan may be unable to pay back its loans to China. When Pakistan is fully trapped, China will do a “Hambantota” on him. China may then take over the complete operations of Gwadar Port and CPEC. Such operations would require Chinese manpower and uniformed troops. Manpower and troops can move hastily down from Kashgar to Gwadar on the CPEC, a state-of-the-art highway specially built to sustain heavy duty cargo traffic. If Pakistan cannot pay back, then China has a lien on the assets it has created in Pakistan and is well within its rights to protect them. Nothing stops China from using the

CPEC roads and railways for movement of Military troops and wherewithal. Pakistan can be a conduit for China to achieve its goals.

There is no doubt that Pakistan is India centric and yet lacks the ability to accomplish its strategic objectives on its own. Hence, *the two front challenge is here to stay*. Therefore, while contemplating the contours of a two-front war, the worst-case scenario is not China to the North and East, and Pakistan to the West, but both Pakistan and China together in the West. The possibility of one of our fronts supporting the other stands diminished.

The Chinese are unlikely to expose its troops in the show window in the IB Sector, but its supportive role will remain. In the LC Sector,

especially Gilgit-Baltistan, the Chinese could take a leading role to defend its own prime asset—the CPEC. Therefore, India cannot afford to declare a primary and secondary front. Both the Northern and Western Fronts

assume equal importance. We cannot afford to denude one front in favour of the other. Any such denudation could have strategic repercussions. We need to have dedicated forces (both defensive and offensive), to retain our deterrence, in both the theatres. We need to build up our infrastructure and conventional forces to meet these threats as also develop capabilities in other domains such as cyber, intelligence and surveillance.

For effective domination of the Malacca Straits and sea lanes, development of Campbell Bay and Port Blair into major bases must be given the topmost priority. The Indian Air Force, must be equipped with the latest generation aircrafts and built up to its authorised strength. A relook at our Nuclear Doctrine

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could also be considered. The combined threat is no longer latent but a reality which needs to be addressed by raisings, reorientation, and modernisation of the entire Defence Force, for which money must be found and allocated in national interest.

We need to be balanced and not reactive to emerging situations like Galwan. A clearly defined National Security Strategy is imperative, followed by a tri-Service capability development plan, which lays down timelines, and then proceed to meet those objectives with alacrity.

## End Notes

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