

PLAYING DOWN THE CHINESE THREAT

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The optimism expressed by our Prime Minister, Dr Mohan Singh, on the ability of the Indian and Chinese leaders to settle the long outstanding border dispute between the two countries sooner than later, appears to be result of over simplification of issues involved. A deeper analysis of the Sino-Indian relations would show that the dispute between the two countries is not just a simple matter of border adjustments that could be easily sorted out across a conference table in a spirit of give and take but involves a serious case of clash of policy objectives. Interestingly the Chinese Prime Minister has expressed no such optimism. Evidently, being aware of the high stakes involved on either side, which could preclude an early solution to the problem, he is reluctant to make any commitment. Let us see what these stakes are.

Technically speaking, the policy objectives in international relations which every country aims at in pursuance of its national interests may be categorised under either “containment” or “dominance”. ‘Containment’ implies *status quo* in international relations. The aim of this policy is peace because it would create a situation in which all nations submit to the present state of affairs and make no effort which is directed towards change - the cause of all wars. The policy of ‘dominance’, on the other hand, implies change in world order, either for reasons of expansion or for genuinely undoing the wrongs of history. The policies of ‘containment’ and ‘dominance’, therefore, always remain in constant conflict with each other.

India’s policy has always been that of ‘containment’, just wanting to hold what it inherited at the time of Independence. On the other hand, China’s policy is that of ‘dominance’, directed towards a change in world order, with the policy objective of regaining, what it calls, its “lost territories”. What brings India in direct conflict with China is the fact that large chunks of Indian Territory, including the whole of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, and parts of Bengal are included in China’s list of “lost territories”, which it has vowed to regain as part of its official foreign policy objective. To leave no doubt in any ones mind as to their intentions the Chinese continue to project these territories in their official maps as part of their own country. What further provocation on its part would be needed for us to realise the gravity and seriousness of the threat to our security posed by China?

The Chinese claim may look absurd today but even false claims when allowed to lie unchallenged for a long period of time have a tendency to become real. Any false claim, that could be used as a readymade pretext for committing aggression has, therefore, to be treated with as much seriousness and urgency as a genuine one, especially when the claimant country openly insists on retaining its right to recover such “lost territories”. This is in fact what the Sino-Indian dispute is all about. The border dispute, which is being continuously harped upon, is, in fact, only the effect and not the cause of the dispute.

There, nevertheless, appears to be a tendency in our country to play down the Chinese threat. Apparently the effort required to meet the threat from China is so colossal that an ostrich-like policy is being pursued and the threat is being conveniently swept under the carpet. Little wonder that while most defence analysts have been at pains to emphasise the threat to the security of the country from Pakistan few have highlighted the magnitude of such a threat from China. Even when the nuclear threat to the country is being considered, comparisons are drawn with Pakistan and not China, to our greatest satisfaction that we are ahead of the former. No

mention of the existence of such a threat from China is made for fear of annoying the stronger foe and causing the threat to get activated. Remember the manner in which George Fernandes, the Defence Minister under the NDA Government, was literally hooted down and made to swallow his words by his own set-up at the Centre, when he blurted out that China was India's enemy number one. Though the manner in which the Defence Minister had said it could not be considered quite diplomatic, what he had said was true nevertheless. But the flutter, bordering on panic, that his statement created within Government circles reflected the national psyche – of letting the sleeping dog lie in the hope that the dog may never wake up on its own.

Dr Manmohan Singh's attempt to down-grade the Sino-Indian dispute to a mere border dispute that could be settled quite easily is, probably, in keeping with the national psyche of following the easiest course even if it is not the correct one – that of preparing to face the Chinese threat squarely by raising our military strength to the level required for deterring China from recovering its "lost territories" by the use of force. At the end of his three-day visit to China, the Prime Minister is reported to have said that the world respected the strong and not the weak. How true it is what he said but unfortunately while elaborating he mentioned only the economic, political and social strength of a country and not its military strength. While one may understand the compulsions of an economist of the stature of Dr Manmohan Singh, who eats drinks and sleeps only economics, in forgetting to mention military strength as the mainstay of national strength, the nation can forget it only at its peril. Political science believes that diplomacy that may be employed for settling international disputes is no substitute for military strength, as diplomacy to be effective must be backed by adequate military strength. Our *hindi chini bhai bhai* diplomacy failed once for lack of adequate military backing. It could fail again for the same reason. Let us remember that wars cannot be avoided by remaining militarily weak. As per an age old maxim if we wish for peace we must prepare for war. While there is no reason for us to feel unduly suspicious about the Chinese, we cannot afford to be complacent either.

Hitler may have used his maxim that "no country's territories were created by God" and that "all boundaries between countries are the result of aggression at one time or the other" as an excuse for committing aggression for territorial gains, but for us it could at least serve to drive the fact home that territorial sanctity of a country is maintained by force and not merely through the goodwill of a neighbour.