
Book Reviews



*Dragon on Our Doorstep: Managing China
Through Military Power*
Pravin Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab
Aleph Book Company, Rupa Publications, 2017
Rs. 799

India and China, the two worthy neighbours, have an uncomfortable relationship ever since the creation of Tibet and Indo-China war of 1962. But at the same time, both countries have covered fair amount of grounds and made great efforts to improve their relations for a better tomorrow. For a long time China had been propagating a perception of its 'Peaceful Rise', a myth that now stands completely exposed.

The book *Dragon on our Doorstep* is a good effort to uncover this myth and has sounded a warning for Indian establishments to take a serious note of some of these developments and at the same time, also take steps to initiate required measures to counter this ever-growing threat from the Dragon. It highlights the differences in approaches adopted by China in varying time matrix, both the countries which has a greater focus on propagation of economic power to exert influence across the continents, as compared to the United States of America, who had a greater dependency on military power so to say, to spread their influence and win over the allies.

In Chapter on 'The Chinese Threat', the writer has brought out very clearly as to how India has fallen into the trap of converting a border dispute into a dispute of Line of Actual Control (LAC) and how this position is contrary to Indian security and sovereignty interests. Of particular interest are the facts of two Chinese incursions: 19 kilometres in Depsang plains in April- May 2013, where China has better access and 2 kilometres in Chumar area in September 2014, where India has a better

access. However, in a briefing to the National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, who was appointed Special Representative for the Eighteenth round of border talks in Beijing on 23 March 2015, it was decided that, 'India will maintain the status quo on the disputed pockets along the Chinese border'. In actual fact, China had crept into India another 640 square kilometres.

Pravin Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab have very logically argued that China has two main reasons for not finalising the LAC/border issue with India till date. First, China now claims that it does not have borders with India in Ladakh (J&K) because it is disputed territory between India and Pakistan. Second, LAC is a military line that can be moved by force either side that gives greater freedom to claim larger Indian territory in times to come. Of significance is the statement of the previous Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi on the outcome and action of China, as a result of international tribunal verdict on South China Sea (SCS), 'China cannot lose one centimetre of the area it claims. The sovereignty issue is China's bottom line.' At the same time we also have the Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju complaining that, 'since 1962, Chinese have been gradually occupying our patches of land what he calls as creeping incursion'.

Author has well-analysed some of the reasons for these incursions and Indian attitude of over-accommodating Chinese misadventure as also such aggressive moves by them. It has been made very clear that lack of infrastructure and availability of adequate forces on the Indian side for quick counter-response is one the main reasons for not being tough on them; therefore, such soft and knee jerk reactions from Indian establishment. By implication, Chinese are having a psychological dominance in the border areas. The Government of India has also been dragging its feet on not revising patrolling limits laid down by it since 1975. In the meantime, China continues to push for peace and tranquillity on the borders but tragically it is also pushing the LAC more and more into India's hinterland thereby claiming larger swaths of land along the borders with India, their way of winning wars without fighting in the spirit of true Sun Tzu philosophy.

One needs to compliment the authors for their brutal frankness, when referring to ceasefire between India and Pakistan in November 2003. They write ‘Before ceasefire, silence was the cause of concern; after the ceasefire the firing became the cause for concern.’ In a forthright manner the writer has also pointed out that prolonged deployment of Army on Counter-Infiltration/Counter-Terrorists grid and the construction of Line of Control fence, on its western borders has resulted in defensive mind set of the Indian Army. Chapters on Pakistan, Kashmir and insurgency within, are also pointers in the same direction. The authors have significantly quoted from Group of Ministers (GoM) report released on 1 February 2001, consequent to Kargil misadventure by Pakistan. However, they have just picked up three main points and the lackadaisical manner in which they have been implemented, particularly on the Chinese front.

