

NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVES OF BHARAT: THE CHINA FACTOR

Souresh Bhattacharya*

Abstract

This research paper delves into the complex relationship between India (Bharat) and China, two ancient civilizations that have faced foreign invasions and colonization, impacting their growth, culture, and economy. Despite shared cultural and economic ties, the boundary dispute between the two nations, exacerbated by China's aggressive actions, remains a significant challenge. Recent efforts to resolve the disputes, including diplomatic summits, have yielded limited success, with China displaying hegemonistic tendencies, particularly evident in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and collaboration with Pakistan. India's national security concerns are further compounded by economic imbalances, border transgressions, and China's expansionism in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). To address these challenges, India must adopt a cohesive strategy, bolstering its defense forces, strengthening regional alliances like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and presenting a credible alternative narrative to China's initiatives. Embracing its rich historical past, India can enhance its role in global affairs through initiatives like the "Global South" and "Neighbourhood First" policies, projecting soft power and democratic ideals to build trust and cooperation with other nations. Shared interests between India and China, such as stability in Afghanistan and participation in global trade talks, offer avenues for constructive engagement. However, India must remain vigilant against the evolving China-Pakistan nexus and prioritize efforts to bolster its maritime capabilities. By leveraging diplomatic initiatives and drawing on its civilizational heritage, India can present a compelling alternative narrative to counter China's hegemonic aspirations on the global stage.

Keywords: India-China Relations, Border Disputes, National Security, Hegemonistic Tendencies, Belt and Road Initiative, Maritime Capabilities.

* Major General Souresh Bhattacharya (Retd), Secretary & DG, Institution of Engineers (India)

Introduction

Bharat and China are both ancient civilizations which flourished in multiple ways and both Nations had to subsequently suffer foreign invasions and colonization which inflicted untold suffering on the populace and severely impacted their growth, culture and economy. Bharat finally gained Independence after facing the trauma of Partition in 1947 and China was established as a Nation-State, as an outcome of a brutal Civil War, in 1949. While China decided to embark upon a journey based on communist ideology, Bharat, keeping its ancient cultural and spiritual legacy in view chose a multiparty democracy as its future. It is at this stage that due to the prevailing geopolitical situation at that time and vastly differing ideologies, differences arose, which has sharply escalated over the last seven decades. It is an established fact that Bharat led by Jawaharlal Nehru went out of its way to develop an accommodative, even friendly stance in its relationship with China during the first decade after Independence. However, it is evident, that, despite India's positive overtures, China, in 1951, embarked upon a path of territorial enhancement through coercion, annexing Tibet using military force.

The Chinese aggression of 1962 was an indication of things to come and there has been, since then, a series of agreements to “manage” the contested boundary issue between the two countries-. In the last few years, China has undertaken a series of aggressive actions, with the aim of acquiring territory (‘salami slicing’) in areas where the boundary is not clearly demarcated. The unprovoked actions of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) in June 2020 in the Ladakh region blocking India's access to mutually agreed upon “patrolling points”, has been a turning point in relations between the countries. Military level talks have reached an impasse and there have been no high-level engagements since then.

The last two decades has seen rapid development and resulting rise of China with a Global outreach transitioning in present times, into hegemonistic tendencies. The ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), development of ports and other infrastructure across the Indian Ocean region (IOR), South

China sea, Central Asia and Africa is a testimony of China's ambitions to attain dominance in world affairs even at times without paying heed to international norms and Agreements. China's diplomacy for the last four decades has followed the idea of 'biding times, hiding brightness', which is now changed to 'Strive for achievement', highlighting its efforts to "proactively shape" the global environment.

India's aspiration to further develop its economy and emerge as a significant voice on the world stage is based on ensuring its national security in multiple domains. It is this backdrop that this article seeks to study and highlight the underlying motives and intentions of China which may impact Bharat's National Security framework in the future. More importantly, this article also identifies some key strategic initiatives that Bharat needs to undertake to counter the Chinese hegemonistic tendencies specially in the Asian region, thus cementing her emerging leadership role in the international community.

Bharat-China Relations

China is India's largest trading partner (USD 93 billion) although the deficit is highly skewed. There are nearly 25,000 students staying in China, mainly medicine and the country is the biggest overseas market of Hindi movies. There are also common interests on various issues of global interest. In spite of this, the boundary dispute remains alive and "face offs" and other aggressive actions by the Chinese mainly on the eastern and northern borders remain a reality. Therefore, it is important to delve into this important element in relations between the two countries.

