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By Bhaskar Roy

Indian and Chinese National Security Advisors (NSAs) Ajit Doval and State Councillor Yang Jiechi are scheduled to meet in Hyderabad, India in the first week of November to review bilateral relations and regional developments. Hugging and selfie diplomacy is over. It is back to the brass tracks. Core interests are to the fore.

Doval and his delegation would certainly carry in their portfolios Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman Hua Chunying's press statement on the Pakistani terrorist leader, Masood Azhar in the aftermath of the Goa BRICS Summit (Oct 15-16). Asked about Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's drive to isolate Pakistan diplomatically over Pakistan's sponsorship of cross-border terrorism, Ms. Hua said the following: "We oppose the linking of terrorism to any specific country, ethnicity or religion. This is China's consistent position". She went on to say, "Everyone knows that India and Pakistan are victims of terrorism. Pakistan has made huge efforts and great sacrifices in fighting terrorism. I think the international community should respect that".

Hua Chunying's punchline is most significant and a message to India – that China and Pakistan consider each other "all-weather friends" and have close diplomatic, economic and security ties.

Basically, Beijing told New Delhi to stop banging at the Great Wall on the issue. If at all, India should try and convince Pakistan to declare Masood Azhar a terrorist and, if Pakistan agrees, China would have no problem in designating Azhar a terrorist at the UN Security Council Committee 1267. The importance of Pakistan to China is such that it is willing to block the rest of the members of 1267 Committee to protect their all-weather friend. Another thing to note here is that China does not evoke the “all-weather” friend construction frequently in official statements. That they used it now should be viewed with the importance it deserves.

Does China love Pakistan? Chinese love is conditional, that is, what is there in it for China. And Pakistan is geographically located in China’s global ambition and its own strategic security. It provides dependable trade routes and energy routes from the Gulf and Africa. China’s outreach to Central Asia through a land route also goes into China’s calculation.

The only consensus in Pakistan is that China is the Holy Grail. The other is that India is their perennial and existential enemy, though that is being questioned very recently from some astute and liberal sections.

While China will not budge from its Pakistan policy, Beijing leaders cannot be too happy with political parties going after each other and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) figuring in some of these do-or-die political fights. China would prefer a stable Pakistan as the rest of the world does, but its paramount drive for “rejuvenation” appears to supersede all else.

The expansion of the Islamic state or Daesh should be on the agenda on the NSA’s meet. Although this organisation has been facing reverses in Iraq and Syria, it has found like-minded groups in South Asia and Central Asia. The recent attack on a police training academy in Pakistan was a coordinated enterprise between the Daesh and a faction of the Pakistani terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LEJ). Elements of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have migrated to the Daesh, who have established a hold, however small it may be at the moment in Afghanistan. The Chinese media has recently said that the IS has been spreading its influence in the Central Asian countries where a sizeable number of Uighurs are located. The attack on the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan last month was mounted by Chinese Uighur separatists with some assistance from the IS.

If China does not recognise the inter-linking of these ultra-religious terrorist groups they would be creating security threats for themselves. China and its interests abroad are targets of the IS.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang has warned that China-India relations would be harmed if the Dalai Lama is allowed to visit Tawang. They also protested US Ambassador Richard Verma’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh and perceived the visit as an US attempt to interfere in the India-China border issue where peace has been hard earned.

The basic premise is that China holds Arunachal Pradesh as disputed territory which they call South Tibet. India cannot accept that because

China's grounds for claim are at best flimsy. An argument that the 6th Dalai Lama was born in Tawang and, therefore, part of Tibet and China is specious. According to the practice of searching for the Dalai Lama, the reincarnation can be born anywhere.

According to the 2005 agreement between India and China on modalities for border demarcation, settled population areas cannot be exchanged in the ultimate settlement of the boundary issue. China has been trying to wriggle out of this agreement.

On the India-China border issue, New Delhi may have to delve deep into Chinese statements including the official media, and actions. One Chinese oft repeated offer was if India made concessions in the East, China would "consider" concessions in the west. The Chinese incursions in the Western Sector were to keep India awake. Actually, as the old Chinese saying goes, "Make a feint to east and to attack the west". In this case the feint is to the west to attack the east. China is well entrenched in the Western sector and really does not need much more. The Eastern sector is their upper most strategic interest. A strong Chinese push in this sector will come in another 15 years or so, after they resolve the Taiwan question and the South China Sea issue.

Recent developments have raised some curious questions on China's position on the Kashmir issue. China holds that Kashmir is a disputed territory. If a disputed territory is to be respected internationally, then the Chinese have no business to involve themselves in road building (CPEC) and other activities in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). It does not matter if they are economic activities or anything else. Such economic constructions can turn into military infrastructure at any time.

This, the Masood Azhar case including cross-border terrorism from Pakistan and India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) are among India's core interests where there can be no compromise. Even this week's India-China discussions in Beijing did not see any forward movement.

China's new concern about India is New Delhi's position on the South China Sea issue. India stands by the International Tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea while China rejected it with harsh words and unfounded allegations. While China proclaims adherence to international laws, it repudiates with impunity such laws when it suits them.

China perceives a growing India-US-Japan triangle to counter China. This is a serious topic of discussion in Beijing's policy making circle. They fail to understand that the cold war concept of relations has been dead for years. In fact during the Cold War Beijing played with the US and Pakistan against the Soviet Union and India. It does not take time for them to switch sides and use propaganda to justify their position each time.

China must study closely and get a clear idea about India-Russia relationship and why it had crests and troughs. But there never was an adversarial relationship between Moscow and New Delhi or the Russian people and the people of India. There has always been the element of trust between the two sides, unlike the lack of trust between the Chinese and the Russians.

The Chinese side may raise the issue of boycotting Chinese goods from some sections in India. This is not engineered by the government of India, unlike the Chinese manipulating people soldiers against the US and Japan. Many people in India are angered by China's support to Pakistani terrorist leaders attacking India. These are free emotions unlike the Chinese ones.

Even if China blocks trade and investment with India, India will not be a great loser. Bilateral trade is heavily loaded in China's favour. In the last fifteen years Chinese investment in India has been a mere US \$ 1.3 billion or so.

India and China share a 4000 km border. Geography cannot be wished away. In the interest of peace, stability and development both sides should navigate with sensitivity towards the other. Terrorism is not a good weapon to try and diminish India's potential. There is an old adage "Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind".

(The writer is a New Delhi based strategic analyst. He can be reached at e-mail grouchohart@yahoo.com [1])

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