- (a) *One Border One Force*: While Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) has been created for the China border since 2005, the capability and competence to fulfil their obligations is still inadequate.
- (b) *Single Point Contact*: The GoM report emphasised the need for a single-point contact on the borders. Here just the opposite has happened; unlike what is the arrangement across with Chinese PLA, where all forces on the border come under PLA. In our case, the ITBP manning the Chinese borders comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs, whereas the Indian Army troops are well-known under the Ministry of Defence. The issue of ITBP coming under command and control of Army remains undecided till date. The caveat of ITBP coming under Army control during hostilities is rather vague.
- (c) *Speedy Development of Infrastructure*: This by far is the weakest link in countering the Chinese threat due to the fact that roads and tracks sanctioned way back in 1999 have not yet started only. The excuses like forest and wildlife clearance, paucity of resources, etc., are simply not palatable by any stretch of imagination. Quoting the Director General of Military Operations that the roads and infrastructure construction are being delayed on his insistence has been taken out of context. It should have been qualified by stating

that the capabilities to guard these road heads also need to be built simultaneously by way of accretion forces and new raisings.

The book for sure gives an excellent insight into the functioning of politico-bureaucratic-military systems in India and how successive governments have either due to total lack of strategic vision or adjusting to our appeasement of Chinese requirements, have allowed the China-India relations as also the issue of unsettled borders to drift away from the supreme concerns of national security issues. There is a chapter each on The Tibetan Struggle and Dalai Lama, where in it has been rightly mentioned that Tibetan cause seems to have been lost due to ambivalent attitude of India and the western world including USA. May be the only solution lies in Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) of 1974.

The authors have quoted a long time China watcher Henry Kissinger, according to whom, Chinese exhibit three characteristics: 'meticulous analysis of long-term trends, careful study of tactical options, and detached exploration of operational decisions'. Therefore, China puts a high premium on political and psychological victories rather than pure military triumphs, which all seems to be at play in this case. The writers go on to explain how China hopes that bilateral economic, political and security relationships with the One Belt One Road (OBOR) nations would transform into a seamless regional and perhaps transcontinental security architecture which would have the capability to challenge the US domination. China has already developed fissures in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is now eyeing for South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. India remains China's unstated rival in Asia. The gains of China's combative cooperation in SCS crisis are already too evident. It is very clearly emerging that with the help China Pakistan Economic Corridor passing through disputed Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) and China-Pakistan strategic partnership, China has not only posed greater challenges through land frontiers to India but is well on its way to the Indian Ocean.

The authors have elaborated large number measures that are required to be undertaken by India, notwithstanding huge time lag in developmental differential and inadequacies of decision-making process in our democracy.

While military diplomacy is an essential feature of military power, the military leadership to become an integral part of diplomacy in India will still remain a distant dream at least for some more time to come. However, there are already early signs of a review of India's nuclear policy as recommended in the book. Yes, India also needs to stabilise its internal security situation with an all-inclusive growth model.

While the book does amplify in great detail the rise of China and its 'Blow hot-Blow cold' relationship with India, it has actually failed to outline a strategy to 'Manage China Through Military Power', since in its present form India simply does not have the wherewithal in pure military terms to do it realistically. At best our option lies in diplomacy and alliances to just about manage peace with neighbours in immediate/near future and focus on developing the hard power in the strategic realm of cyber, space, and nuclear domain. Developing full spectrum deterrence capabilities in the long term could provide one viable option for India. In the interim, it is felt that a chapter on recent developments of India's greater cooperation with USA in recent times could have helped balanced out the China-Pakistan collusive threat to India. It is also felt that the writer has been unfair to blame the Indian Army for covering up some of the border incidents as they happened. As anyone with a good understanding of the system would recall that no one can take a chance with truthful reporting due to highly accountable Army system and the degree of sensitivity that is attached to the sanctity of LAC/borders. It has been rightly argued by the author that China would like to have peace between India and Pakistan, at least for its own sake; now that the China's strategic investments in Pakistan are up on the rise and peace is pre-requisite for development of the region to its full potential.

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