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The Current and Strategic Affairs Forum

Beyond Disengagement

Webinar Summary Report

Publishing date : 12 July 2020

Published by : CASA

Acknowledgements:

The Webinar “Beyond Disengagement” held on 12 July 2020 at 1800 hours, was organised by The Current and Strategic Affairs Forum. The organisers would like to thank our keynote speakers Mrs. Nirupama Menon Rao, IFS (Retd) who was the former Indian Ambassador to USA, China and Sri Lanka, as well as former Indian Foreign Secretary, Lt General Vinod Bhatia (Retd), PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd) former DGMO and currently Director, Center for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), Lt General PR Shankar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) former DG Artillery and currently Professor in the Aerospace Department, IIT, Chennai for their comprehensive analysis, past experiences and for candidly expressing their views.

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A special note of thanks to Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM (Retd) currently Director NDMA, Chancellor Central University of Kashmir, Lt Gen Sanjiv Chachra, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), former GOC-in-C Northern & Western Command, Lt Gen PR Kumar, PVSM, VSM, VSM (Retd), former DGMO, Lt Gen Ranbir Singh, PVSM, AVSM & Bar, YSM, SM, ADC (Retd) former GOC-in-C Northern Command and former DGMO and Lt Gen K. Surendranath, PVSM, AVSM**, SM, VSM (Retd) for their inputs during the session. We would also like to thank the many other distinguished attendees including many senior retired veterans, business leaders, professors, think tank contributors, analysts and others who shared their inputs and views with relevant questions through the interactive Q & A and chat sessions.

We would like to thank Lt Gen Gautam Moorthy, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC (Retd) as founder of CASA for his energetic and motivational role in guiding the CASA Core Committee to facilitate the webinar, bringing together the distinguished speakers and contributors. We would also like to thank Mr. Manoj Mohanka, our anchor moderator of the CASA webinars for moderating the webinar professionally, Maj Gen Deepinder Singh for organising the webinar and Mahadevan Shankar, core committee member of CASA based in Australia, for contributing with his vast experience, well informed views and global business expertise of past 25 years.

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Overview:

The third webinar organised by CASA was set in motion by Lt Gen Moorthy at 1800 hours on 12 July 2020. In his opening remarks Lt Gen Moorthy introduced the keynote speakers, Mrs Nirupama Menon Rao, Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, and Lt Gen P.R. Shankar for taking valuable time out of their busy schedules to address the webinar. Lt General Moorthy also acknowledged the presence of other distinguished attendees who held senior positions in the Indian Defence Forces and thanked them as well as the other attendees who included many reputable business people, economists, professors, faculty members of key institutions in India & overseas, reputed think tank contributors and other key influencers who have an important role to play in shaping the Current And Strategic Affairs of India to secure its long term economic and security interests in the immediate neighbourhood, Indian Ocean Region and globally.

Presentation:

Mr. Mohanka commenced the discussions by sharing his views about the ongoing situation between India and China at the LAC, the previous CASA webinars about China, with his thrust being the present subject “Beyond Disengagement”.



The keynote speakers shared their views at length on matters impacting India China relations arising from the illegal Chinese incursions along the LAC with Ladakh and other border regions.

1. Views of Ambassador Nirupama Menon Rao:

- a. Ambassador Rao thanked CASA for inviting her to the webinar to speak with highly accomplished veterans and forum members. She highlighted the salient points arising from the ongoing violent confrontation in the Galwan Valley caused by the illegal actions of the Chinese troops on Indian troops.

- b. This, the first incident resulting in loss of lives at the LAC since 1979, has shaken the core and foundation of the India China relationship that was so far moving along the Nixonian principles post the 1988 meeting of leaders of both countries in China. These principles focused on maintaining peace & tranquility in border areas with an agreement on no use of force between both countries which enabled building of trade and economic relations. This further helped build political and strategic dialogue since 2003 which enabled peace and prosperity as twin pillars between both countries. This contrasted with our relationship vis-à-vis Pakistan.

