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Chakravyuh We Made

By Manoj Joshi

India needs a more realistic assessment of its Pakistan and China options

The country's foreign and security policy has plunged into a Chakravyuh of its own making. Its major manifestation is the dead end that we have reached in our relations with China and Pakistan, our two principal neighbours, who are simultaneously our principal adversaries and each other's best friends.

The biggest foreign and security policy challenge that we confront is the deepening China-Pakistan relationship. These are countries we have warred and skirmished with, and on their account we have to spend a fortune on our security apparatus.

Faced with this challenge, one would imagine that the principal aim of our government would be to seek to break this nexus, which has been around since the 1960s, by fair means or foul. Instead, however, we have been witnessing a strengthening of that alliance, especially in the last two years. As for the government, it is in a world of its own where it already believes that it is a major world power that can bring its adversaries to heel through a policy of unrelenting toughness.

In the real world, the choices for India are fairly clear – manage ties with the countries in question or engineer change in them. Changing China or Pakistan is too big a task for India to attempt alone. Even the mighty US has tried and failed. Hoping for change to come is a non-option, what is needed is a policy to manage the bilateral problems through dialogue and negotiation in the short term and effecting change with the help of other likeminded countries in the longer. In essence this is what India's policy has been till recently.

And it has achieved a great deal by avoiding a major war with either country, despite our very serious issues with them.

India rightly believes that the forces against change in Pakistan are powerful and insidious, but it is still worth pursuing the path of dialogue and friendship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's approach towards Pakistan, at least to the point, a little over a year ago, when he descended on Lahore to wish Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif “Happy Birthday“, was in line with this.

It's not clear what happened thereafter and the same Modi has since spoken of the need to sanction and isolate Islamabad in virtually every international forum that he addressed. It cannot simply be the crossborder attacks which are fairly minor and had been going on since, at least, 2012. We can only assume that Modi's desire to make peace with Pakistan has been overtaken by his need to win the UP election and thereafter the general election; in both cases, bashing Pakistan and, by inference, Islamism, plays well with his electorate, as against the risk of endangering his political capital through instances such as the Pathankot and Uri attacks.

New Delhi has displayed the same zig-zag pattern with China. In his visit to Beijing in 2015, Modi made an impassioned plea to his counterparts to resolve the border issue.

But since then, New Delhi has adopted a strident and sometimes belligerent attitude towards Beijing on issues that can, at best, be considered trivial – India's membership to the NSG and placing Masood Azhar in the UN's 1267 list. The former appears to be born out of a sense of entitlement, rather than a real need. As for the latter, counterterrorism is better off focussing on eliminating the terrorist, not putting him on some list. Hafiz Saeed has been on that list since 2008 and it has hardly made any difference to him or the Lashkar-e-Taiba.

A third issue relates to CPEC which India says it will not condone because it passes through Gilgit-Baltistan. On the face of it, it looks reasonable, but in essence it means that New Delhi is offering Beijing a Hobson's

choice either accept India's claim on J&K or abandon Pakistan. And it is not about to do either, at least not without good cause.

Defeating the Chakravayuh is not easy , false choices and illusions block the way, and the belief that only unrelenting toughness will work with Islamabad and Beijing. Getting out requires a more realistic assessment of India's options and a willingness to accept the international norm that in bilateral ties, you are expected to give something in exchange for something you want. There are incentives New Delhi could offer contracts for Chinese companies, a face-saving role for Pakistan in Kashmir and so on.

At present all that is on display are disincentives for them. As of now, it would seem that New Delhi is riding on the hubristic belief that friendship with Washington is its key out of the maze. But in the US of today nothing will come for free.



Sun, 05 Mar, 2017

Centre to contest tribunal order on military pay

Says it has no authority and the ruling is 'judicial overreach'

The Defence Ministry has decided as a matter of principle to challenge in the Supreme Court the ruling of the Armed Forces Tribunal to grant non-functional upgrade (NFU) for the armed forces.

While the government is not against the upgrade for the services, its challenge is on principle as a tribunal has no authority to take such a decision. It is "judicial overreach", a senior Ministry official said.

Core anomalies

Last December, the Principal Bench of the tribunal in New Delhi granted the upgrade to the armed forces personnel in pay and allowances in response to a petition filed by over 160 officers. The upgrade has been one of the core anomalies raised by the services in the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations, which are yet to be implemented for them.

The official said the Defence Ministry had been open to granting the upgrade to the services and it was being looked into as part of the four core anomalies raised by them.

