

Ten months into a border standoff in and around India's Galwan Valley, there is still no sign of military de-escalation and rapprochement between the Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

Several rounds of peace talks have failed to yield a helpful outcome. While China is keeping India engaged in a dialogue giving false hopes of credible tranquility along the borders, it does not seem genuinely interested in de-escalating tensions.

China's recent contravention of the confidence-building measure agreed upon on Sept. 21 last year that neither side will send further troops to the front line proves it beyond doubt.

Instead, China consolidated its position in eastern Ladakh by deploying more troops, artillery and ammunition. This contravention casts doubt on the sincerity of the entire dialogue and throws open several questions about China's territorial ambitions and strategic posturing toward India.

Last year's Galwan standoff between India and China is different from the 2017 Doklam standoff and the 2013 Daulat Beg Oldi standoff on several counts.

Arguably, one of the most important reasons is that today's China is different from that of seven years ago. Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平) has since systematically accumulated more power to the extent of almost centralizing it in his hands with no checks and balances within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

With no term limits and the so-called "anti-corruption" drive to discipline party elites, Xi has become the epitome of power in China. Under Xi's leadership, the world is witnessing a more assertive and confrontational China.

Beijing wants to establish control over some sections of Indian territory so as to gain a strategic edge over India. Aggressions in the eastern and western sectors of the mutual border make

China's dominance agenda apparent.

China's vulnerabilities with regard to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan government in exile, a dispute with Bhutan, and attempts to use Nepal against India as a strategic tool are all part of Beijing's long-term strategic designs.

China is mindful of the long-term challenge that India poses to its hegemonic designs in Asia.

India was the first country to have raised concerns about China's Belt and Road Initiative, and became the only country to not send representative to its two Belt and Road Forums.

In the initial years of the initiative, China was keen on including India and tried to convince it of the benefits of participating.

However, realizing India's resolute stance on its sovereignty, particularly with regard to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Beijing stopped persuading India and turned confrontational.

The fact that the initiative has become Xi's political legacy item, especially after its induction into the CCP constitution, makes it an important factor in China's perception of India. Beijing finds it unpalatable that India stands up to its regional designs.

Notably, with the exception of Taiwan, none of China's neighbors, including Japan and Russia, have turned the initiative down.

Just like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, India's participation would have added credibility to China's flagship infrastructure and connectivity project. That India deprived China of this advantage was not taken kindly by the Xi regime.

Time for Taiwan, India to team up

Written by Rahul Mishra

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China has always been wary of Asia's major and middle powers aligning with the US to form a common strategic platform against it.

In 2007, when the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was proposed by former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, China vehemently opposed it, leading the member countries to abort the mission in an untimely manner. In hindsight, that was one of the critical but shortsighted and fumbled steps on part of the Quad members.

It is worth noting that China's aggressive postures toward Taiwan and India rose over the past 10 years.

Nevertheless, after the Doklam standoff, India shed its inhibitions, and so did other partners, such as Australia, helping the Quad take a more concrete shape.

Beijing understands that India's strategic swing toward the US would be the tipping point for China in the Asian strategic dynamics. Therefore China has been trying to dissuade India from engaging with the Quad.

It seems rather contradictory, but the Wuhan informal dialogues between China and India in 2018 on the one hand, leading to the so-called "Wuhan Dialogue Spirit" and the "Chennai Connect," and the Galwan border clash between the two Asian giants on the other are part of China's attempts to dissuade India from inching closer to the US and its allies.

China does not want India to get the limelight in the Indo-Pacific region, because of Beijing's concerns over the US playing the China card former US president Richard Nixon played against the Soviet Union. India's enthusiasm for the Quad has caused much concern among Beijing's foreign policy mandarins.

It is beyond a doubt that China's irresponsible attitude led to an uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finding the rest of the world under the pandemic, China is exploiting the opportunity to consolidate its power at home and abroad.

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China's aggressive postures toward Taiwan to the extent of denying it entry to WHO fora on the pretext of the "one China" principle, repression of the democratic movement in Hong Kong and incessant cruelties against Uighurs in Xinjiang are cases in point. While crushing domestic unrest and challenges such as a looming power supply shortage, China is trying to flare up nationalist feelings toward its neighbors to deflect its vulnerabilities.

India is not alone on the list. Taiwan, Bhutan, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, South Korea and Vietnam have over the past few months also faced Chinese aerial, maritime and land boundary incursions.

The China-US trade dispute, economic coercion against Australia and threats to invade Taiwan are some other notable examples. A sheer look at Chinese social media platforms clearly demonstrates this trend.

Last year will go down in history as a watershed moment for India-Taiwan relations as well. China's aggression against India has led to an anti-China mood in India, particularly among young people on social media.

China's international behavior, and contrasting approaches of China and Taiwan has opened up a hitherto unknown affection among Indians for Taiwan.

As much as India would want to resolve its disputes with China, the appreciation and urgency to engage Taiwan is not to go down. India is mulling over the possibility to engage Taiwan on an even keel with China, without using it as a card against Beijing.

Considering China's lack of appreciation of India's territorial sovereignty and sensitivities, it is becoming increasingly apparent that Beijing does not find maintaining cordial ties with India a useful and beneficial proposition.

It is timely for India to strengthen the Quad and build partnerships with like-minded countries in

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the region, including Taiwan, and find a lasting collective mechanism to effectively deal with the China threat.

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