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India's China Policy Reset 2018 Strategically Inadvisable without India Stipulating Benchmarks for China

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India once again stands plagued reminiscent of 2004-05 with China throwing “thaws” and seconded by Indian China-Apologists and some in the policy establishment arguing for a reset of India's China policy and all without advocating ‘benchmarks’ for China to change its India-policy.

Analytically, China's present political “thaw” reachout to India does not suggest that China by some divine revelation has been inspired to attempt better relations with India. The Indian policy establishment should read China's intentions accurately. In 2018, China has been forced to play such a hand as a tactical short -term ploy for the sake of political expediency to offset the not so benign security environment imposed on China in the Indo Pacific.

Perceptionally, after the Doklam Military Standoff in 2017 when India finally “unshackled itself from the Nehruvian timidity of not confronting China” any quest for “thaws” in 2018 is misplaced and more significantly a “Perceptual Disaster” for Modi Government and the personal image of PM Modi himself.

India has compulsively been weak in divining China's underlying intentions right from Indian Ambassador K M Pannikar in the late 1940s, to iconic Nehru's total blindness to Communist China's duplicity and on to China's military adventurism against India in 1967 and 1987 and heightening of border incidents ever since present Chinese President Xi Jinping assumed power in Beijing.

It is well said that those who ignore the lessons of history are compelled to repeat it. India in 2018 seems set on being hustled into a wrong divining of Chinese intentions once again. China has neither diluted its decidedly anti-India strategy nor visibly exhibited any indicators of changing so as to infuse confidence in the Indian public opinion.

In Communist China public opinion does not count but in India in 2018 no Government of any political dispensation can conduct its China policy behind closed doors. China by its aggressive instincts and aggression has caused deep scratches on the Indian peoples psyche

The prominent opposition in India to an Indian reset of its China policy in 2018 with no commensurate strategic and geopolitical gains should prompt PM Modi and his pro-China advisers to proceed with caution.

Reflected in my Book 'China-India Military Confrontation: 21st Century Perspectives' (2015) one had stressed the propensity of the Indian foreign policy establishment to jump and 'embrace' every "thaw" that China spasmodically keeps throwing at India, without realising that there is a serious geopolitical context which India fails to exploit.

This propensity of the Indian policy establishment not only distorts long range perspectives of India's China policy but it also sends wrong political signals to Asian capitals and seriously distorts India's security postures, force structures blueprints and war preparedness. Moreso, when it is widely accepted that India is faced with a two-front military threat by the China-Pakistan Axis. Can India be oblivious to this enhanced threat engineered by China?

Reverting back to the context of China's political reachout to India, one needs to recall the 2004-05 contexts. That period saw a flurry of high-level visits by Chinese dignitaries and academic delegations stressing better China-India relations. This was to prevent or pre-empt India moving closer to the United States and the negotiations for the US-India Civil Nuclear Deal.

China's then political reachout to India ended with the signing of the US-India Civilian Nuclear Deal. Thereafter China's political and military support to Pakistan increased and also tensions on Indian borders with China Occupied Tibet.

The context in 2018 for China's political reachout to India is provided by China's virtual isolation globally, the growing China-India confrontation geopolitically and economically and more worrying for China the addition of substantive military contours to the US-India Strategic Partnership.

China's target in both 2004-05 and in 2018 is to act as spoiler or disruptionist to prevent the growing geopolitical and strategic convergences that are emerging between the United States and India extending from Afghanistan to the South China Sea and the overall security template for Indo Pacific Asia.

In 2018, what is also visible is that of India in the lead with Japan giving shape to the American vision of Indo Pacific Security template and the Quadrilateral focussing on China's unilateral aggressive moves in South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The stirring impulse for China for 2018 political reachout to India is to drive a wedge in the US-India Strategic Partnership and also Japan-US relations. The Chinese aim is to unravel the United States strategic blueprint on Asia Pacific security which shrinks the space for China's hegemonistic adventures.

Does India have to assist China in doing so when it without any remorse or apology tramples wantonly on India's strategic sensitivities?

Surprisingly in the 2004-05 context it were Chinese dignitaries and high level delegations that were making a bee-line to New Delhi, but in 2018 what is visible is that the traffic in 2018 is in the opposite direction.

Indian Foreign Minister. Indian Defence Minister and the Indian National Security Adviser's multiple visits to China followed by today's announcement that PM Modi would be visiting China for informal discussions sends the wrong geopolitical signals worldwide.

The above is a tacit admission that India is succumbing to China's political and military coercion which perceptionaly is as bad as losing to China on the battlefield. Do we as Indians feel compelled to create these perceptions?

