China’s 2021 Imperatives for Military Climb-down against India in Eastern Ladakh Analysed

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China’s military climb-down in February 2021 against India in Eastern Ladakh after eight months of intense military confrontation and violent clashes has not been prompted by some ‘Divine Revelation’ or China’s sudden desire for peace but impelled by a complex mix of geopolitical, and military factors.

China from April 2020 had amassed more than 50,000 additional Chinese troops against India in Eastern Ladakh under the guise of formation training in high altitude areas raising military tensions with India.

Unanticipated by China, which seemed to have not learnt any lessons from the Dokalam Military Standoff 2018 with India, China miscalculated India’s equally massive military responses to confront China with equivalent military forces speedily deployed facilitated by heavy airlift of Indian Air Force acquired United States heavy military transport aircraft and helicopters. This unprecedently included sizeable Main Battle Tanks, heavy artillery and missiles systems.

Geopolitically and militarily Galwan Clashes of June 2021 will mark a ‘Tipping Point’ in the history of unending China-Military Confrontation on India’s Northern Borders with China Occupied Tibet since 1962 humiliating military debacle( imposed on the proud Indian Army by Nehruvian misplaced trust in China and consequent neglect of war preparedness) , India gave notice to China that India will no longer countenance China’s political and military coercion nor Chinese military brinkmanship and provocations on its Himalayan Frontiers.
Chia’s and India’s stiff responses to China in Eastern Ladakh in 2020 stand amply discussed by policy and strategic analysts including this author on China’s persisting intransigence to accede to disengagement processes after protracted diplomatic and Corps Commanders Meetings. The main question on in all such analyses was who would blink first––India or China?

China having blinked on its own volition is unimaginable going by China’s demonstrated propensities in conflictual situations of digging in its heels and Chinese President Xi Jinping’s propensity for ‘Hard Line’ strategies. Contemporaneous analytical factors point towards some mix of geopolitical, military and economic factors bearing down heavily on China.

Also must not be forgotten is what the future portends for China in relation to China Occupied Tibet.

**Global Geopolitical Forces in Play Impelling China’s Military Climb-down in Eastern Ladakh**

Pointed out by me in successive Papers is that the stark global geopolitical reality is that China faces today is that China stands politically isolated globally after its aggressive moves against Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, and the South China Sea in recent years.

Topping it all was China’s unprovoked mass deployment of Chinese Army troops in Eastern Ladakh and the consequent military clashes with India. China was perceived as endangering global security by provoking a near military-equal capable of stoutly confronting China.

China’s irresponsible conduct in relation to global affliction of China Wuhan Virus19 pandemic has raised suspicions, not unfounded that China possibly has resorted to a virtual “Biological Pearl Harbour” not only against United States but the rest of the world too.

Arising from the above is a total global strategic distrust in China’s policies, actions and intentions. This stands reflected in NATO too becoming alive to the China Threat in various manifestations.

Coupled with United States under President Biden re-invigorating the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, the balance of power against China becomes heavily weighted against China.

Global perceptions of China’s Eastern Ladakh military adventurism against India have been highly negative and in India’s favour.

Diluting of India’s China Threat perceptions reinforced after Eastern Ladakh Chinese aggression would necessarily translate into China displaying “reasonableness” in lowering tensions with consequent impact on global perceptions.

This would facilitate China to concentrate on other strategic challenges of Taiwan, Xinjiang and South China Sea.
US-India Global Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Possibly Weighed Heavily in China’s Strategic Calculations

Undeniably, the US-India Strategic Partnership, as discussed in an earlier Paper of mine, has virtually emerged as a military pact, if not an alliance, going by the notable institutionalisation and integration of the span of US-India defence cooperation under the Trump Administration.

President Biden and his top policy advisers have also asserted in the same vein---the primacy of India in the Indo Pacific Security template and their commitment to this crucial US national strategy precept.

Strong US Congressional Resolutions critical of China’s military moves in Eastern Ladakh need to be added to the above considerations.

Implicit in the foregoing is an underlying US assertion that the United States may not be a passive spectator if China resorts to a push against India developing into a ‘shove’.

