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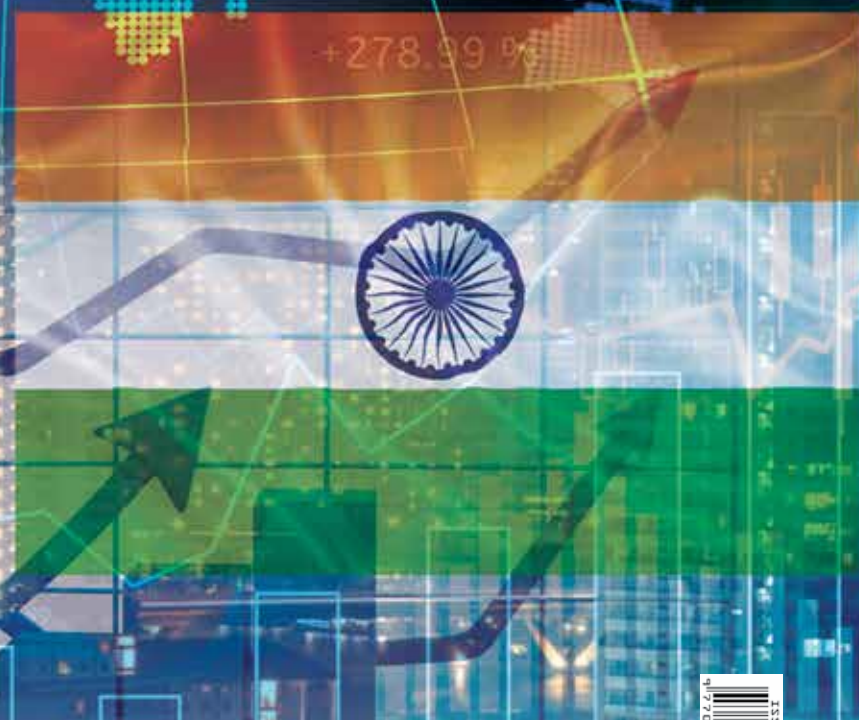
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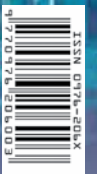
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GLOBAL TRENDS AND INDIA'S ROLE



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CONTOURS & SHAPE OF FUTURE SINO – INDIAN CONFLICT

India needs to quickly catch up economically for the well-being and prosperity of its people. India's priority at this stage is to build a better India as part of the 'Build a Better World' initiative. Militarily too, it must do a lot of catching up.

In the context of any conflict between India and China, there is a perception that China is not in a hurry to resolve the border disputes. The underlying reason being that it views its relations with India as contentious given its expansionist design. Since the taking over of China by the Communist Party led

by Mao Zedong, it has gradually assimilated Xin Jiang and Tibet. It is now slowly but firmly increasing its influence on the neighbouring countries of India such as Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. As far as Pakistan is concerned, it is now more or less a vassal of China. In addition, China has kept the Line of Actual Control



Mao Zedong.





(LAC) on the boil by raising disputes all along the borders. The two countries often describe their relationship as higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the Oceans. In any conflict between India and China, collusiveness between the two countries is almost inevitable. We also need to consider two additional factors while arriving at the likely shape of any conflict between India and China. Firstly, no two nuclear states till now have ever fought a full-fledged war. Kargil War between India and Pakistan was a highly restricted and limited conflict and hence falls under a

low-intensity conflict paradigm. The second aspect which we need to factor in is the long-term intent of Xi Jinping which is, "to make China by 2049, a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious". The shape of any future conflict will be impacted by these factors.

Likelihood Of A Full-Blown Conflict

Given the two major factors highlighted earlier, the most relevant and important question that confronts us is, 'Is there a possibility of full-blown conflict

The **two countries** often describe their **relationship as higher** than the **Himalayas** and **deeper** than the **Oceans**



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in the near term? This question would also need to be looked at from the perspective of the fact that China considers India as its regional adversary and the US as

its global rival. Normally as per Chanakya's theory, we should naturally try to align with the US. However, the global order that confronts us today is more challenging and complex for India. We are still heavily dependent on Russia for our defence equipment needs. Further, since the Ukraine War, due to sanctions imposed on Russia by the West, most of the oil and gas needs of the European countries are now being met by Middle Eastern and Latin American countries, this has forced India to make up its oil and gas requirements from Russia and Iran. So, we need to carefully craft our approach at the diplomatic and military levels to ensure that we do not get embroiled in any undesirable major conflict with China pushing back the ongoing good run of economic growth of the country. Analysing from the Chinese perspective, would Xi Jinping like to go in for a major conflict with India? Given, the economic downturn with Chinese growth projected at 3 to 3.5 per cent and the next three years' projections only marginally improving to about 4 per cent plus; any war will setback the growth clock of China further thereby seriously jeopardising its intention to build a prosperous society by 2049.