Perceptionaly, this intensive 'Indian dignitaries pilgrims' heading to China signals that India is once again falling in its habitual propensity to "clutch at crumbs of thaws' thrown by China. Only 'tributary states' made a bee-line for the Chinese capital.

Political, diplomatic and military stances ever since mid-0204 of China have been decidedly adversarial against India. It includes hardening of Chinese military postures on India's Himalayan Borders with China Occupied Tibet and the intense prowling of Chinese nuclear submarines and naval ships in India's vicinity in the Indian Ocean.

Then what has changed in the period 2014-18 in terms of "Strategic Distrust "that has hovered menacingly over China-India troubled relations? Contrarily China has hardened its adversarial attitudes towards India. Or PM Modi's advisers on India's China policy have other divinations on China's adversarial stances against India? The Indian strategic community and even at the global level have no doubts that China is the long term and most geopolitical and military threat to India.

The Indian hype on the forthcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in China in June 2018 is flawed and misplaced. India is no gainer in terms of its national security interests by joining the SCO) . By joining the SCO, India is now thrown in the company pf China, Pakistan,&-Russia--all not well-disposed towards India and all anti-American in intent and inclinations.

Does a vibrant and audacious India under PM Modi seriously consider that it is worthwhile for India to throw its strategic weight behind an anti-American Coalition?

This in terms of strategic perceptions worldwide places India in the China-Russia orbit pitted against the United States. Is that the geopolitical message that India wishes to convey to the United States and the West & Japan and Vietnam?

Indian political leadership and its policy planning apparatus in 2018 need to face the stark reality that the United States & West and Japan are India's 'Natural Allies'.

In an age of geopolitical uncertainties and till such time India gathers and harnesses its strategic and military power, India needs to manage the China Threat by balance of power strategies in which the countries stated in the preceding para are India's 'Natural Allies'. Surely India's China-apologists are not suggesting that China and Russia have emerged in 2018 as India's 'Natural Allies'?

Conceding that the adversarial impasse in China-India relations needs to be broken but then one cannot escape the question that does it behove on India only to reset its China policy? Is there no corresponding obligation on China also to reset its India Policy? If so then what initiatives as the more powerful actor in this China-India power tussle has taken to lower China's adversarial profile against India? None so far as China in its arrogance of power wishes to politically and militarily coerce India and other nations which stand up to China.

India therefore needs to stipulate benchmarks for China as it proceeds to attempt resetting its China policy in the vain hope that possibly China has turned a new leaf in its relations with India. India should not unilaterally jump at Chinese "thaws" without a conditional stipulation on China to turn the leaf.

Imperative benchmarks that need to be stipulated by India for China and which China should adhere to if it genuinely wishes an improvement in China-India relations: (1) China has to concede 'Strategic Equivalence' and equitability in its bilateral approaches to India (2) China needs to "Genuinely Reset" and move away from its existing templates on Pakistan and India's neighbourhood (3) China needs to remove all nuclear stockpiles and nuclear missiles from Tibet (4) China must desist from its shielding of Pakistani Jihadi terrorists in the United Nations by vetoing resolutions to that effect (5) China must accept India formally as a Nuclear Weapons State and give up its opposition to India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and (6) Stop balancing India by use of Pakistan as the regional spoiler state (7) China must cease its brutal suppression in China Occupied Tibet.

Would China opt to adhere to these benchmarks that India wishes China to adopt and concede? India be rest assured that China would not concede to any such benchmarks in its arrogance of power.

India's China Apologists advocate that in the interests of better China-India relations, India should not insist on any stipulations as pre-

conditions. On the contrary such China Apologists advocate that it is India which should respect China's strategic sensitivities. Implicit in such advocacy is that India should present the other cheek when it comes to China NOT respecting India's strategic sensitivities. Preposterous to say the least, is it not?

So what are India's options? 'China Appeasement' even in its remotest connotation is not a viable option for India if it has to retain the stature of an 'Emerging Power' that India has won after decades of misguided and appeasement policies and the global community has endowed on it in recognition of India's rise as a benign power.

The other end of the spectrum in terms of India's options in its China policy is to adopt "China Engagement Policy" something which one has recommended for more than a decade. Such a policy would ensure that India while not losing sight of containment of China's adversarial postures against India is yet reasonable in engagement of China in non-military dimensions. Or would the Indian China Apologists agree to designating such a policy as India's "China Hedging Strategy"?

Concluding, it needs to be stressed that in 2018 it is high time that India moves decisively away from timidity in its policy approaches on China and gets into a strategic mode of proactive China policy rather than a reactive mode of clutching "thaw crumbs" thrown by China. China's political reachout to India needs only to be seen as a tactical ploy impelled by political expediency of the security environment imposed on China.

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