The Border Issue: Overview

India has a 3488 km long border with China which is itself disputed by the Chinese since the latter does not consider POK (bordering Xinjiang region) as part of the dispute. The border, for purposes of negotiations, has been divided into eastern, middle and western sectors. The major areas of dispute are in the eastern and western sectors and these have been discussed herein. There are about 23 places in the western, middle and eastern sectors in which there are

perception differences leading to “face- offs” between the two militaries. Strategically the McMahon Line establishes the eastern borders and protects the foothills, while the Aksai Chin provides China the vital Xinjiang-Tibet link

In the Eastern sector, the boundary has been demarcated by the McMahon Line which was arrived upon during the Simla conference held in 1913-14 between China, Tibet and British India. The important issue here was the fact that the recorded objections by the Chinese referred only to the Outer Tibet - Inner Tibet boundary and not to the McMahon line.

While the McMahon line demarcates the borders in the East, no such agreement exists to establish the boundary in the Western Sector. In the western sector, as per the 1842 Ladakh-Tibet Treaty, both sides agreed to accept old, established frontiers and refrain from any acts of aggression.

It was the Chinese who created the idea of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) after they had illegally occupied the Indian territory of Aksai Chin in the 1950s. In a letter of 7 November, 1959, the Chinese premier Zhou Enlai wrote to Prime Minister Nehru that a line had existed between the two Militaries which was pure fiction. Further, after the 1962 war, the Chinese withdrew, 20 kms behind this “line” to make a point and maintain the fiction of the LAC. It is imperative to note that the LAC is not a fixed line which has been agreed upon nor the final border, but land that is controlled by the respective countries, till such time the boundary issue is resolved. India has continuedly rejected the concept of the “LAC”, however, to maintain a dialogue on the border issue, agreed that both sides would clarify the LAC wherever required.

It is important to highlight that while the Indian claims especially in Aksai Chin was based on some historical facts such as administrative and land records and tax receipts, China has nothing in this context to show to substantiate its claims.

Events Leading Up to 1962 Chinese Aggression

The 1962 aggression by China casts a shadow over relations between the two countries, remaining firmly entrenched in Indian public memory even today.

Therefore, it is important to briefly study this issue and place it in the appropriate context.

Actually, the western border with China was designated as undefined while the Eastern border was demarcated by the McMahon Line. The problem arose when, in 1954, the Indian Government under Nehru, published new maps indicating that the borders were settled and that there were no discussions required on this. India decided to establish check posts in disputed areas. Further in 1954, an Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet region of China and India was signed resulting in the 'Panchsheel' or five principles of peaceful coexistence. Shockingly, after this, nearly all the privileges in Tibet inherited from the British were given up by India.

In 1960 the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, during his visit to India, had suggested a 'trade-off' with Chinese acceptance of the McMahon Line in the east with India recognising the dispute in the western boundaries (meaning acceptance of the illegal occupation by China of Aksai Chin). The idea put forward by the Chinese was that 'neither side should put forward claims to an area which is no longer under its administrative control'.

Prior to the visit of the Chinese premier to India there had been two unsettling incidents. Firstly, the Indian government finally woke up to the idea that China had constructed the Xinjiang-Tibet Road through Aksai Chin by changing ground realities unilaterally. Secondly, a Chinese Ambush in October 1959 had killed nine soldiers of an Indian patrol at Kongka Pass in Ladakh. Also, as a backdrop there was the Tibetan uprising in 1956 which was brutally suppressed by the PLA, causing much anger in India, as well as the arrival of Dalai Lama in India in 1959.

It is interesting to note that there were quite a few warning signals leading up to the 1962 attack by China including warnings by Chinese officials to withdraw Indian troops (Nehru's Forward Policy of 1961) from disputed areas.

The Next Four Decades; 1990-2012

The offer by China to accept the status quo in the Western Sector (illegal occupation of Aksai Chin) in return for recognition of the McMahon line in the Eastern sector was repeated again in 1980. However, by 1985 the Chinese refused to discuss the McMahon line and instead started to claim Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. The work of the Joint Working Group (set up in 1988) resulted in exchange of maps of the middle sector. However, as regards the western sector (bordering J&K) there was no final exchange of maps and maps of the Eastern Sector were neither shown nor exchanged. It is important to note that after this, despite repeated Indian efforts, the Chinese refused to continue to work on the exchange of maps.

