

INDIA–CHINA STANDOFF: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA

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Paper Received On: 21 JULY 2021

Peer Reviewed On: 31 JULY 2021

Published On: 1 SEPT 2021

Abstract

Though recent May 2020 standoff that continued between India and China in Galwan valley was not taken by the Indian leadership as routine water testing by the Chinese. India took it seriously and very well managed to handle the aggression on its own and halted the China's backdoor thinking of projecting themselves a superpower at least in Asia. Now it's going to be a normal routine along the LAC as India is now determined to change the ground strategic infrastructure reality along the LAC. By tackling Chinese on its own, India has bolstered its position in the world's strategic power pie chart. Further India need to work on many fronts to meet the challenges and convert these sour relations in a Diplomatic, Economic and Strategic opportunities for India. The aim of this paper is to analyze in detail the India's stand against the PLA's incursion, internal assessment to meet this "going to be routine" challenge on LAC and further considering the India's population, market size and china's sour relations with neighbors, it's time for India to encash the opportunities out of such attempts from China.



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India and China are on border standoff since 05 may 2020 in Galwan River Valley in East Ladakh. It's all started by the Chinese People Liberation Army (PLA) who objected our soldiers from patrolling Pangong Lake that resulted in a fierce scuffle among around 250 soldiers of both sides and there from the continued standoff has positioned the two Nuclear Trans-Himalayan neighbors head to head. India and China share a border line of 3488 km and there have been many such scuffles on LAC issue in the past from Arunachal Pradesh to Ladakh. The series of the skirmishes erupted between India and China after the Tibetan Uprising in 1959 when India granted asylum to Dalai Lama and that series concluded in the 1962 India-China war. The last much known face to face skirmish was long back in 1967 in Nathu La and Cho La wherein India achieved a decisive tactical advantage and China had to withdraw. In 1986 India granted statehood to Arunachal Pradesh and that once again irked

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China and that led to another standoff of Sumdorong Chu in 1987 and it was one of the incidents when India and China were on the verge of war. However the India Forces swung into action through operation Falcon and Chinese had to withdraw. In addition to few low profile skirmishes like Depsang in 2013, Chumur in 2014, the last known Doklam standoff happened in 2017 wherein Chinese tried to construct road in Bhutan's Doklam and on Bhutan's request, in the light of the 1949 India-Bhutan Treaty superseded by 2007 New Friendship Treaty making it mandatory for Bhutan to take India's guidance on foreign policy, India objected the Chinese advancement with firm footing and ultimately after 72 days of standoff Chinese had to withdraw. There are around 20 disputed locations along the LAC and many rounds of the talks have already taken place in last 50 years on the border row. However no firearms or gunshots have been reported from LAC in the last 50 years. As per Govt observation 2019 has seen more LAC violation than in 2018. Further unlike the past standoffs, the present conflicts have erupted at more than one point. If I look into the past and analyse the present regional and global political/economic/strategic developments, I dig out the following **apparent reasons that have brought the two Nuclear Powers face to face**:

➤ In August 2019 Home Minister Shri Amit Shah roared in the Sansad that Aksai Chin is ours and we will take it back. In the same session Sansad scraped the Article 370 and 35A, a special provision given to J&K. "Kashmir is an integral part of India, there is no doubt about it. When I say Jammu and Kashmir, I include Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin, both are included in the territorial boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir,"-speech of Home Minister in the Sansad. This statement of Shri Shah and scraping 370 heavily irked China and Pakistan and consequently China raised this issue in UN four times but in vain hence with a view to reaffirm their claim on Aksai Chin plateau, China appears to have fired their plan B in the form of latest Ladakh standoff.

➤ By the recent development from the Indian Meteorological Department issuing the daily weather forecast of PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan and Survey of India showing Gilgit - Baltistan and Aksai Chin in the Ladakh UT, India has once again, after the Home Minister's assertion in Sansad in Aug 2019, strategically signaled Pakistan and China to reclaim the Pok as well as Aksai Chin as per Sansad Resolution 1994 where in Parliament resolution was adopted unanimously by both Houses on 22 February 1994, that the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh have been, are and shall be an integral part of

India. These all the developments came as a sock for China and Pakistan and this amounted one of the reasons China blowing hot air in Ladakh with a view to discourage us but in vain.

