

Editor's Note

Assessing India's Geopolitical Threats

What should India's most appropriate response be to the continuing and increasingly intransigent and aggressive posture of India's two long-term adversaries – China and Pakistan—remains the central problem in India's national security strategy. Both individually and in alliance, the two neighbouring states pose security challenges across India's land, maritime, aerospace and other domains, that few other countries face. The means they use are both kinetic and non-kinetic that demand the highest attention of security planners and the defence forces. These threats have been significantly raised by China since its sudden military build-up across the Line of Actual Control and its aggressive military attempts to capture territory in India's eastern Ladakh sector in May-June 2020, and the north-eastern State of Arunachal Pradesh. Its large and expanding territorial claims, its multiple violations of India's sovereignty and formal agreements painstakingly reached between the two countries since 1993, underline the colonial and imperial character of the Chinese Communist Party state. It is not India alone that faces this expansionism, virtually all its neighbours do. Its 'historical claims', that have no legal or moral justification, are aimed to serve a neo-imperial project.

The current issue of *National Security* focuses largely on the Chinese dimension of the threat given its greater potency and urgency in the context of its continuing military build up and threat across India's long Himalayan frontier and its growing activities in the Indian Ocean. It also examines the recently released National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-26, by Pakistan, for any signs of positive change. But as former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Satish Chandra in his incisive critique, observes 'it is long on rhetoric and short of specifics'. He calls the Policy a failed attempt at image-building in the context of Pakistan's worsening international profile. Pakistan's acute economic problems, a dysfunctional democracy that is controlled by the military and fosters terrorist groups against India, Afghanistan, and others, its systematic persecution of its minorities, and its deepening dependence on China are an international embarrassment. Pakistan lives a precarious existence. He draws attention to the absence of any fundamental change in either its hostile military posture towards

India or in its use of Islamic terrorism as an instrument of warfare against India, especially in Jammu and Kashmir. There is no real change indicated in the Policy document.

It is, however, China under Xi Jinping that continues to demand maximum attention in this Issue given the grave and growing multi-dimensional threats it poses to India and other Asian states on its land, air and maritime periphery. Sujit Dutta, in his opening essay in this segment, draws attention to the deep contradictions that have come to the fore in China's assertive and destabilising rise as a great power. Repression at home and military actions abroad—against India, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, and steady occupation of the South China Sea isles and waters, and threat to forcibly occupy Taiwan – have become China's markers of rise as a power. A brewing sense of internal crisis amidst slowing growth and external setbacks are visible signs of a country not in peace with itself or with the outside world.

Gautam Banerjee in his fluid and sweeping survey explores the divergence between 'direction and destination' in Xi's pursuit of the China Dream. He points out that in fulfilment of that goal, the Regime has 'opted to undermine' the stability, security, and progress of Asia. Xi Jinping's stated goals: the unification of Taiwan; the 'recovery' of what the Regime claims to be the 'Middle Kingdom's lost territories'; and attaining techno-industrial-economic hegemony, are underwritten by China's ever growing military power. In its attempts to trample its way through towards its "Dream" the regime not only riles the victims but lays the ground for resistance and united opposition.

In an equally significant essay, Rakesh Sharma explores the strategic context in which Chinese expansionism and aggressive actions along India's Northern Frontier and Indian responses have occurred. He argues that since the 19th Party Congress held in October 2017, Xi Jinping and the Communist Party have systematically pushed the people, the party cadres, and the PLA on an extreme nationalist course to realise the China Dream of national rejuvenation. The incursions in Eastern Ladakh that led to the unprovoked aggression and military conflict in Galwan Valley in June 2020 clearly indicate coercion and intimidation as an integral part of Chinese way of 'realizing its geopolitical ambitions'. It also underlines permanence in China's belligerent attitude. He emphasises that China is attempting to fixate the entire LAC

by settling population in newly constructed 'xiao kang' or prosperous villages along the border, including in Eastern Ladakh's contentious Aksai Chin, and by encroaching into stand-off buffer zones along a Belt of Actual Control! He also draws attention to the PLA's current understanding of modern warfare as 'a confrontation between opposing operational systems rather than merely opposing armed forces.' The Indian Armed Forces, he says, need to create a robust, capable, and adaptable operational systems to fight such a modern war.

Naval Jagota in his essay on the PLA Air Force, assesses its holdings, budgets, roles, and real-world behaviour in the context of East Asia, in order to predict its actions in a conflict. By comparing the capabilities of the PLA with those of Japan and Taiwan he emphasises the imbalance that numbers have created in favour of China in the region. The asymmetry puts enormous pressure on the countries being challenged in terms of budgets and internal public opinion. He observes that the PLAAF has built an asymmetric force in terms of numbers and diversity in the air domain in East Asia much like what the PLA Navy has achieved in the naval domain. The steady stream of its provocative incursions into Taiwanese and contested air spaces provides training and exposure to its pilots. The PLAAF is also using its platforms to gather intelligence and probe the responses of the opponents. Japanese and Taiwanese responses to PLAAF incursions 'have exposed to China, to an extent, the playbook these countries would follow in the event of an outbreak of hostility, and thus provides greater freedom of action' to it, he argues.

Prerna Gandhi describes the many tensions that have come to the fore in the Chinese economy in the post-Pandemic period that underline the complexities and challenges ahead for growth, employment, the corporate sector and technology acquisitions. Clearly, they indicate a deeper structural problem at the heart of the economy. Tibet scholar Sarada Subhash in her strong critique of China's systematic Sinicisation and securitisation strategy in Tibet draws attention to the threat of 'cultural genocide', continuing human rights violations and repression. The policies foisting Chinese language, culture and Communist Party ideology on the hapless and non-violent Tibetans, undermine and restrict the study of Tibetan language, religion and customs among the youth and future generations. They are likely to ensure the demise of an ancient civilisation and culture, she emphasises. It is urgent and essential that the world community prevails on China to change its course.

Finally, in a new section called 'Africa Watch', scholar Samir Bhattacharya writes on the gravity of the civil war in one of the continent's largest countries, Ethiopia, and its import for the region and India. He urges India to actively press for efforts by the world community to end the ongoing massacre, the destruction of the state, and another large humanitarian crisis.

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