



History, the stand-off, and policy worth rereading

Context:

- The editorial talks about China's legendary revolutionary leader Mao Zedong's five finger policy (with respect to Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh) and how



India should cast a grand strategy to renew its compact with each of those areas in the current situation.

What is Mao's five finger policy?

- The deadly clashes at Galwan and the ongoing stand-off between India and China on the ridges or fingers around the Pangong Tso are a metaphor for the wider conflict between the two countries over all the areas that Chinese strategy refers to as the "five fingers of the Tibetan palm".
- In the 1950s, Mao described Tibet as the right hand palm, while **Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Arunachal Pradesh** are five fingers.
- According to the construct, attributed to Mao, it was China's responsibility to liberate the fingers.
- Sixty years ago, India began to set about ensuring that quite the reverse ensued, and all five fingers were more closely attached to India, not China.

India's countermove:

- In the 1950s, even after India and China signed the **Panchsheel agreement** in 1954 and before the 1962 **China-India war**, the Nehru government had begun to worry about some of China's proclamations.
- Especially after the flight of the **Dalai Lama** to India in 1959, China began to demand "**self-determination in Kashmir**".

19.06.2020

Friday



<http://www.sriramsias.com>

- The Chinese press and radio launched a propaganda war against India, while the Chinese government allowed Naga and Mizo dissidents into China for refuge and training.
- More importantly, school textbooks there began to depict the “five fingers” as a part of China, in the 1950s.

Three-pronged foreign policy approach:

- The three-pronged foreign policy New Delhi set into motion during the 1962 war, that provided an effective counter to Mao’s five finger policy over the course of the century, is perhaps not so well understood.

Managing the borders:

- The first was a push for building border infrastructure and governance.
- In the mid-1950s, the government piloted a project to build the Indian Frontier Administrative Services (IFAS) for overseeing NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) and other areas along the India-China frontier.
- A special desk was created in the Ministry of External Affairs for officers who would tour all the regions from NEFA to Ladakh in order to make suggestions for the rapid development of these areas. It was wound up in 1968.
- The IFAS’s role has since been transferred to the Indian Army and the Border Roads Organisation.
- It is an idea worth revisiting, especially as areas along the frontier continue to complain of neglect and a lack of focus from the Centre.

Outreach and treaties:

- The second prong was a series of treaties that were signed with neighbours such as Nepal and Bhutan, and the consolidation of control, militarily and administratively, of other territories that acceded to India, including Ladakh as a part of Jammu and Kashmir (1947), and NEFA (1951).
- In 1950, India signed a treaty with Sikkim that made it a “protectorate”, and by 1975 the Indira Gandhi Government had annexed Sikkim and made it the 22nd State of India.

19.06.2020

Friday



<http://www.sriramsias.com>

- Each of these treaties built unique relationships with New Delhi, tying countries such as Nepal and Bhutan in ways that were seen as a “win-win” for both sides at the time.
- However, over time, the treaties have outlived their utility, and the benefits of unique ties with Nepal and Bhutan, including open borders and ease of movement, jobs and education for their youth as well as India’s influential support on the world stage, have waned in public memory.
- China was not able to make inroads with Bhutan as it did with Nepal because the Indian government renegotiated its 1949 Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship between the Government of Bhutan of 1949 with the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty in 2007.
- This has held India and Bhutan ties in good stead, even during the Doklam stand-off between India and China in 2017 in the face of severe pressure from China.
- New treaties may not, in themselves reduce India’s security threat from China in its neighbourhood, but they create space for a more mutually responsive diplomacy that is necessary to nurture special relationships.

The Tibet Issue:

- For the third prong, India’s policy towards Tibet should be looked at more closely.
- While New Delhi’s decision to shelter the Dalai Lama and lakhs of his followers since 1959 is a policy that is lauded, India must now look into the future of its relationship, both with the Tibetan refugee community in India, as well as with its future leadership.
- At present, the Dalai Lama has the loyalty of Tibetans worldwide, but Karmapa Lama, who lived in India after his flight from China in 2000, and was groomed as a possible political successor, has now taken the citizenship of another country and lives mostly in the United States.
- Given that it is home to so many Tibetans, India must chart a more prominent role in this discourse.

19.06.2020

Friday



<http://www.sriramsias.com>

Conclusion:

- Finally, it is necessary to introspect on how India's own reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 has changed the security matrix and threat parameters for India, and its neighbours.
- While Pakistan's extreme reaction to the move was expected, China's reaction was perhaps not studied enough.
- Beijing issued a statement decrying the impact on Jammu and Kashmir.
- Also a statement specifically on Ladakh, calling it an attempt to "undermine China's territorial sovereignty by unilaterally changing its domestic law" and warning that the move was unacceptable and will not come into force.
- Home Minister's vow in Parliament, to take back Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Aksai Chin was not taken lightly either, as China's stakes in PoK now go beyond its historical closeness with Pakistan, to its investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that runs through it.