- c. The Galwan valley attack by Chinese troops on Indian patrolling troops has become a turning point in the relationship between



both countries and has shaken the foundation of the relationship. India never envisaged the issue coming to such a pass causing 20 Indian troops being killed in action. The Chinese continue to remain incommunicative as always on various matters, including the actual number of their casualties of their own troops killed by Indian soldiers on 14/15 June 2020.

- d. The LAC western sector stretches from UT of Ladakh to Xinjian to Tibet and this ~ 850kms of border between both countries was never defined or clarified.
- e. Experience with Chinese diplomats is that they are not so positive in that they are most incommunicative and deliberately vague on most issues. A senior ranking Chinese diplomat had once stated in the context of the LAC that it has not been drawn on their maps nor even figured out in their mind. As such, they have deliberately kept their options open to interpretation since they illegally occupied a major part of the Union Territory of Ladakh (Aksai Chin) in 1950s.
- f. The DBSO road building work is ongoing with BRO actively involved and the expected completion of all such major infrastructure is 2022.
- g. Whilst troops of both countries have been exchanging blows after crossing into each other's areas of perception of the LAC, no live



firearms were used as per signed agreements. This was the first time the Chinese troops used barbaric primitive weapons with treacherous intentions attacking Indian soldiers. The fallout is that this has shaken the foundations of the relationship between both countries. There is only one option left now which is to restore status quo ante by China.

- h. The question as to why immediate action on the ground was not taken during the Chinese buildup on their side of the LAC is something the GoI and the IA should answer in due course.
- i. It is encouraging that the high-level talks at Lt General level between both armies have resulted in Chinese troops agreeing to de-escalate and disengage. The Indian Defence Minister has stated the actions are work in progress. However, one needs to know how long it will take for full disengagement and restoring status quo ante.
- j. It is pertinent to remind everyone to be cautious as there is no guarantee that the Chinese will honour their words based on past experiences. The battle of Ussuri River between China and then USSR was a good example for such distrust of Chinese leadership.
- k. The current leadership of China under President Xi is entirely different from Mao's China. The current Chinese leadership is losing friends globally at a rapid pace since the outbreak of the



COVID-19 pandemic originating from Wuhan in China. In this context, will the agreements that were signed between 1993 & 2013 hold?

- i. To summarise, it is time for India to revisit its partners and friends. It was encouraging to note that GoI has invited Australia to participate in the Malabar exercises and there's ongoing active engagement amongst the QUAD. It may be noted that GoI decision to ban the 59 Chinese apps may have a short-term negative impact on the poorer Indians who were using some of these Apps as a source of income but in the long term it will benefit India.
 - m. In closing, it is important to note that the US Government has recently announced and given direct funding of USD1mn to the Central Tibetan Admin (CTA) located in Dharamshala to pursue efforts for Tibetan causes. (<https://tibet.net/cta-receives-almost-usd-1-million-in-direct-funding-from-the-u-s-government/>). There is very little resilience in our relationship with China. In this chaotic and ill-defined situation, China will try to encircle us strategically. They will continue to resort to diplomatic opportunism and military adventurism.
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2. Views of Lt General P. R. Shankar, (Retd) former DG Arty:

- a. It is important to ensure no second guessing of the ongoing disengagement process at the LAC.

- b. To understand the Chinese more intricately, it is important to do a SWOT on China as a starting point. The SWOT by Lt Gen Shankar was presented in four key verticals – Political (P), Military (M), Diplomatic (D) and Economic (E).

- c. Strengths (P) include China's leadership is in a hurry for global dominance, has ongoing expansionist outlook expressed in Han nationalism, engaging in 3W strategy of psychological operations (psyops), legal and internet warfare (IW).

Weaknesses (P) include jobs & unemployment. China is looking at a grim situation resulting in social unrest as highly likely, multiple fronts opened in Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South China Sea (SCS) to name a few, impact of the virus globally with potential bubonic plague outbreak, second virus wave, ongoing flooding, significant deficiency of international trust amongst entire Western countries, African countries and SAARC (except Pakistan and lately Nepal Communist party government), ASEAN region, Japan and Korea – all of which is creating a need to showcase success despite failures, resulting in increased censorship of social media in China.