The other major sustainable development parameters of China are also not proceeding as per plans. China is facing serious challenges of water security with most of its rivers drying up, leading to food shortages in 2022, forcing it to resort to the import of food grains. Another sector that is under threat of a major slow-down is its real estate sector. It has been drastically affected by people unwilling to pay up for the houses booked by them. This has led to a large number

of assets lying incomplete or has become non-performing assets. A few high-tech US companies in the semi-conductor industry have exited China due to the US preventing the technical manpower

from working in China. Another setback that China is facing due to the downturn of the economy is that it has dropped ten places in the failed state index and is placed at No. 54, whereas India

China considers **India** as its **regional adversary** and the US as its **global rival**





is at the 93rd position. (Lower index indicates worsening of the situation.) The zero Covid policy of China has also contributed majorly to the overall worsening of the economic situation in China. Finally, we have the nuclear factor which continues to function as a deterrent between the two countries. The foregoing argument indicates less likelihood of a major conflict between the two countries.

Similarly, is India in any position to resolve its border dispute through military options? Very unlikely, in the near to medium term. India needs to quickly catch up economically for the well-being and prosperity of its people. India's priority at this stage is to build a better India as part of the 'Build a Better World' initiative. Militarily too, it must do a lot of catching up. We need to be aware of the

collusive threat, our sensitive internal security situation in Jammu & Kashmir, and above all, the need to transform our defence forces from a buyer's armed forces to a maker's armed forces. For this to happen, our Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative must succeed for which we need time and resources. And of course, the nuclear overhang will continue to impinge on our military options.



Chinese President Xi Jinping (L), has stayed relatively quiet about the June border skirmish. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the country is "capable of giving an appropriate response," if instigated.



This video frame—taken from footage recorded in mid-June 2020 and released by China Central Television on February 20—shows the Galwan Valley clash between Chinese (foreground) and Indian troops (background).

Likely Conflict Scenarios

Xi Jinping’s recent statement that ‘China to become more adept at deploying its military on a regular basis and in diversified ways to enable it to win ‘local wars’, provides a clue to the likely Sino – Indian conflict scenarios. The likely current conflict scenarios that we may confront are low-level border conflicts limited in the application of force and space. These are likely to play out more in the grey zone using tool kits such as information operations, cyber-attacks, legal warfare, cartographic warfare, and support to terror groups in the NE inimical to India. In the military domain, conflicts are likely to be restricted to border skirmishes. However, the possibility of a short intense border clashes to gain operational advantages or claim local-level

Above all the need to **transform** our defence forces from a **buyer’s armed forces** to a **maker’s armed forces**

territorial advantage cannot be ruled out. The incentive to indulge in such a move by China could be driven by its desire to showcase the coming of age of its modern military, teach India a lesson and put a break on the economic growth trend of India.

As far as clashes over unsettled borders are concerned, there are 10 disputed locations in the Eastern (Arunachal and Sikkim), three in the Central (Uttarakhand) and four locations in the Northern Sector (Eastern Ladakh). In addition, Unarmed Violent Clashes

of the Dolam, Galvan and Yangtse type would remain omnipresent on the table. We need to keep reading the situation and strengthen our intelligence and surveillance mechanism to proactively respond and not get taken in by surprise.

Limited Conflict Scenario of the Kargil could also take place over thinly defended areas in Eastern Ladakh, Uttarakhand, and Arunachal Pradesh and for this our responses must be well rehearsed with forces re-balanced and relocated dynamically based on enemy posturing from time to



An Indian Army convoy moves along a highway leading to Ladakh, which borders China's Tibet, June 2020.

time. Mobilising forces from one sector would be the most difficult challenge especially the decision-making to do so. Intelligence, surveillance, and real-time communications with the forces on the ground are the key to success.

However, the real threat of the future is likely to come from the Grey Zone. It is the most possible conflict scenario which is not only going to play out in the near to long term but would dynamically change forms and evolve rapidly given the advent of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. The tool kit of a grey zone that is rapidly being adopted by major powers, especially the US, Russia, China, Israel, Iran, and Pakistan are information operations, cyber-attacks

against organisations, financial institutions, and infrastructure, economic coercion, legal misrepresentations, cartographic manipulations, diplomatic orchestrations (wolf warrior diplomacy is an example), covert operations and media operations.

Recommended Response

As far as preparedness for an all-out war is concerned, it is reiterated that “despite the nuclear factor and stated aim of becoming a prosperous nation by 2049 by China, India must work towards having a viable conventional and nuclear deterrence in place. Indian Military strategy for China must be based on threats emanating from our adversaries including grey zone threats. For this, the higher defence management

and decision-making matrix must facilitate initiative-taking and timely response including a pre-emptive response. Our ISR capability must be enhanced and integrated with other national and international resources. The tri-service capability must become the thinking parameter of any operation irrespective of where it is taking place in the country. Strategic deterrence must be backed by credible conventional deterrence. Integrated Theatre Command Structures are getting unduly delayed and must be raised post haste. Finally, our war-waging and sustenance capability must be continuously enhanced as we are unlikely to get the unending support that Ukraine is getting in ongoing Russia – Ukraine War. 