

**India – China:  
The Logics of Diverse yet Balancing Power Projection – Some Points**

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*The Problem:*

There are not many questions at the beginning of the 21st century which are of greater significance for global history than the question for the course which the relationship between India and China will take.

India – China watchers usually agree that the possibility of a major military conflict between the two Asian giants is extremely remote. So called military “standoffs” along the LAC including the “Doklam crisis” of 2017, during which a few hundreds of soldiers from both sides were involved, was defused without a single shot being fired.

After the Doklam crisis was settled, the leaders of both countries, the Indian PM Modi and the Chinese president Xi agreed on what was called “strategic guidance” in order to avoid in future local military confrontation which always entails the danger of going awry and trigger unintended escalation which might become uncontrollable at a point.

“Strategic guidance” on which both leaders in Wuhan agreed, was never revealed in great detail. Yet the idea behind that concept seems to be to bring military posturing at the widely unmarked LAC under a sort of single point control which would be enacted at a very high political level. The aim was to prevent any “loose cannon approach” by local commanders.

To cut a long story short it is held that “strategic guidance” today applies to all scenarios of possible military confrontation, not only in view of the situation at the LAC.

From another perspective: Should there ever be a military confrontation between India and China one can start from the presupposition that whoever started hostilities they were preceded by decision at the highest level.

**This is the other side of “strategic guidance”: If there would be military confrontation it would be meant to be and thereby really serious.**

This is one aspect of “strategic guidance” which has to be immediately thwarted by the question which controversy or which bundle of controversies would carry enough weight for to motivate the power elite of either China or India to transgress the threshold towards military operations.

In the case of India the assessment is not difficult to enact: There is no point of contention vis a vis China which could weigh heavy enough to make decision makers in Delhi ponder the idea of military action against China: Neither the irredenta -issue of Aksai Chin, nor the fact that the Chinese sponsored CPEC which violates India`s legal position on the whole of Kashmir, is seen by Delhi as important enough to consider action other than making a political point now and then.

This is further corroborated by the obvious fact, that the Indian armed forces are no match for the PLA when it comes to offensive capabilities.

Vis a vis the PLA Indian armed forces not in the wildest fantasies can be pictured as conducting major offensive operations against the PLA:

In view of military conflict with China, a sober analysis arrives at the conclusion, that the Indian armed forces, - with the exception of certain naval operations which I will address later -, can only function as a kind of trip – wire which is supposed to delay the advance of the PLA until such a point in time when Indian counter measures can start to work.

The fact that unlike some years ago, nobody in India speaks any longer seriously of establishing a mountain strike corps which would be supposed to give India an offensive option in case of military conflict, is very much telling: Not only would a mountain strike corps which was earmarked originally to execute offensive operations across the LAC be too great a burden on Indian military budgets, but geography together with the well- developed militarily usable infrastructure in the Chinese hinterland of the LAC renders any thinking about Indian offensive options as unrealistic: In a relatively short span of time an Indian mountain strike corps would be confronted by far superior forces of the PLA and pushed back inevitably.

What will happen if in case of hostilities along the LAC, be it in the Western or the Eastern sector, the tide starts turning against the Indian armed forces which cannot perform their trip – wire function any longer?

At such a point in time the Indian armed forces will resort to playing their most valuable joker and start blocking Chinese transports, mainly oil, through the Malacca strait. As regards alternative routes such as Sunda - and Lombok straits, it is highly unlikely that Indonesia will allow for use of those sea gates to supply China with indispensable energy in case of war between India and China.

On the other hand, the option for China to keep Malacca – Sunda – and Lombok straits open by using the military crowbar, would militarily be extremely demanding and risky and politically devastating at the same time.

All this boils down to saying that military conflict between the two Asian giants is highly unlikely and that the real problem is to figure out those scenarios which in spite of what has been said above, carry nevertheless a residual risk of military conflict.

### *The perspective from India*

As far as one can see there is no scenario in sight which would entail offensive military action by India:

India would never try to enforce her claim to Aksai Chin with military means.

The same applies to disputed sections of the LAC.

And even the fact that China makes the CPEC run through POK which is considered part of Indian Kashmir would never be a sufficient reason for India to seriously ponder military action.

Only offensive action by the PLA would force India, – nilly willy - to take to arms.

This is not only due to the fact that Indian armed forces, - notwithstanding the trip wire – function I have alluded to above, would be no match for the PLA in a major protracted conflict, but it has also to do with the basic ideology which in the last analysis governs the political thinking of the present Indian power elite.

To put it simplistically: That political thinking or base – ideology lives on the conviction or vision that India or “Bharat” will through a sort of divine destiny not only be reconstituted as “undivided” (akhand) Bharat, but also become the top power on earth by virtue of rising as a basically spiritual superpower.

*In other words:* The present Indian political power elite sees no real need to protect Indian interests through military means, - except if it is forced to react in self -

defence -, because divine destiny will in any case make Bharat to prevail as a top global power sooner or later.

This is not easy to understand for somebody who is used to Western thinking on power politics.

*Another point:* Only at first glance India resembles the so called “nation state” , a European “invention” as it was exported roughly in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to most parts of the globe, - first as colonial identities with widely accidental boundaries -, for which in the wake of de – colonisation – respective local power elites conjured up the magic of the “nation” in order to give legitimacy to their privileged position.

Compared to those artificial entities which under the denomination of “nations” emerged from colonial entities, India is widely different:

India indeed exhibits the “classical” attributes of a “nation state”, such as national flag, national anthem, a national constitution, national armed forces, even a national opinion which is measured by means of opinion polls etc., but all this cannot obscure the fact that India is essentially different.

Only at first glance India is a nation state, which is similar to most political entities which carry that denomination.

Under the thin paint coat of national identity, a deeper look at India reveals that there is an incredibly complex multiverse in terms of social diversity, spiritual facets and not at least of political dynamics which are difficult to prognosticate in proportion to the inexhaustible complexity of the Indian multiverse.

There is still another aspect of that: If we call that Indian complex multiverse a system, the elements of which interact through reciprocal functionality, then the stability of such a system is in direct proportion to its complexity: Many people, even Indian scholars speak of the “Indian miracle” in the sense that the Indian system survives in spite of the fact that so called “chaos” seems to be its very nature. Yet one has to understand, that what looks like chaos, is in reality the unshakable guarantee for survival of the Indian system as a whole. Simplistically one could say that what has no recognizable clear-cut order cannot be destroyed.

Coming back to our topic I would like to continue saying that this distinguishes the Indian sociocultural system from systems based on clear cut hierarchical order such as the Chinese one: The latter may be more efficient when it comes to things such as material production, development or even military efficiency. But contrary to the Indian chaos type – system a strictly hierarchical system can hardly afford to lose one stone of the hierarchical “pyramid” without the system running the danger to overbalance as a whole.