China’s climb-down in Eastern Ladakh could also possibly arise from China’s strategy to “Lull” or lessen India’s China Threat perceptions and move India in lessening the recent primacy that India accords to the vital US-India Strategic Partnership.

QUAD Maritime Security Group Presents China with Possibility of Facing a “Three Front War Scenario’

The Quad Maritime Security Group of USA, Japan, India & Australia virtually discarded since 2008 has been resurrected with dynamic force including elevating the level of political interaction on the same.

This impulse stood ignited by China’s switch over to Hard Line Strategies under President Xi Jinping and consequent China’s military aggressiveness on all its peripheries endangering Indo Pacific security.

The QUAD is likely to draw in additional members like Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia thereby effectively checkmating China both in Western Pacific and in Indian Ocean.

Going by NATO’s new Strategy Paper for 2020-2030 detailing China as a strategic concern to NATO security, unfolding events can also draw in NATO into the QUAD Grouping.

With the above portents and growing joint exercises of QUAD Navies in Indian Ocean, South China Sea and Western Pacific---- what would dawn on China’s military planners?
China has shown alarming concern on emergence of QUAD as a credible naval grouping and a potent force for the Chinese Navy to confront with.

On a larger plane, the QUAD presents China with a most disturbing scenario of a “Three Front War Scenario”. Military analysts would understand how it would manifest itself.

China’s disengagement in Eastern Ladakh seems to be to weaken India’s commitment to QUAD and dilute QUADs credibility.

**India’s Enhanced War Preparedness against China Threat & Indian Army’s Superior Military Effectiveness Impelled China’s Climb-down in Eastern Ladakh**

India under PM Modi and his BJP Government ever since 2014 embarked on a sustained momentum of enhancing India’s War Preparedness against the China Threat which stood culpably neglected by Congress Government 2004-14.

This ‘fast-track’ campaign manifested not only in acquisition of advanced military hardware but also creating the necessary borders infrastructure of roads and airfields and creating heavy airlift capabilities of Indian Air Force for speedy deployment of military formations in Himalayan Terrain.

China was totally surprised not only by the massive size of Indian Army Formations rushed into Ladakh abut also the speed of deployment at forward locations in Eastern Ladakh of heavy armour and artillery.

Lastly, but not the least, Indian Army’s superior combat experience at High Altitudes and overall military effectiveness prevailed over Chinese Army’s troops deployments in Eastern Ladakh.

Topping it all, was what was on display in Eastern Ladakkh by the Indian Army----Renewed military robustness arising from enhanced War Preparedness, high-mobility logistics to sustain robustness of Indian Army frontline deployments and modern surveillance systems permitting 24x7 surveillance of Chinese Army moves.

Notable also, was the ‘political trust of the Prime Minister in apex Senior Military Commanders is according ‘operational freedom’ to them to conduct effective military operations against China. In short, India’s political leadership did not indulge in ‘micro-management’ of military operations.

**Concluding Observations**
China may have resorted to a military climb-down in Eastern Ladakh after eight months of unremitting intense confrontation for any of the reasons stated above but neither India nor the Indian Army should be lulled into complacency.

China believes in the old military adage that “Those who fight and run away live to fight another day”. China’s disengagement needs to be viewed as a ‘tactical ploy’.

While India may have disengaged from ‘eye-ball-to eyeball’ confrontation, it is imperative that Ladakh additional military deployments are maintained ‘in-location’ in depth positions so that they can be speedily be deployed if need arises.

Indian Army needs to exploit ensuing lull to further revise its operational plans and deployments for the next ‘Inevitable Round’ with China.

China’s attempts to drive wedges in the US-India Strategic Partnership must be politically and diplomatically be resisted. For the coming decades United States and India along with Japan and Australia provide a bulwark against Chinese expansionism.

The QUAD is India’s ‘Inescapable Military Imperative” as a long term insurance against China attempting to remove “Indian’ from this Ocean. The QUAD is an enabling factor for India to present China with a ‘Three Front War Scenario”. Let detractors within India opposing India’s continuance as a vital component of QUAD be given short shrift.

China continues to be an ‘Implacable Enemy” of India and will continue to be so as China realises the stark reality that what stands between China and its attainment of Superpower status is India---an Asian Giant with ‘near-equivalence’ to China in strategic weight and power attributes,