There were quite a few high-level exchanges of visits in the 1990s, which saw a thaw in relations such as reestablishment of people to people contact, border trade, sharing flood season data for the Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo) and so on. Some of the milestones and Agreements to address the Border issues during this period are as follows: -

- 1993 - The Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement (BPTA) was the first of its kind related to border areas with China.
- 1996 - Based on the BPTA, another Agreement was signed on Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in the military field along the LAC in the Indo China Border.
- 2003 - Mechanism of Special Representatives was set up to resolve the border dispute. Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between China and India, India's explicit recognition of Tibet as part of PRC, Chinese recognition of Sikkim as a part of India in 2005.
- 2005- Landmark "Agreement on Political Parameters and guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India- China Boundary question"
- 2006- MOU on defence cooperation

Meanwhile, since the 1990's, China embarked upon building and modernising its infrastructure in the border regions with India following much later. Also, there were tense situations along the borders in “face offs” between troops on the ground during this period.

Recent Efforts and Challenges for Resolution of Disputes

There was hope that the present Government taking over in 2014 on both sides would result in substantial efforts towards resolution of the border issue. However, during the visit of President Xi to India that year, there was a stand-off at Chumar in Ladakh which was later defused. Also, during a visit by the Chinese Premier earlier, there had been a similar incident in the Depsang Plains, provoked by the PLA.

In 2015, Prime Minister Modi visited China and the outcome of the visit resulted in statements that indicated that the efforts were to “manage” the border question rather than resolving it. There were some overtures by the Chinese such as opening of a shorter route for the Kailash Mansarovar yatra through Nathu La, but no substantial breakthrough in relations as regards the border issue resulted.

The Doklam incident of 2017 was due to the PLA constructing a road on the Doklam Plateau on the Bhutan side and India countered this effectively and deft diplomacy defused the crisis. However, this adversely affected the Indo-China relations. Ironically, shortly before this incident, Prime Minister Modi and President Xi had a very useful meeting on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Kazakhstan.

During the Summit in Wuhan in April 2018 it was declared that both countries had agreed to issue ‘strategic guidance’ to their militaries to maintain the peace. In October 2019 another Summit was held in Mammalapuram in India and these interactions enabled peace on the borders to be maintained through 2018 and 2019.

It was in June 2020, when the Chinese, taking advantage of the Covid situation, aggressively advanced into disputed areas resulting in the Galwan incident of 15 June 2020, thus violating the spirit of the 1993 agreement. The crossing of the LAC and stopping any Indian movement even to the designated patrolling points was a clear violation of the principles of all previous agreements and Galwan actually destroyed fifty years of relative calm on the borders. Till date, India has completed about 60 strategic roads in the border areas comprising nearly 3,500 kilometers in length. This large-scale development in the last decade perhaps unnerved the Chinese since it poses a challenge to them and it is surmised that the border violations of the LAC was to pressurize India to stop this development.

To the credit of Prime Minister Modi, he has raised the need for resuming the process of clarifying the LAC during each of his interactions with the Chinese President. However, for unknown reasons, China has avoided entering into any negotiations in this regard, although they have not publicly said so. Some suggest that the China view-point of not addressing the border issue is that earlier efforts at clarifications have made the border issue more complicated. Actually, not entering into any meaningful negotiations regarding the border issue clearly indicates, that, China is deliberately ambiguous about its claims as this attitude enables it the strategic flexibility to expand its claims whenever it so desires.

CHINA'S GLOBAL AMBITIONS

Since 2007, China had been advocating the ancient idea of “Tianxia”, meaning “all under Heaven or World” as an ideological platform for its “One Belt One Road” initiative. This was presented as a counter to the Western ideas of World order, to promote “political unity and harmony”. This concept, has now become the fulcrum of Chinese foreign policy. Interestingly in 2017 itself the idea to develop a “Community of Shared Future for Mankind” was made part of a United Nations resolution on Global Governance.

After the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, China rose to the challenges of the end of Communism globally, the end of the cold war and then the financial crisis

in 2008- 2010. As Vijay Gokhale writes about the two decades (1992- 2012), “China experimented with bold ideas, demonstrated strategic vision and laid the foundations for the pursuit of Global Power”. This set the stage for the grand global initiatives and hegemonistic tendencies demonstrated by China under Xi Jinping, who was elected President in 2013. The Western response to the Tiananmen massacre as well as the study of causes for the fall of Global communism hardened the Chinese stance towards the West and thus emerged the rivalry with the United States.