➤ Due to Corona virus, China is at the receiving end for causing the massive loss of human lives and many countries including USA have intensified a demand for the probe about the origin of the virus as they think that Corona was strategically developed in a lab by China. The whole world is reeling under it and even the best medically equipped country toppled in front of Corona. Many countries directly or indirectly expressed concern on the role of China on delayed disclosing the outbreak of Corona and even WHO accepted it. Now USA who has withdrawn itself from the WHO had repeatedly demanded for an independent investigation in the issue and proposed Taiwan which is an anti China country to be a global observer wherein India diplomatically supported and these all the activities must have irked China very much. I am of the strong view that the recent faceoff with India created by the China is a Chinese attempt to divert the global focus from this Corona episode.

➤ Another smoldering reason for the standoff is more than 60 billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Since CPEC lies in PoK/Gilgit-Baltistan and that India has already registered its claim on the PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan many times hence China has a perception that in case India attempts to take over PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan then CPEC may go in a rough weather. Further China also knows that if India makes its presence in Gilgit-Baltistan which directly face the Aksai Chin then it will become another direct strategic point for India to set guns towards Aksai Chin and will ultimately be a setback for the BRI and One China concept.

➤ One of the main reasons is the rapid speed of the construction of the strategic roads and other Defence logistical infrastructure along the LAC in the last 4-5 years which has socked the Chinese. Not having any such infra in 1962 was a main reason of the debacle. China very well understand that these border roads and other infra will bolster India strategically and is a threat to the China occupied Aksai Chin which is very important link between Tibet and Xinjiang and if India establishes a strong infra along LAC and particularly in Ladakh then they will be one step closure towards the goal of obtaining Aksai Chin. China does not like a infrastructural and strategically stronger India in the Ladakh region.

➤ China has always tried its best to keep India limited to the South Asia Box but due to the vibrant personality of the Prime Minister Modi and his convincing approach in reaching out to the world leaders and getting their favorable strategic support for India (its pertinent to mention here that United Nations Security Council P5 leaders visited India within 100 days of the Modi Govt which indicate that how India become important for the world affairs after a huge victory for a leader in the general election) does not go well with China who thinks that India's growing reputation on the Political/Economical/Strategic map is a setback for them in becoming a big power regionally and globally. It's the India's diplomatic reach that India was invited as the Guest of Honour in the meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Countries in 2019 whereas Pakistan being a Islamic country was not invited. Further in 2020 USA invited India officially for the G7 meeting to be held in September this year with a view to expand elite group G7. New Delhi's "Act East" policy has been of a great success. The above feathers in the India's diplomatic achievement irritate China who does not want any other country in South and South East Asia to be on par with.

➤ It's also an attempt of the Chinese leadership to divert the attention of the Chinese citizens from the internal issues that have brought the stake of the Xi Jinping at a lower level. Few of them are like human rights violation in Hong Kong and other part, trade and political standoff with USA, the Taiwan's inclination towards USA and India; huge political freedom demand gearing up in China, worsened unemployment situation and that of Xi Jinping himself facing huge discontent within his own Communist Party.

➤ Few strategic endeavors that India carried out in the last five year like 2015 Surgical strike in Myanmar to eliminate Naga insurgents, 2016 Surgical strike in Pakistan against Uri incidence, 2017 Doklam set back to China and 2019 Surgical Airstrike by IAF in Pakistan to avenge Pulwama sent strong signals of India's growing military will power to the world communities. China having aspiration of becoming a world leader cant digest such neighbor and always ploy something to pull India down and the current standoff is one in the series.

➤ Another threat totalitarian state China facing is from the military alliance of India, USA, Australia and Japan (Quad) that is well capable of changing the scenario of Indo-Pacific region, economically they can imbalance Chinese economy and can even impact OBOR project. China sees Quad an anti China grouping and has raised objection many times by issuing formal diplomatic protest to its members.