"The Ministry is waiting for the elections to get over. They will appeal later this month," another official said.

The upgrade entitles all officers of a batch who are not promoted to draw the salary and grade pay that the senior-most officer of their batch would get after a certain period. For instance, batch mates of a Secretary to the Government of India who have not been promoted will be entitled to the same pay after a certain time lapse.

The Sixth Pay Commission had granted the upgrade to most Group 'A' officers but not the military. Since then, the armed forces had been demanding a one-time notional upgrade to ensure parity.

However, the Seventh Pay Commission (SPC) gave a mixed verdict on it and the issue has since been referred to the Anomalies Committee. A decision is expected by March-end, sources said.

China hikes defence budget by a mere 7%

BEIJING: China has increased its defence budget by 7% for 2017, the lowest increase in seven years and second year in row that the hike was below the double digit mark.

In real terms, the defence budget of the world's largest armed forces, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is likely to be close to the \$145 billion-mark.

China's 2016 defence budget was around 954.35 billion Yuan (\$138.40 billion) and much smaller compared to that of the US, which announced a 10% increase in its defence outlay earlier this week.

Reports say that China understates its defence expenditure, which is closely followed around the world, especially by its neighbours with many of whom Beijing has maritime disputes.

The announcement was made Saturday in the run-up to the beginning of China's rubber-stamp Parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC) on Sunday when Premier Li Keqiang will release the actual numbers.

Fu Ying, NPC's spokesperson, said the increase is in line with China's economic development and defence needs.

"The fresh raise could be the country's slowest defence budget rise in more than a decade, and mark the second time that defence budget dip to single-digit increase since 2010. In 2009, the figure was about 15%," official news agency Xinhua reported

Fu said China's defence spending accounts for about 1.3% of the country's GDP, as

compared with Nato members' pledge to dedicate at least 2% of GDP to defence. "You should ask them what their intentions are," Fu said at Saturday's press meet.

Last year, China's finance ministry had said that the reduced hike was in line with the country's economic slowdown

"We will support efforts to deepen the reform of national defence and the armed forces and strengthen the military in all respects so that its more revolutionary, modern and standardised. We will promote integrated development of the economy and national defence," the finance ministry had said last year.



US carrier 'testing' SCS waters

The flight deck of the USS Carl Vinson shakes as a succession of F-18 fighter jets are catapulted into take-off, emitting a thunderous noise and leaving white mist in their wake.

Crewmen aboard the aircraft carrier scramble to prepare for the next arrival in a frenetic cycle of take-offs and landings involving dozens of aircraft, a dramatic display of American power in the hotly contested South China Sea.

The USS Carl Vinson led a carrier strike group on Friday in waters some 400 nautical miles east of China's Hainan Island and northeast of the Paracels, the island chain occupied by Beijing since it seized control from Vietnam in the 1970s.

China claims most of the South China Sea through which about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year. Neighbours Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims.

China's growing military presence in the waters has fuelled concern in the West, with the United States criticising its militarisation of maritime outposts and holding regular air and naval patrols to ensure freedom of navigation.

Tension between the US and China over trade and territory under US President Donald Trump has been stepped up of late, with fear in the region that the South China Sea, vital to global trade, could become a battleground between the two rival powers.

USS Carl Vinson has been on patrol since February 19 in the South China Sea, amid some confusion about US staying power in the region under a Trump administration with policies skewed heavily towards a domestic agenda. — Reuters



Sat, 04 Mar, 2017

New Defence Unit to Quell Cyberattacks

The US and Soviet Union had their Cold War from the mid-to-late 1900s. Now India is fighting a Code War with its nosy neighbours.

In a bid to enhance its combat capabilities in the virtual domain, the defence ministry is working towards establishing a new cyber agency to tackle attempts by Chinese and Pakistani hackers to break into its systems and networks. “The tri-services integrated defence staff (IDS) is coming up with a unit to tackle the cyber warfare domain and it will be staffed with personnel from all the three services,” senior government sources told Mail Today. The IDS is a tri-services organisation that works directly under the defence ministry but has officers and men from the army, navy as well as air force, and is responsible for tasks and projects involving the assets and men from all three services. “The forces have already started pooling in their resources in the cyber domain under the new agency, which would be headed by a major general-rank officer.