China had by 2012, accumulated large foreign exchange reserves, acquired Western technology and skills as well as established control over a large number of raw materials globally. Noteworthy is the fact that all this was achieved as Gokhale aptly puts it “without attracting hostile attention or making adversaries and the rare sounds of alarm were smothered over by clever foreign policy”.

The Chinese projected their Global outreach strategy as a “peaceful rise” and surprisingly this was willingly accepted by the West due to varied reasons such as American focus on democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia (which unnerved Governments in the region), Chinese financial aid to the countries in the region during the Asian financial crisis (1998) as well as its diplomatic initiatives subsequently. Predictably, in taking these actions, China did not raise any democracy or human rights issues. China also made considerable efforts in resolving border issues with Central Asian republics and set up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 1996. It was only in 2011, that the Americans belatedly realized their waning influence and adverse perceptions vis-à-vis China, announcing their “pivot in Asia”.

The Chinese outreach to Africa actually took off around 2000 in its quest for energy. This was achieved by large scale investments in building roads, railways and ports. China took political risks in large scale lending to countries like Angola, for acquiring oil blocks and building infrastructure. This strategic initiative also resulted in growing support for China in Global institutions and diplomatic initiatives. Strangely, it was only much later, after 2012, the West

started talking about “Chinese exceptionalism in Africa and levelled delegations of them as being self-serving or insincere”

Similarly, China made inroads into the Middle East, becoming the Major arms supplier to Iran and also selling military hardware to Saudi Arabia. These actions secured oil resources and expanded Chinese influence in this strategic region. Astutely, China went about balancing “American unilateralism” by creating or joining major organisations such as SCO, CTBT, Russia-India-China group (2001) and BRICS in 2006 among others.

Growth of Chinese Economy

Since 1992, Chinese economy displayed remarkable growth, rising from a GDP of USD 430 billion to an amazing USD 8.5 trillion by 2012 (more than half the size of the economy of USA), averaging a GDP growth of about 10%. The details of this spectacular economic transformation have been widely reported and it is important to note that this resulted in huge Foreign direct investment (FDI) into China specially after entering into World Trade Organization (WTO). In 2001, before joining the WTO, China’s share of global exports was less than 5 % which rose to about 14% by 2020, becoming the largest trading partner for more than 100 countries. The US, wrongly believed, that the Chinese entering into WTO was an acceptance of the latter of the supremacy of the West, and, would be economically advantageous. Actually, the trade deficit rose from USD 83 billion in 2001 to USD 367 billion in 2015 in China’s favour and loss of huge number of US jobs. Later, issues of unfair trade practices arose only after the Global Financial crisis. Trade and energy linkages with Central Asia played an important role in the Chinese calculus resulting in limiting America’s influence on China’s borders.

‘One Belt, One Road’

The precursor to the official launch of the BRI, was the endorsement by the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in 2013. Later, in October 2017, the Belt and Road was formally included in the constitution of the CPC, thus making it a core

principle in all future actions by the Chinese government including its foreign policy. In May 2017, 29 foreign leaders attended a meet in China during which President Xi Jinping announced the Grand Initiative of “One Belt One Road” (OBOR). Interestingly, the OBOR was renamed in English, as the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) due to sensibility concerns, but in Mandarin the original name is retained (Yi Dai, Yi Lu). The BRI essentially comprises developing large scale infrastructure projects mainly across Asia, Middle East and Africa. India has deliberately stayed out of the BRI due to a variety of reasons.

Acquiring mineral resources from Africa is being seen as a major objective of the BRI, though not explicitly stated. For example, China had imported about USD 1.2 billion worth of Cobalt, an essential metal for lithium-ion batteries (used in electric vehicle market) from the Democratic republic of Congo, thus actually dominating the world market for this critical material in the future.

As Ananth Krishnan notes, “through the BRI what China was doing was staking a claim, for the first time, to Global Leadership.” He further notes that there are three major motivations for the BRI: -

- Secure access in the long term to natural resources and energy of Central Asia, Russia, Middle East and Africa.
- Finding new markets for Chinese companies in the services sector as well as identify markets which can absorb excess capacity for legacy industries (steel, cement etc.)
- Address security concerns by securing its interests in neighbouring countries and bridging jobs to restive areas of Xinjiang & Tibet.

BRI: Global Concerns

The BRI has been deliberately structured to be without any institutional procedures or rules. There are well founded fears that the BRI would lead to a hierarchical system since there would necessarily be interdependence between the participating states. China has been known to exert its political muscle using this very interdependence, an example of which was the Chinese reprisal carried out by closing a key border crossing with Mongolia in December 2016,

shortly after Dalai Lama visited the country, leading to great inconvenience being caused by mining companies.

