

Why India and China must learn to coexist in peace

They'll fail to provide better opportunities to their citizens and also give the West a chance to continue its hegemony



The military stand-off at Doklam will test effectiveness of changing foreign policy orientation in both India and China. As both President Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi would like to be portrayed as strong leaders, neither side is likely to back down from the standoff in a hurry. The behaviour of both big powers is going to shape the evolving Asian economic and security architecture.

Indirect Chinese reference during Modi's US visit and Indian decision to boycott Belt and Road Initiative gathering seems to have annoyed Chinese authorities. Similarly, Chinese objections to Indian entry into the NSG as well as blocking Indian move to ban Masood Azhar in the UN have made New Delhi suspicious of Chinese intensions. The nationalistic rhetoric fuelled by media from both sides has created a situation, in which Doklam has become more than a 'normal border incident'. The entry of a new actor, Bhutan, into this game has made things further complicated and to some extent unpredictable.

Most European powers are not comfortable with the rise of China. However, they are unable to do much. How to manage China's rise was left to the US. The 'pivot to Asia' or

rebalancing initiated by the Obama administration is over. The current policy muddle in the US will benefit China. The South China Sea dispute is opportunity for the West to put pressure on China. An extended India-China standoff would provide another chance for them to pinprick China without getting involved in a serious manner. The vice-president of the European Parliament Ryszard Czarnecki has asserted that "Chinese action in the Doklam plateau can be seen as a part of the country's recent tendency to unilaterally change the ground situation in areas that are disputed". The US so far has avoided commenting on the standoff.

The all-party meeting on the standoff has rightly stressed on diplomatic engagement. Enhanced engagement and understanding is required not just for Doklam but also for broader strategic issues and economic projects. Some serious issues are involved in projects like China-Pakistan Economic corridor. Still, there is an ample scope of coordinating Chinese BRI with our own initiatives like INSTC Chabahar port or Asia-Africa Growth Corridor etc. Beyond geopolitical moves, all these projects offer tremendous developmental opportunities for citizens in participating countries. With cooperation and coordination both India and China can make 21st century a truly Asian century. Otherwise conflicting Asian powers will offer opportunities for the West to continue its hegemony for some more decades.

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The views expressed are personal*