

## **General**

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) organised a Round-Table discussion on “India-China Relations” on 20 September 2011 at the CLAWS campus. The discussants were Prof Huang Jing and Prof Kanti Bajpai, both from Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore National University. Views on the subject were given by Maj Gen GD Bakshi (Retd). The discussion was attended by a select gathering of members from the strategic community and the CLAWS faculty.

### **Opening Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal, Director CLAWS**

India and China are rising simultaneously. While relations between the two can be said to be stable at the strategic level and the economic co-operation is also strong, the relationship at the tactical level remains contentious. The territorial dispute between the two countries is a potential source of conflict in the future. There are ‘perceptual differences’ with regard to the border. Both sides patrol up to their perception of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Even though there is low probability of a war between the two, a minor confrontation between the border patrols could result in a more violent conflict. Keeping in view China’s close relationship with Pakistan, it would be prudent on India’s part to be prepared for a conflict on two fronts.

### **Prof Kanti Bajpai**

Prof Bajpai stated that he along with his colleague Prof Jing was engaged in a joint project on ‘India-China relations and the prospects of conflict and cooperation’. The focus of their project was on the security aspects of the relationship in which they would be covering the following:-

- The border situation
- The military balance (including nuclear weapons)
- The state of CBMs, India-China-Pakistan, Tibet, Central Asia, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and North Korea.

The demands of both countries for food, water, energy, and strategic minerals are another important aspect of their relationship. As India and China continue to experience high rates of growth, their demand for these four resources and their effect on the environment will increase.

With the increase in demand and the worsening of the environment, the two countries could come into conflict on a whole range of new issues. Some aspects of this are now being seen in the competition for resources in Africa, parts of Asia, Latin America, and perhaps even in Europe. The situation as existing could lead to either cooperation

between the two countries based on mutual interests or it could lead to conflict. Preferably, the two countries should be thinking of ways to avoid conflict and laying the foundation of cooperation. Some however would view this as too utopian an idea.

### **Major General GD Bakshi (Retd)**

While it is good to believe that the two countries can cooperate on many issues, one cannot ignore the military reality and Chinese assertiveness which will make any cooperation unlikely. By the year 2009, there were significant policy shifts in China. The PLA now seems confident that its two-decade long military build-up has now reached a stage where it can take care of any adversaries in its Asian backyard.

This hubris and self-congratulatory tone was blatantly evident throughout 2009.

The Beijing Olympics were China's coming of age party. Next was a series of high profile military exercises significantly targeted not at Taiwan but at overland Asian adversaries like India and Vietnam, or even intervention in the Koreas. There have been unprecedented levels of nuclear proliferation and conventional military support that China has provided to Pakistan. Given the stark security consequences of this Chinese support and the levels of nuclear and military parity engendered between India and Pakistan, such denial is dangerous. What was most significant, however, was a series of some 23 major military exercises culminating in the large scale military exercise called "Kuayue" (or Stride). Four divisions from four different Military Regions (MRs) of China (Lanzhou, Jinan, Guangzhou and Shenyang) took part in this exercise. All previous Chinese military exercises have focused on Taiwan and rehearsed for an amphibious assault. This was the first major exercise not focused on the renegade province but on overland military operations against possible adversaries like India and Vietnam.

The current change in China's military profile is clearly indicative of an acceleration of the Chinese pace of military transformation. India's military modernisation, on the other hand, is lagging far behind schedule, by almost a decade. There is an urgent need to speed up our weapons' acquisition and military modernisation process. China's 'Exercise Kuayue' may well turn out to be a long overdue wake-up call.

Another aspect of the equation is the water conflict. The Chinese leadership has always thought in hydrological terms. Hence its very early attempts to seize Tibet and assume control of the water tower of Asia. That is why the Chinese leadership invests such strategic significance in the TAR. Even today many top Chinese leaders are hydrological engineers. In fact Prime Minister Wen Jiabao is a Geological Engineer and President Hu Jintao is a Hydraulic Engineer. The plan to divert the Brahmaputra was initially mooted by a Chinese Engineer and he elaborated the idea of a massive Shuomatan Canal. This canal would take off from the bend of the Yarlung Tsangpo and

divert its water to the North of China. This grandiose plan was vociferously supported by Gen Gao Kai of the PLA.

### **Prof Huang Jing**

Rising as status quo powers, India and China have a shared demand to reform the existing world system, so that it can continuously facilitate, rather than hinder, their development. This explains why on major global issues — from environmental concerns to food security and from restructuring the world financial system to trade policies — India and China are naturally on the same side.

Bilateral cooperation also serves the interests of India and China on other more pressing issues. There is a looming crisis of water in India, China and all the Asian-continental countries, where the flowing water comes from the same place. As water has become a vital economic resource and an important strategic asset, bilateral cooperation between the two big powers in Asia is the key to solve this problem. Confrontation will only make everyone the loser.

Nowadays, India and China are also find convergence on the Pakistan issue. Lingering instability, rapid expansion of fundamentalist influences, and persistent military dominance since the start of the Afghan war have dramatically increased Pakistan's profile in China's security concerns. China and India will have to work together to promote stability and development in Pakistan, with a military under solid civilian control and an economy integrated regionally. It is high time for China and India to make a joint effort to promote bilateral exchanges and, specifically, to institutionalise bilateral summits and high-level dialogues. It is necessary to promote and sustain a peaceful and constructive relationship between the two rising Asian powers, whose success is essential for peace and prosperity in the entire region.

From China's perspective, India should build credible deterrence in the region to counter China. There are conflictual interests; however the challenge is how to manage the issue in a diplomatic manner so that any massive conflict could be avoided. As it is for sure, that if a war takes place, both sides are sure to lose.

### **Discussion**

- Strengthening nuclear deterrence for peace on ground
- Economics interdependence and challenges of internal consolidation and development are also important.
- Terrorism/ Islamic extremism is the long term trajectory where India and China can work together

- Challenges of the global commons issue are difficult to be solved individually at the state level, even though the GDP might improve drastically in the future.