Opportunities (P) include their secure control of Tibet and Xinjiang, ongoing complete assimilation of Hong Kong into one China policy, emerging as the only country that has effectively controlled the virus to protect its people and restarting its economy at much lower levels.

Threats (P) are imperial overstretch to superpower status, loss of face internally and globally, second wave of virus and stigma attached, overconfidence resulting in imbalance from one party system, historical ups & downs as experiences in past 4 phases of each 25 years cycle resulting in a conclusion that nothing is long term about China. This is only a myth created by CCP.

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- d. Strengths (M) are China is well equipped, able to seize initiative & surprise, strong missile, cyber & space forces, command, and control systems.
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Weaknesses (M) are combat inexperience of PLA. That India would not back off was not anticipated by Chinese military leaders, high altitude inhibits their force buildup, logistic and air operations with turbulence factors and lack of defences being always in a non-tactical mode.

Opportunities (M) include their intention to have control over SCS and IOR in quick succession and transforming into an experienced



force. India could be on its own with USA & QUAD not able to help immediately.

Threats (M) include they have opened multiple fronts, escalation with potential for nuclear war, miscalculated Indian army resolve & strength with quid pro quo (QPQ) actions, opened an otherwise closed door into Tibet / Xinjiang resulting in possibly serious miscalculation.

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- e. Strengths (D) are well oiled machinery globally, one to one opaque dealing using divide & rule effectively, enhanced control on global institutions like WHO, Pakistan and Nepal being used as cats paws while securing flanks with N. Korea and Russia, and lastly being experienced in isolationism.
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Weaknesses (D) are China is not ready for global leadership, using aggressive threats causing global resentment, wolf warrior diplomacy causing deep wedges in what used to be strong economic relations with USA, UK, Australia ASEAN, Germany, Taiwan, France with all these countries becoming adversarial. The period of strategic opportunity is over as they stand isolated fighting a lone hand without any allies.

Opportunities (D) include lack of opposition unity, USA in decline and likely chaos with upcoming Presidential elections in November 2020, domination of international organisations,



regional leadership using scare factor and QUAD (as also QUAD plus) being put under threat.

Threats (D) include USA resolve to bounce back as it has displayed post 9/11, global financial crisis (GFC) and other economic recession periods as well as multiple ongoing wars in different countries, WHO leadership with India and UNSC membership, QUAD and QUAD plus ties strengthening rapidly, EU eventually aligning with USA for military strength as witnessed in WW2, India opening old Silk Route with USA setting up a permanent island base in the SCS.

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- f. Strengths (E) are a strong economy predicted to grow well, cheque book diplomacy working well, leveraging large market like tariffs & import bans, strong manufacturing base, intertwined with world requirements in almost every aspect of daily requirements including weapon systems, pharmaceuticals and food.
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Weaknesses (E) include de-globalisation and export shocks, made in China 2025 derailed, BRI & CPEC failing, debt bubble with borrower countries seeking full waivers of loans in hundreds of billions of dollars, weakening yuan that's not even 10% of global trade, financial troubles in banking system with major fake gold scams being revealed impacting true gold reserves in China.



Opportunities (E) include increased internal consumption with domestic market, unshackled from global order and rules, creating new structures like Hainan FTZ, Africa and LATAM growing markets, regional dominance with growing health and Digital Silk Road infrastructure.

Threats (E) include exports revival bleak due to ongoing decoupling by many countries targeting 30% decoupling in next 5 years, internal consumption weak due to job losses and lower income levels, BRI & CPEC collapse causing more internal unrest especially with vast majority of retired veterans not receiving pensions, lack of energy security with imports being restricted due to high dependence on the Malacca Straits which is closely monitored by Indian Navy and now US forces in SCS, slow recovery by other countries lowering demand for Chinese products.