➤ The setback received by China in Doklam after 72 days standoff did not go well in China as there was intensive domestic criticism of the Chinese leadership and this Doklam episode undermined the Chinese stature in the region. Ladakh standoff may be an attempt to polish their domestic reputation.

However the standoff is continue despite few rounds of talks on military and diplomatic forums. China, not giving sanctity to the talks, kept on building the military strength during these talks hence India is also augmenting the preparation. However as per my view the following **challenges India will have to address** if this standoff continues or escalate:

❖ India is the 2nd most populated country of the world hence counts the 2nd largest market for the world business and as per WEF, we are poised to become the 3rd largest Consumer Economy of the world by 2020. In such scenario it's a challenge for the strategic think tank as how to convert this 2nd biggest and populated market as a weapon for the Economic Warfare against China. Since China is having a very big participation in Indian domestic market hence India can't ignore China on every front of the economy though we can set our priorities of participation and strategically choose to close the avenue for Chinese investment in selected sectors. It's good that government has already started applying this tool.

❖ Though due to sour and totalitarian nature of China, the relations with many countries including the neighbors are not on the good terms and these countries will directly or indirectly support India in case of border scuffle but ultimately and in reality India has to fight the Chinese challenge on its own strength, for not only securing its sovereignty but also cementing its International and Asian power share and it would be the most challenging task for Indian strategic and diplomatic think tank.

❖ We have 3488 km long LAC with China and it's a good augur on the part of India that present Indian Govt has made a great intention to make LAC strategically infrastructured with necessary military logistical establishments. In the current scenario when China is trying its level best to stop these activities, then it's a challenge for India to continue with the border project to wave a strong signal to China. Even when the standoff is continue, India sent the labourers on LAC from Jharkhand for resuming the infra work and it is really a commendable stand that New Delhi took during the standoff and it should be continued.

❖ Since China while engaging us in the talks during this standoff, strategically augmented its military presence in Ladakh hence India need to be cautious of this tactics and

keep on building our military and other strategic logistical preparation along the LAC on a war footing. Though India too has mobilized its resources very prudently but it will really be a challenge for us to be vigil and proactive all along the LAC to thwart any Chinese knock.

❖ Since China has made huge investment in the neighboring countries like in Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar and will try to get their support hence India has to work overtime to keep the inclination of these countries towards us. Pakistan may be handled through USA and Nepal through our past relations (it is pertinent to mention that due to change of Govt in Nepal, there may be an inclination of Mr Oli towards China but Nepalese as a whole are intact to India due to our old cultural and domestic relations) and others by our prudent bilateral relations wherein we are doing very fine in the leadership of PM Modi.

Having discussed the reasons and the challenges out of this standoff, let's explore what could be the opportunities India can pocket out of this situation. A great nation always strives for creating the opportunities even in the adversity. Japan has remained a palpable example for the whole world as to how it became one of the largest economic powers of the world even after nuclear attack on them. Our Prime Minister Shri Modi has always been echoing while addressing the nation on Corona Pandemic that 'We will work for the opportunities even in this adverse Corona period'. Here in this Indo-China recent standoff can also be explored from other angle i.e opportunities hence when I analysed the overall scenario on LAC then I inclined to workout as to **what opportunities India may en cash out** of the happenings with China on LAC?

✓ China is the 2nd largest economy of the world and eyeing to overtake USA in the next lap and therefore can't take a risk of losing India's market which is 2nd largest market (as per population) and 3rd largest Consumer Economy of the world, if they really want to remain in the race of the world's economy powers. Going by this logic I am of the strong view that China will not wage a full scale war with India so as to avoid the Indian's boycott sentiments against Chinese products and investments. Hence in such strategic scenario India is having a fair opportunity to use its market power to fix China and intensify the Economic War as well as aggressive Military and Diplomatic approach against China. The recent debar of the Chinese companies from BSNL/MTNL/Railways contracts and banning the Chinese Apps etc are the steps taken in this direction and one can see how the Chinese diplomatic

setup is under pressure from the Chinese business communities to be lenient on their approach on LAC.

