

China Responds to India's Military Presence in Border Regions

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Chinese security analysts on South Asia, as well as its decision-making elite and state controlled media have been critical of Indian military presence in the border areas adjoining China. In a commentary published in the mouthpiece of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) earlier in November 2011, the Indian military presence and preparedness in the border areas adjoining China stretching from the northern sector through to the eastern sector has been put under the scanner by Beijing. Beginning with the premise that India's "military surge" is aimed at a "rising China", the piece referred to "certain Indian elites which see China's peaceful development as a threat." The commentary laments Indian military presence especially in the bordering areas around China as "more of a political move than a military one."

Meanwhile, an edited and translated version of the commentary mentioned above was simultaneously run by the state-controlled *People's Daily*, in which the abrasive Chinese position on the East China Sea and South China Sea was underlined yet again. Nations with an "envious, jealous and hateful attitude toward China" have been singled out toward bearing the responsibility of any potential "changes in the international and regional security landscape that shall negatively impact upon China." However, the *People's Daily* states that these actions "will benefit one country: India.

Authoritative commentaries running in the Chinese media tend to support maintenance of peace and stability along the Sino-Indian border, but caution China regarding the threat coming from India's military build-up in the border. In the October 2011 edition of *Shijie Xinwen Bao*, Wu Minjie argues that in recent years, India, taking China's strengthening of its troop deployment in Tibet as pretext, has all along been indulging in a continuous expansion of its troop strength in the Sino-Indian border region. Wu especially notes the deployment of additional two mountain divisions, Arunachal scouts, Su-30 MKI fighters, T-72 main battle tanks and other advanced equipment in the borders.

Chinese scholarship outlines the border dispute, the Tibetan issue, and China-Pakistan relations as major issues between the two nations. Continuing to describe Arunachal Pradesh as "Southern Tibet" in an effort to create politico-diplomatic pressure against India, many Chinese publications note that "above 7 million Indian immigrants are currently in "Arunachal", which in number exceeds the total Tibet population." It needs to be underscored here that Indian Minister Pranab Mukherjee had stated long back, "China is often making claims on Arunachal Pradesh ... which regularly elects two representatives to the Lok Sabha and there is an elected state assembly carrying out the responsibility of administration like any of other 27 Indian states. The question of parting company with Arunachal or any of its part does not arise."

Chinese publications such as the *Huanqiu Review* while referring to border talks in October 2011 has stated that China and India have large and serious differences on some aspects of the 'political parameters and guiding principles.'" It has added that "though India is not enthusiastic in becoming a pawn of others, it has its own 'imperial ambition', but looking from the angle of real politics, it is still important for China to avoid hostility with India and seek its cooperation.

In this reference, the agenda of the recently concluded East Asia Summit incorporated a wide canvas, with an attempt of keeping the divergence pertaining to the South China Sea, out of the purview of the summit. Notwithstanding the intent, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India sent out a clear and firm message to his Chinese counterpart, Wen Jiabao by choosing to reject Chinese objections to the Indian presence in the South China Sea. Stating that Indian interests were "purely commercial and that sovereignty claims must be resolved according to international laws", Singh visibly admonished Chinese claims over the issue. The response by the Indian Prime Minister came in following Wen Jiabao's warning that "outside forces" should refrain from getting embroiled in the South China Sea dispute. Wen

further expressed, “The dispute which exists among relevant countries in this region over the South China Sea is an issue which has built up for several years... It ought to be resolved by countries directly involved... Outside forces should not, under any pretext, get involved.”

It would only be pertinent to point out a critical dichotomy in the Chinese position on the above-mentioned issue. All this while China has been claiming and asserting what it terms as “indisputable sovereignty” over sections of 1.2 million square miles in and around the South China Sea. Interestingly, Wen’s statement above acknowledges, “the dispute” which “needs to be resolved” with countries that are “directly involved.” China needs to clarify its position on this contradictory policy posturing. Given that China reaffirms that it would “commit itself to becoming a force for peace and stability in Southeast Asia”, current trends in Chinese policy-making do not seem to conform to the above intent.