The organisation will have both offensive and defensive capabilities in cyber warfare,” said the sources. The development comes against the backdrop of around 22,000 pages of data purportedly related to submarines that a French government-owned company was building for the Indian navy being leaked to the media last year. There have been thousands of online attacks on various government websites and systems including defence-related ones in recent years, with fingers often pointing towards China and Pakistan.

Till now, the army, navy and air force have their own separate cells dealing with cyber issues and they have also developed individual networks for safe communication and data exchange. The information networks created by the forces are state of the art and are capable of detecting any violation at centralised locations within a few microseconds. “If anybody puts in a pen drive in a computer of the military network, our men sitting in Delhi and other centralised locations can detect it within no time and prevent any leakage or attack immediately,” said the sources. “This step of creating a new cyber agency, which would be a precursor to a cyber command, is in the right direction. Now the focus should be on creating infrastructure for manufacturing totally indigenous information and communication technology equipment,” said information warfare expert Pavithran Rajan. To test its capabilities, the new agency has also carried out its first cyber warfare exercise under which Indian forces carried out attacks on their own networks to check for loopholes and steps required to strengthen the system, the sources informed.

“The forces deduced that cyber should be the first agency to be raised for dealing with the increasing instances of attacks on military networks and systems,” they said. The command of the new agency would be on rotational basis for the three services, which means that if it is first headed by an army officer, he would be succeeded by navy and air force officers. The head of the unit would report to the chief of integrated defence staff Lt Gen Satish Dua who heads the organisation at present. The government had deferred the demand for creation of new commands for cyber, special forces and space under senior lieutenant generalrank officers and asked the forces to first create capabilities for such commands.

The decision to put off the creation of new commands was taken soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi told senior military commanders that while global powers were reducing the number of their personnel, Indian forces were continuously demanding expansion in size. The armed forces had initiated the demand for creation of three new commands during the UPA government where the three services had decided to take one command each for themselves, setting up three army commander-equivalent positions. The country has only

two operational tri-services commands including the strategically located Andaman and Nicobar command in Port Blair, which will now likely have an officer from the navy as its head permanently.

The other tri-services organisation is the strategic forces command, which looks after the nuclear arsenal including the Agni-series missiles for the nuclear command authority headed by the Prime Minister. The government is now considering a four-star officer appointment in the form of permanent chairman for the chiefs of staff committee. All tri-services issues are expected to go to him once the office is created.



Sat, 04 Mar, 2017

NASA to help astronauts grow their food in space

To Send Veggie, A Plant System, On Board ISS

Nasa is sending a self-sufficient plant growth system to the International Space Station (ISS) that will help astronauts grow their own food during deep-space exploration missions.

The new plant system will this month join “Veggie” -Nasa's first fresh food growth system already active on ISS. The Advanced Plant Habitat is designed to support bioscience research aboard the space station for up to a 135-day investigation, and for at least one year of continuous operation without maintenance. “This system requires minimal crew involvement to install, add water, and other maintenance activities,” said Bryan Onate of Nasa. Arabidopsis seeds, small flowering plants related to cabbage and mustard have been growing in the prototype habitat, and will be the first plant experiment, called PH-01, grown in the chamber aboard the space station. The large, enclosed chamber measures 18 inches square, with two inches for the root system and 16 inches available for growth height.

It uses red, blue and green LED lights, and broad spectrum white LED lights. The system's 180 sensors will relay real-time information, including temperature, oxygen content and moisture levels back to the team.



Sat, 04 Mar, 2017

Radiation-proof vest set for trials on mission to moon

A vest designed to shield astronauts from solar particles in deep space is set for trials on a lunar mission ready for deployment on any manned mission to Mars.

The AstroRad Radiation Shield has been devised by Tel Aviv-based StemRad, which has produced a belt to protect workers from gamma ray radiation. The vest would protect tissues, particularly stem cells, which could be devastated by solar radiation in deep space or on Mars, whose sparse atmosphere offers no protection, StemRad's CEO Oren Milstein said.

The vest is made of layers that look like a contoured map and will be tailor-made for each astronaut. Non-metallic protective materials will be positioned on each shield to cover the organs of astronauts. “Our breakthrough has come in creating the architecture of the multi-layered shield to accurately cover the most important organs,” Milstein said.

StemRad said it had proven the concept in the laboratory, but testing would also take place on the Orion spacecraft, set to orbit the moon in late 2018.

Stemrad's chief technologist, Gideon Waterman, said the vest needed to combine density with flexibility to protect astronauts while enabling them to move about as freely as possible.