- g. In summary, Middle Kingdom vs Modern China is a Myth busting story where past century in blocks of 25 years have proven there is no proven long-term vision of Chinese leadership. Tibet was suzerainty of China and its important for Gol to restart and change this narrative. One China is NOT acceptable to India's long-term interests for maintaining peace in the region.
- h. <https://www.gunnersshot.com/2020/06/profound-myopic-vision-consistent-with.html>



3. Views of Lt General Vinod Bhatia, DGMO (Retd) and Director CENJOWS:

- a. The world is preoccupied with Indo China LAC issues during the past two months.
- b. The present incursions are different from the earlier incursions in Depsang during April 2013, then September 2014 at Chumar which coincided with the visit of President Xi Jinping to India and the 2017 Doklam standoff. These are more in scope, depth and intensity as also are simultaneous at multiple locations.
- c. The Dolam (otherwise known as Doklam) incident resulted in very positive outcomes for India and that was not easily absorbed by the Chinese leadership.
- d. The DBSO road work has been ongoing since 2000 and one cannot attribute current Chinese actions on LAC as solely related to the DBSO road infrastructure construction.
- e. It must be noted that from the Chinese perspective, India has also got away with many actions like creation of UT of Ladakh and other various events like a Minister's announcement of taking back "Aksai Chin" territory.



- f. India's objection to BRI & RCEP has not gone down well with the Chinese leadership who always wanted India to be far behind in the hierarchy of Asian and world power order with China's ambitions of taking over from the USA.

- g. CPEC has given China an alternative route to the Malacca straits which is a jugular in control by Indian Navy through our Andaman & Nicobar island base.

- h. In hindsight, one must be thankful to the Chinese for their actions as the 1962 war witnessed a big increase in Defence budget spending to focus on building up our capabilities. That strengthening of the defence forces enabled us in effectively defeating Pakistan in the 1965 war.

- i. Similarly, the Galwan valley treachery by Chinese army is a wake-up call for India and we need to significantly enhance our capabilities, which is ongoing with urgent procurement of various weapon systems and supporting munitions from different countries.

- j. It is now important for "Strategic Rebalancing" by GoI and reconsider our non-aligned status by aligning with new partners and friendly countries.



- k. The paper written in 2017 could foresee the 2017 LAC event potential due to the various weaknesses identified in that paper. https://cenjows.gov.in/upload_images/Synodos/pdf/200%20pc_Doklam%203%20Fold%20%20_07-09-17.pdf
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- l. Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) of ~ 90,000 strong force needed but we can also revisit other options. The funding was the main challenge in earlier attempts to set up the MSC, but one can easily fund it by reduction in strength of the ~ 600,000 employees in the MoD which is like a white elephant eating away the budget of the Defence Forces.
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- m. The Indian Navy and the Indian Air Force are far better than Chinese with strategic strengths that be brought to bear in any conflict on LAC or entire border up to Arunachal Pradesh.
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- n. There is an urgent need to focus on War Prevention through high level of preparedness whereby the adversaries will not try any misadventure again as they have been doing for the past few decades. This requires higher procurement from overseas partners and buying or developing technologies for production within India.
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- o. Infrastructure development and construction of roads along the border are of utmost priority. Out of the 73 roads sanctioned, 62 have already been completed.
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- p. There is a need for mature assessment of capabilities of all our forces across service lines to avoid any recurrence of reactive purchases to every incident on the border regions.

- q. India needs to focus on and prepare for non-contact and Information Warfare strategies to counter China in future.

- r. Lastly, we need to address and target China's sensitive issues including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang to enable us to have the leverage and revisit the current foreign policy towards One China.

Summary:

The highly enlightening Webinar proceeded for an hour and thirty minutes of searching questions & suggestions from the audience during the debate. The moderator Mr Manoj Mohanka highlighted few of the key roles and options for the Army & Navy and foreign policy decision makers.

Mr Mahadevan Shankar acknowledged and thanked Ambassador Nirupama Rao, Lt Gen Shankar & Lt Gen Bhatia for their erudite and well-informed contributions. The powerful SWOT analysis on China is recommended for GoI and others in the decision-making leadership to

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consider in the ongoing 'Beyond Disengagement' decision making process. Relations with Australia, ASEAN countries impacted by China's actions in the SCS, the increased thrust into QUAD (plus Korea), USA, Russia and other partner countries needs to be enhanced.

The Webinar closed at 1930 hours IST with a vote of thanks by Lt Gen Moorthy to the speakers, attendees, and the moderator for making it a successful event.