

China Maintains Quiet Pressure on India

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China continued to exert quiet but sustained pressures on India on the South China Sea issue. Beijing wants New Delhi to endorse its position on UN the International Tribunal award on the South China Sea under the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The Philippines took the issue to the Tribunal over China claiming sea area perceived by Manila as its own. The Tribal verdict went against China. Beijing had declaimed to contest the Philippines at the Tribunal on the grounds that the Tribunal had no jurisdiction. China claims nearly 90 percent of the South China Sea on “historical” evidence which non-Chinese experts believe have no grounds to stand on. The sea is claimed variously by Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. Taiwan’s claim is similar to that of China. On territorial issues, Taiwan and China are in congruence as both sides envisage an eventual unification. China reserves the right to use force to unify Taiwan, which it claims is a renegade province of China. In Taiwan the opinion is divided though a significant number prefer a status quo. Nevertheless, with the return of the DPP government in Taiwan under President Tsai Ing- Wen Beijing smells some moves towards independence.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is scheduled to visit India this week. The main focus of the visit in the G-20 (20 most powerful economies in the world) summit to be held in Hangzhou, China, in September. China expects the South China Sea issue, especially the Tribunal award may come up. The G-20 does not include countries like Laos, Cambodia and Pakistan, most vocal supporters of China. India will be represented, and Beijing wants New Delhi by its side.

On August 9, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sua Chunying announcing Wang Yi’s visit, said he will “communicate with the Indian

side about how to carry forward consensus between the two leaders and enhance mutually beneficial cooperation in different field in a bid to make sure that the relationship will keep growing as planned.

Hua went on to say “China and India have identical strategic goals and their common interests far outweigh their differences, she went on to mention Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to India in 2014 and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to China in 2015. The hard-line Chinese official newspaper, the Global Times warned India should avoid “unnecessary entanglement” in the South China Sea dispute and expressed as “puzzling” India’s interest in this issue. In its usual tenor the newspaper warned India of “risks” and “unnecessary side effects” if India took a different position from China on this issue.

Since the Hague International Tribunal’s award, which is binding on UNCLOS signatories (and China is one of them), the Chinese have been warning and threatening India in various ways.

In April this year the Chinese charge D’Affaires in New Delhi which trying to explain Chinese rights in the South China Sea remarked that in future someone may dispute the ownership of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Very veiled threats are also coming from the Chinese official media and think tanks that if India does not fall in line it will lose in economic terms. Chinese markets will not open up to Indian business and Chinese investments will not come to India. Carrots are also thrown in along with warmings.

When the Chinese official spokesperson says that both countries have “identical strategic goals” and “common interests far outweigh differences”, they need some understanding, instead of declaring these meaningless and fixed Chinese statements.

True, both countries have strategic interest in keeping the disputed border peaceful. That is being done by both sides. Since signing of the “Peace and Tranquillity” (P & T) treaty on the borders in 1993, not a single shot has been fired; Mechanisms have been set up for local commanders’ meetings. Periodic border transgressions may be given the benefit on doubt because of the nature of the borders. But Chinese reluctance to exchange maps of the borders especially in the Eastern and Western sectors and avoidance of forward movement on delimitation raise serious questions on future Chinese intentions. Why is China keeping the India-China border issue alive when it has resolved land border disputes with all other countries? History of Chinese land border negotiations show that they move very quickly if the resolutions serve Chinese strategic planning and advantage.

Obviously, settling the border issue with India on an as-is-where-is basis with some minor adjustments does not suit their India calculations. They continue to claim the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh on specious grounds.

Their aggressive claims on South China Sea with military backing, and similar show of force when claiming the Japanese held Senkaku

islands in East China Sea are points on the graph to suggest possible future Chinese actions on the India-China border. If they cannot get their way through talks they will resort to force.

Membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a strategic goal for India. But China has been stonewalling India's efforts. Similarly on terrorism, India's move to designate Pakistan based and supported Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM) terrorist group Chief Masood Azhar in the UN, has been blocked by China on technical grounds. In a roundabout way Beijing tells New Delhi if Pakistan agrees to designate Azhar a terrorist, they will endorse it. Terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET) and JEM are admitted foreign policy assets of the Pakistani army, and China will do nothing to debilitate the Pakistani army which is China's asset especially where India is concerned.

China does not support India's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Four of the five members of Perm-5 support India, since India qualifies in all respects for the position.

In bilateral economic cooperation India remains at the losing end. China promises to restore the balance but blocks Indian entry in Chinese markets while India is flooded with shoddy Chinese goods. The Indian government will do well to understand that when the Chinese invest one dollar they calculate to get back a hundred, both in money terms and strategic depth. China's "One Belt One Road" (OBOR) project is designed exactly on these lines.

Finally, on India's position on the International Tribunal award on the South China Sea. India is a signatory to the UNCLOS and has abided by the Tribunal's award in its own case. It does not matter if the UK and Russia have not accepted the decisions of the Tribunal or that the US has declined to accede to the UNCLOS. It is on high moral principles. If country after country rejects the UN award it is a recipe for global chaos, where might becomes right. China's position is untenable and India must not support it.

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