

China's Political Outreach to India 2018 Contextualised By China-US Trade War

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China's political reachout to India, markedly in 2018, needs necessarily to be analysed in the context of the increasing China-US Trade War. Chinese present reachout to India is transactional and not incorporated in China's Grand Strategy and India would be well advised not to make things easier for China by siding with it by perceptual proximity to China against the United States.

When has China made things easier for India geopolitically and strategically? China is strongly opposed to India's ascendancy on the Asian and global power ladders. Coterminous with China's ongoing political reachout to India there is no let up by China in its 'India Containment' strategies. Then why the Indian policy establishment's ardour and exuberant responses to China's transactional overtures?

China in 2018 perceives that its biggest foreign policy thrust should be targeted at prompting India to step back from its reinforcing the US-India Strategic Partnership and also the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership. In Chinese perceptions these two vital Partnerships that India has forged in the last two decades significantly alter the 'Balance of Power' adversely for China.

Japan and India cooperating with the United States in reinforcing their convergent templates for Indo Pacific security and stability places in position an impressive security template which in actual effect aims at maintaining the 'freedom of the high seas' and a 'rules bound international order'. Both these global concepts are repugnant to China's overall Global Maritime Strategy put in place in 2015.

India has in official pronouncements and global and regional forums has been articulating these two precepts and also in relation to China's aggressive and illegal 'Full Spectrum Dominance' of the South China Sea. China's similar ambitions in relation to the Indian Ocean stand covered in my previous SAAG Paper.

So where was the need for India to indulge in a 'China Reset Policy' in 2018 when all indicators and ground realities on the Northern Borders with China Occupied Tibet and China's putting its Pakistan relations in an inescapable gridlock as a base against India reinforce China's adversarial image against India.

India must therefore shed the mistaken belief that China is genuinely serious of improving relations with India as some in India's policy establishment believe. It is not borne out by an objective analysis of China's demonstrated behaviour against India in in the past two decades forgetting the sordid record of China's Anti-India hostility of the 20th Century, including the Chinese betrayal of India in resorting to the Chinese military offensives against India in 1962.

China-containment policy by India may at this juncture may not be preferable but so also should not be preferred a Chamberlainisque approach to China with an overriding fixation that India must have peace with China at any cost. Policy-makers should not forget that in Chinese foreign policy no space is accorded for flexibility or quid pro quos. China adheres imperiously to the maxim that it is either China's way or the highway.

If that be so then what diplomatic space exists for India to believe that China in recognition of India's more ambiguous postures on the China –US Trade War benefiting China would bring corresponding dividends from China for India?

Geopolitically, India needs to recognise that in the furtherance of Indian national security interests, and also in terms of support to India's aspirational rise to be a global power, it is the United States which is publicly committed to India. China is not on record, in the public domain or in implicit admissions that China would do likewise. China's documents in much Chinese language military literature in the past perceive India as a major military threat to China's security.

Analytically, no substantial reasons exist for India to get geopolitically exuberant over China's ongoing political outreaches to India when China is not matching it on the ground with its walk the talk record. India should in no manner generate global and regional perceptions that give the impression that India even remotely or tangentially is siding with China against the United States.

In its eagerness that China would respond more positively to India responding positively to Chinese political reachout of 2018 should not result in the Indian policy establishment placing the US-India Strategic Partnership and the Japan-India Special Strategic Partnership on the back-burner. On the contrary, in terms of Indian political signalling to China, Indian initiatives towards strengthening these two vital Strategic

Partnerships are accorded more momentum.

Then only can India be genuinely be seen as really engaged in 'Balancing' policies. Let it be noted that India with weak kneed China-Policy would in effect be seen as 'Balancing' its Strategic Partnerships with United States and Japan by overly jumping at China's transactional political reachout to India.

Analytically, the next step would be to assess the geopolitical and strategic costs for India by reacting exuberantly to China's present political reachout to India which I strongly maintain is purely a transactional one. Simply, because China has not yielded to any of India's strategic sensitivities in the South Asian region. In reality, China continues as a contending power against India in South Asia.

India's recent signals in participating in joint military exercises with China and Pakistan under the aegis and command and control of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which is decidedly anti-UUS and anti-Japan in intent and operation has sent multiple wrong messages to Asian nations besides India's two most vital Strategic Partners, namely the United States and Japan.

Perceptionally, India's China Reset Policy 2018 is virtually coincident with the commencement of the China-US Trade War. India may have strong trade issues of its own with the United States and which in any case cannot be resolved by a perceptual alignment with China in its ongoing trade war with USA. India's trade issues with the United States are purely a bilateral issue and cannot be expanded into a multilateral issue with SCO overhangs.

Concluding, it needs to be stressed that India was not forced into its Privileged Strategic Partnerships with the United States and Japan and nor was India coerced into partnering the Indo Pacific Security template. India's moves in this direction was prompted by an implicit insurance policy to cater for manging if not containing China's adversarial postures against India and the China Threat perceptions shared all over Asia. Then why let India's geopolitical insurances crafted and evolved over decades be subsumed by China's transactional overtures and moreso when China has not put in place even genuinely marginal 'Reset of China's India-policy'?

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