Also, there is rising concern that massive lending by China in projects in other countries may be used as means of economic coercion and falling into a “debt trap” (lending by China surpasses that by World bank and International Monetary Fund combined). The strongly advocated Chinese idea of a “harmonious world” and “shared destiny” is in itself going to pressurize the countries committed to the BRI to act as per objectives set out by China. The BRI, besides roads and railways includes projects for building telecommunication networks between Asia and Europe “digital silk road”. Herein lies other serious concerns that ecommerce initiatives, based on the planned digital infrastructure, would be dominated by Chinese companies such as Alibaba and also lead to countries giving away valuable data to China, especially in cases where technology is used for security and law enforcement, such as in Zimbabwe

Another risk is due to the fact that Chinese companies are being given projects, without competitive bidding and this would create problem when debt burden of countries become unsustainable. A relevant example of this is Sri Lanka which is one of the countries facing problems to pay back Chinese loans. The total Chinese investment in the BRI is likely to reach USD 1.3 trillion by 2030 if timely repayment of the debt being incurred by the participating countries is done.

Chinese Hegemony in the South China Sea

The PLA Navy which carried out a large-scale expansion and modernization since the early 2000’s, has been used effectively to lay claim to island territories in the South and East China seas and for this the Chinese commenced laying the ground from a legal, historical and factual perspective. Strangely these claims were not based on any agreements or treaties and presented the claims as a fait accompli. This is another example of how China uses ‘principle’ in their territorial claims as a matter of convenience to adapt as per their will, further indicative of their hegemonistic tendencies.

The Chinese hardline attitude in grabbing territory manifested itself when they paid short shrift to the declaration of code of conduct in the South China Sea which they had agreed to as well as using the fig leaf of joint development, joint scientific maritime research and hydroponic survey to hide their expansion. Here, it is important to highlight that the Chinese are extremely concerned about the strategic Malacca Strait referred to as China's 'Malacca Strait dilemma' since around out of the 50% of China's oil supply which comes from the Middle East, 80% passes through the Malacca strait. Therefore, one of the key objectives of the BRI is to ensure security to its flow of resources.

BHARAT'S NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

While India perceives China as an equal, the latter does not believe so citing its much larger economy (five times) with a considerably higher military spending. This is worrisome for India's strategic thinkers who fear that China would force it into a subordinate position, the BRI being one such example. The growing Chinese territorial and strategic ambitions globally are becoming a source of major concern for India from a National security perspective. Some of the major challenges faced especially due to the recent hegemonistic tendencies displayed by China in India's neighbourhood and on its borders, are enumerated below.

Economic Imbalance

The massive growth of the Chinese economy can be seen from the fact that the Chinese per capita GDP being half of Bharat's in 1980 became about twice that by 2019. Although there has been increased trade between the two countries, the trade deficit is close to USD 30 billion and the investments by the Chinese has been mostly in supply of goods and services generating huge profits for Chinese companies.

The imbalance in trade is a source of increased concern in the bilateral relations and although Bharat has sought to take some corrective action such as anti-dumping duties, they are not considered enough. The much advocated

“China+1” manufacturing idea is yet to find traction mainly due to competition from other Asian countries.

BRI and China-Pakistan Collusivity

India’s objections to the BRI mainly stem from the fact that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) runs through POK and is considered a major National Security threat since China would be able to use the infrastructure to exert its military power both in India’s eastern, western and northern flanks. The core of the CPEC is the development of the Gwadar port which being strategically positioned, has a strong possibility to evolve as a Chinese coastal city. China is unwilling to address Indian concerns specially regarding its dealings with Pakistan which has changed from the earlier “balancing act” by the former. Also, a sensitive point for Bharat has been the Chinese assistance to Pakistan in their strategic programs since 1988 and ongoing deep involvement in modernizing the latter’s military.

The Chinese expansionism in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) around the Indian peninsula as part of their ‘String of Pearls’ strategy involves setting up of military installations around peninsular India which is a threat to Bharat’s power projection, commercial maritime activities and territorial integrity. In December 2017, Sri Lanka handed over control of the strategically located Hambantota port to China (lease for 99 years) in return for underwriting the country’s debt. This deal of about USD 1.1 billion is of immense National security concern for India and further events substantiate this as China is involved in training and support to the Sri Lankan Navy, in all likelihood leading to a Chinese naval base in Hambantota in the future.

