



## Could India's provocations lead to another Sino-Indian war?

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Pitfalls of a Thucydides Trap a war?

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A host of Indian generals, politicians and China-centered media *gurus* claimed that China was out to alter *status quo ante*. Planet-Lab-imagery `corroborated` exhibited pre-incursion and post-incursion positions. India's Maj Gen (Dr) G G Dwivedi, who commanded a *Jat* battalion in this sector in 1992, said, `It is part of China's "nibble and negotiates policy". Their grand aim is to ensure that India does not build infrastructure along the LAC, change the status of Ladakh, cozy up to the US and join the anti-China chorus caused by Covid-19. It is their way of attaining a political goal with military might while gaining more territory in the process.' He added. "We used to patrol up till Hot Springs and so did they. The Ladakh Scouts controlled the Galwan Valley and did not encounter any problems either'. His troops learned of Chinese patrols from graffiti on the rocks that read 'Chung ko (This is China)'. Indian troops retaliated by scribbling 'This is India' on the rocks.

He interpreted China's current belligerence as a reaction to ` India's recent actions of reorganising [disputed] Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and improving infrastructure in the region, Dwivedi clarified, `It [China] has high stakes in PoK [Azad Kashmir] as the \$60-billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) traverses through it, and it is also the site of the proposed \$9 billion Diamer Bhasha Dam, a joint project of China and Pakistan.' China's aim is to ` dominate Durbuk-DBO road, strengthen its position in the Fingers area, halt the construction of link roads in Galwan-Pangong Tso [salt lake] and negotiate de-escalation on its terms (Maj Gen (Dr) G G Dwivedi: '*Right now, Chinese have an edge, we must neutralise it*'. *Indian Express*, June 18, 2020).

**China's view:** Chinese media insisted that it is India, not China, who outstepped the Line of Actual Control. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, however, reiterated China's allegation, squarely blaming the Indian troops for the incident. `The right and wrong of this case are very clear and responsibility doesn't lie with the Chinese side' (*Indian Express* June 19, 2020).

**False allegations corroborated by satellite imagery:** India alleged, `An analysis of high-resolution satellite images of the Pangong Tso area in Ladakh shows that not only have the Chinese changed the status quo at the Fingers, the mountain spurs along the lake, but also built "substantial" structures in the contested region of the Line of Actual Control'. The hills protrude into the lake like fingers and are numbered 1 to 8 from west to east. According to India, the LAC lies at Finger 8, but China points to Finger 4. The May 27 images by Planet Labs show dozens of new structures, most likely tents, that have come up between Finger 8 and Finger 4 on the north bank of Pangong Tso, one of the main points of contention in the current standoff (*Satellite imagery shows how Chinese changed status quo on Pangong bank, Indian Express*, June 6, 2020).

**Allegations rebutted by the Indian Army, ex-foreign minister and the prime minister himself:** However, the Chinese view was confirmed by prime minister Narendra Modi. **While addressing the all-party conference, Modi said, "Neither have they [Chinese] intruded into our border nor has any post been taken over by them [China]. He added, "Neither have they intruded into our border nor has any post been taken over by them (China)". He added, "no one can take even an 'inch of the land' (China did not enter our territory, no posts taken': PM at all-party meet on Ladakh clash, *Hindustan Times*, Jun 19, 2020).**

The media had alleged that former foreign secretary Shyam Saran in his 2013 report had stated that China had taken over 640 kilometers of Ladakh territory. But, this allegation was rebutted not only by Saran himself but also by former defence minister AK Antony. (*Antony to clarify whether China occupied 640 sq km in Ladakh in April, NDTV*, September 06, 2013; also, see *NSAB chief denies reporting Chinese intrusions to PMO, Business Standard; China did not enter our territory, no posts taken': PM at all-party meet on Ladakh clash, Hindustan Times*, Jun 19, 2020). Even `The Indian army denied that Ladakh had shrunk. Change in the river course was cited as a reason for the loss of 500-1,500 meters of land annually (*Standoff between India, China troops end in Ladakh after talks: Report, Indian Express*, May 26, 2020).

**Real casus belli:** India is unhappy at China's unflinching support to Pakistan concerning Belt-Road Initiative assistance and construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam. At US behest, India is flexing muscle over China. Since 1962, India has been building bridges and constructed roads in the disputed border areas. India wanted faster access to feeder roads to LAC. `Under the phase 2 of the India-China Border Roads (ICBR) project, 32 roads will be built along the India-China border. As per sources, now the government has asked concerned officials to accelerate the construction of these roads' (*India to accelerate the construction of roads along Chinese border: Sources. India Today* June 17, 2020).