The state-run commentaries in question have referred to the spread of the “China threat theory” in India and have come down heavily against New Delhi for “holding joint military drills with China’s neighbouring countries... showing it evidently intends to contain China.” In the past four decades, the PLA has been critical of “Indian hegemony” in South Asia. Even while willing to enhance confidence-building measures (CBMs), PLA assessments constituents still express concern about Indian hegemony in South Asia. While writing in the *Liberation Army Daily* more than a decade ago, Li Yanan, stated, “Since the 80s, India started pursuing a policy of “regional deterrence” and a military strategy aimed at seeking a strong military... consolidating [its] gains, containing China and deterring Pakistan, controlling weak and small neighbors, and intercepting big power penetration outside the region, thereby clearing hurdles in its path towards becoming a world power.”

Further, another analyst, Wang Ming has argued that in order to control the Indian Ocean and compete to become a big power in the world, India has embarked upon a military modernisation programme. Wang pointed to Indian plans to become a “futuristic military” by increasing the technical arms of the services; transforming the Army into a “strategic strike service.”

The Chinese cacophony as it raises loud objections over India entering into joint oil and gas exploration projects in two columns of Vietnamese waters of South China Sea is more than evident. However, China has chosen to be extremely coy and non-committal, when it comes to explaining its position vis-à-vis its own activities in India’s backyard. Beginning with the nuclear arming of Pakistan, the influx of Chinese soldiers in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK)

that has illegally been occupied by China and Pakistan, in order to enhance connectivity with Pakistan, and maintain a constant military presence near India, will surely have direct military implications for New Delhi. Additionally, providing diplomatic support to Pakistan's position on Kashmir, by means of issuing stapled visas to people hailing from Jammu & Kashmir, attempting to make inroads not just in India's immediate, but extended neighbourhood, aiming to counter India and assert maritime dominance in the northern Indian Ocean, are just some of the vital issues for which New Delhi is yet to receive any answers from Beijing.

Stressing upon the significance of India's demography, Valerie Niquet stated in *China News Analysis* (Taipei), "Even though tactically Beijing acknowledges the demographic importance and the cultural prestige of India, it is not ready to share its supremacy, strategic and economic, with its Asian neighbour. Like the Sino-Japanese relations, the Sino-Indian equation hinges on the scope of China's ambitions, the nature of the Beijing regime, and the overall issue of leadership in Asia."

Instead of China expressing concern regarding Indian military presence and preparedness in the border areas, it is India that perennially needs to remain cautious in the backdrop of China's ongoing military modernisation campaign for the past three decades. Increased Chinese deployments in and around the Tibet Autonomous Region, reportedly include placing of advanced Dong Feng-21 (DF-21) medium-range ballistic missiles, coupled with plans to shift airborne forces at short notice to the region—thus making it imperative for any nation to question China's long-term politico-military intentions.

New Delhi should carefully factor the mixed trends in China's policy towards India in its approach to Beijing at this juncture. On the positive side, Beijing is coming out with favourable responses - readiness to resume defence dialogue with India, promotion of the process towards formation of "Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China border Affairs" and hosting of India-China first Strategic Economic Dialogue. On the negative side, the PRC maintains uncompromising positions on issues relating to its territorial sovereignty and integrity like the Sino-Indian boundary under 'core interests' principle; it claims entire Arunachal Pradesh as part of China and on India's participation in oil and gas exploration in South China Sea, it strongly opposes New Delhi's stand. China's leading party-affiliated paper *Global Times* has lambasted India's South China Sea project in Vietnam as 'serious political provocation'.

Today's realism, by and large, is still determined by virtue of nations consistently pursuing their interests that can be interpreted as "power". China will have to accept, sooner or later, that it alone cannot define the future of Asia's destiny, and would have to negotiate realistically on the politico-diplomatic front with other nations, most importantly, India.

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