Border Transgressions

The 2017 Doklam incident was caused by the PLA constructing a road following a ridge that overlooks the 27 kilometre-wide Siliguri Corridor (‘Chickens Neck’) which connects the North-East with the rest of India. The dominance of this corridor and the possibility of PLA troops moving down the valley to cut off this corridor was alarming to say the least. China has

subsequently built-up considerable military infrastructure on the strategic plateau. Additionally, in the western sector, the continued Chinese efforts at denying the Indian Army to access agreed upon areas up to designated patrolling points, especially since 2020, has resulted in gradually nibbling away at the LAC ('salami slicing'). This has serious portents for the sanctity of India's borders as well as raising strategic concerns.

PROGNOSIS

China's population is aging in contrast to the demographic dividend which India is blessed with and this fact coupled with the plateauing of China's economy pose challenges to its stated global ambitions. We can already see India's significant economic growth, enhancing her prestige in the international community and drawing in foreign investments. China is also on guard about the impact of its democratic values on the countries in its neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, India has to rise up to the challenges posed by the rising Chinese global ambitions which is now enshrined in their political, diplomatic and military doctrine and thinking. India's growing National Security concerns due to rising Chinese hegemonistic tendencies in the region need a cohesive strategy and well-articulated narrative. There is a pressing necessity to build up our defence forces specially in the maritime domain as well strengthen regional groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

Building a Credible Alternative Narrative

Indian researchers and strategic thinkers have to delve deeper into our rich historical past and ancient thoughts in political science and strategy to present these as global solutions and a vision for the world. It is imperative to engage proactively with countries specially in Africa, Middle East and south east Asia to present viable alternatives to the Chinese initiatives. There is tremendous opportunity for Bharat to build on its ancient trade and cultural linkages and shared heritage with countries in South East Asia such as Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand.

Enhance Role in Global Affairs

The creation of the “Global south” initiative by India is a step in the right direction. The G20 summit held in New Delhi in September, 2023 saw India’s influence and acceptance of her emerging position by the international community. Another initiative which may be proactively pursued is the ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy as well as involvement in the “International North-South Transport Corridor’ to Central Asia through Chabahar port in Iran. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) Project was signed at the G20 Summit in New Delhi and holds significant geopolitical and economic implications for India. These initiatives being undertaken in cooperation with other countries provide an alternative narrative to the BRI.

Projecting Soft Power and Democratic Ideals

Soft power is going to be a large factor in India’s growth story vis-à-vis China. Bharat has a large population which is familiar with the English language and there is democratic freedom with adherence to rule of law as also vast popularity of her rich and varied culture and entertainment industry. These appeal to the international community and are essential factors in building people-to-people connects with other Nations.

It is an established fact that, being a vibrant, pluralistic democracy, is widely and correctly perceived as not having any expansionist tendencies nor does it meddle in the internal affairs of other countries which strengthens the credibility of Bharat globally.

Shared Interests

Both countries have some shared interests, which may bring about some normalcy into bi-lateral relations, some of which are as follows: -

- Identify joint projects in the neighbourhood, perhaps in Afghanistan to build up trust. Both countries seek a stable Afghanistan so that

infrastructure projects can be rolled out and for China natural resources can be accessed

- Resolution of the Kashmir issue is in China's interest enabling it to develop the CPEC without hindrance
- Participation in trade talks and presenting issues of common economic interests at global level such as the WTO. Identify areas of cooperation on global issues such as climate change, trade participation in international institutions.
- Projecting issues jointly connected with reform of global financial institutions

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the military expansionism of China coupled with territorial ambitions were hidden behind a cloud of deception and the world at large believed in Chinese assurances that their intentions are purely peaceful and not hegemonistic at all. As Bruno Macaes writes in his book 'Belt and Road – A Chinese World order' – "ultimately India constitutes a special challenge to Chinese expansion, because as a separate civilization, tracing its origins to the same axial age five millennia ago, it cannot be assimilated into the expanding Chinese orbit in Asia.

Bharat has to significantly enhance its military capabilities specially in the maritime domain since a two front war has now become a challenge if changed Chinese rhetoric in recent times and its hardened attitude are to be believed. The growing China- Pakistan Nexus is India's biggest strategic and military challenge in the future.

Bharat needs to deepen its efforts under the 'neighbourhood first policy' and presenting ideals from our rich civilizational heritage in a cogent manner would be highly acceptable among Southeast Asian countries. This, based on strong diplomatic initiatives would enable Bharat to present an alternative narrative to that of China's in a global context.

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