Coupled with improved road links, India constructed many air bases and airfields in forwarding locations. Following Galwan melee, India alerted its forward airfields and moved its fighters/bombers there. Even Indian air force chief undertook whirlwind tours of forwarding fields, including Leh (*IAF chief visits Leh, IAF on high operational alert, India today* June 19, 2020). Russia is upgrading the existing fleet of the Su-30 MKI to match Chinese aircrafts Su-35 and J-31 fighter jets.

The existing fleet of Su-30 will be upgraded to the level of 'Super Sukhoi' with long-range stand-off missiles with a range of 300 km; adding more powerful EW and jamming systems, high-performance engines, multiple ejector Rack, and AESA radar. Five fly-away Rafale aircraft, with India-specific enhancements, has landed at Ambala, and 31 more are on their way. The Rafale jets will be based at Ambala Air Base in Punjab and Hashimara Air Base in West Bengal.

India is developing Andaman and Nicobar as a strategic outpost to monitor rival Chinese naval activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean. It has set up an integrated surveillance network there. The Indian Navy has been developing the Strengthening anti-access capabilities in the Andamans.

**The myth of China's 'string of pearls':** String of pearls, in geostrategic nomenclature, refers to the Strait of Malacca, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives, the Strait of Hormuz and Somalia and includes Bangladesh and Myanmar in Chinese strategy. The emergence of the String of Pearls is believed to be China's growing geopolitical influence through concerted efforts to increase access to ports and airfields, expand and modernise military forces.

**But,** the USA has over 800 naval bases while China has only two that is Mombasa and Djibouti, aside from controversial Hambantota (Sri Lanka). Yet, the US propaganda is that China is setting up bases along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea. The bases have dual objectives to protect energy and strategic interests.

**USA's ring:** Doubtless the USA is the dominant super-power in the Indo-Pacific region. Majority of the littoral states, including India, Australia, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea are under American influence.

The USA has powerful naval bases at Diego Garcia, Busen, Guyan Island, Yongson base (South Korea) and Okinawa (Japan). The USA has stationed its littoral combat ships in Singapore besides accessing facilities of Vietnamese port Cam Ranh Bay.

The US has terminated special treatment agreements with Hong Kong in response to China's 'actions to deny freedom to the people of Hong Kong'. Houston consulate was closed 'because it was a den of spies'.

**China's disputes:** The USA is flaring up China's dormant maritime disputes over some islands in the region (Japan, Vietnam, Brunei, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines). In East China Sea, there is a dispute between China and Japan over islands of Diaoyu and Senkaku islands.

The USA assures China's rivals that the USA would be their 'security provider' in a moment of need. The major stakeholders in the region are the USA, China, Australia, ASEAN countries, Japan and South Korea.

To block China's ascendancy, all littoral states including Japan, Australia, Taiwan, South Korea and other middle-ranking regional powers are modernizing their navies.

**India's necklace of diamonds:** As a US proxy, India is building a 'Necklace of Diamonds'. This is a China encirclement strategy. India is expanding its naval bases and is also improving relations with strategically placed countries to suffocate China.

India's Strategic Bases include (a) Changi Naval Base, Singapore: In 2018, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement with Singapore. The agreement has provided direct access to this base to the Indian Navy. While sailing through the South China Sea, the Indian Navy can refuel and rearm its ship through this base. (b) Sabang Port, Indonesia: In 2018, India got the military access to Sabang Port which is located right at the entrance of Malacca Strait. This strait is one of the world's famous choke points. A large chunk of trade and crude oil passes on to China through this region. (c) Duqm Port, Oman: In 2018, India got another military access after Sabang Port in Indonesia. The Duqm Port is located on the south-eastern seaboard of Oman. The port facilitates India's crude imports from the Persian Gulf. Indian facility is located right between the two important Chinese pearls, Djibouti in Africa and Gwadar in Pakistan. (d) Assumption Island, Seychelles: In 2015, India and Seychelles agreed upon the development of the naval base in this region. This gives the military access to India. This base is of strategic importance to India as China desperately wants to increase its presence in the African continent through the maritime silk route. (e) Chabahar Port, Iran: In 2016, Prime Minister Modi signed an agreement to build this port. India reneged on a promise to complete it under US pressure. Iran had to replace her with China. (f) New naval bases are being developed in Mongolia Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with Japan.

India is maintaining good relations with Vietnam and has so far sold Brahmos Missile and four patrol boats to the country. Bangladesh and Nepal are slipping out of India's influence, but Bhutan is in India's grip. India scuttled China's claim over the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary in Bhutan.

**Inference:** India's provocations may inadvertently lead to a war against China. India's frenzied war preparations are a source of serious concern to China. The USA is unlikely to contribute foot-soldiers to such an eventuality. Some of China's diamonds are weary of India's pugnacity. For instance, Bangladesh is getting closer to China. Bangladesh is unhappy at India's non-compliance of the Teesta River Accord, and anti-Muslim (Bangladeshi) Citizenship Amendment Act.

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### **Bio-page**

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