✓ The China is having border disputes with many neighbors like Taiwan, Tibet, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines and India itself. Now India is having a bright strategic opportunity to rope in these anti Chinese countries to create a new front and pressure group against China on International Economic as well as on Strategic forums. The aggressive approach of Taiwan, Tibet exile Govt, Japan and of Vietnam against China can be felt by us during recent spans.

✓ Due to this acrimony in relations with China, the boycott Chinese products sentiment among Indians is at all time high. In this favorable anti China wave, India has a very bright opportunity of boosting its domestic products and markets. Even many investments will gradually be leaving Corona impacted sluggish Chinese market which ultimately will provide an opportunity for India to provide them a platform to invest in India.

✓ Since China is vying to scale itself up to a world power but knows that India is an emerging Military and Nuclear deterrent power and in such scenario they will not like to engage with India in a full scale war as their failure to contain India will be a great loss for the China in the International power share. Hence nuclear deterrent India should be opportunistic to take on China aggressively on LAC against any Chinese intrusion attempt and keep on trying to get our Aksai Chin back.

✓ On LAC there are many confrontation flashpoints with China. In case Ladakh standoff with China goes on for a long time then India is having an opportunity to engage Chinese on those points wherein their strategic position is weak.

✓ If India successfully contains China in Ladakh standoff then it will not only be a psychological setback to Pakistan who is also an immediate adversary of India but also a dwarf size feel for Pakistan in front of new strategic elevation of India in this case.

✓ Though India need to work overtime to swing a diplomatic favor from the world community on the Ladakh standoff but India need to take it as an opportunity and solve this standoff on its own. It will not only cement a strong position for India in Asia but will also elevate India to a new position in the international power distribution and will change the dimensions of the global politics.

✓ Our Military is well acquainted with the strategy of Pakistan on the western borders due to their long engagement over there. Now on the eastern sector it's an opportunity for India to plan a strategy as per the movement and the probable positioning of PLA. So in my view it's going to be a Strategic Laboratory for Indian Forces along the India-Chinese border.

✓ Considering the adversary with China, India need to revisit the policy of not intervening in Taiwan–China issues. Now India should support Taiwan on the international forums to weaken the One China concept.

✓ It's the best time and opportunity for India to make Quad more strategic and relevant having learnt the recent standoff between China and Quad nations USA, Japan, Australia and India itself. It's all known that a fierce trade war is going between USA and China. Japan and China are already on a sour relation due the conflicts on Senkaku Island. Recently the Australian Cyber Security Centre's (ACSC) issued advisory against the possible cyber attack on Australian computer systems. So we can see here that almost all the Quad countries are on loggerhead with China hence it's a best time for India to explore and forge a strong strategic relation with the Quad nations and try creating a much impact and decisive force like NATO in Indo-Pacific region.

So far the diplomats of India have shown a much matured trading on the Ladakh issue and almost all the major countries including Russia have backed India up on our stands and thus it's the bravo for both, the Defence Forces and Diplomacy that compelled China to revert in Ladakh. Top leader's like PM, Defence Minister's visit to the Ladakh during this standoff has bolstered the confidence in the Indian leadership. Going by the first aggressive and offensive move by the India since the conflict started in May, the Indian Armed Forces have taken over the firm control of the strategically important Kala Top and also Indian Navy has quietly deployed the Warship armed with Bramosh Supersonic Antiship Missile in Malacca Strait which is not only a strong signal of the Indian intention along the LAC but also a paradigm shift in New Delhi's approach towards China against such misadventures.

Though compelling China to go back is a clear edge for India as for as this conflict is concerned. However if we add on India's 2017 successful Doklam stand with China's instant Ladakh debacle then we can very well conclude that India has gained its share in the International Power Distribution. However, going by the Napoleon Bonaparte's word that "China is a sleeping lion", India need a strict vigil not only on the LAC but also in world

diplomacy loaded with our own economic market power. India has recently moved at least 50,000 additional troops to its border with China with a firm intension of an offensive military posture against the world's second-biggest economy. Now it's time for India to meet and thwart the challenges arisen out of Ladakh standoff with firm footing and avail the opportunities that comes out of this and en-cash them Diplomatically, Economically and Strategically. This is also time for each and every Indians to add to the nation at this junction.

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