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Theorising Scenarios for Resumption of Indo-China Border Talks

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Abstract

Border issues between India and China are complex and fundamental in nature. There were negotiations immediately after independence, but, still led to 1962 War between the two countries. Historically efforts to negotiate Borders were held 45 times from 1981 to 219 in various formats as JWG and SR talks. Further WMCC at Jt Secy level est in 2012 and met 26 times and Corps Commander level talks post Galwan met 21 times till Feb 2024. Clearly China does not wish to negotiate borders and plans to use it as a leverage at opportune moments. There is a typical stalemate since China feels that borders is a settled issue, while India's stand is to resolve border issues before normalisation of relations.

The idea of this article is to theorise scenarios is original, based on open source material and attempt to visualise contingencies that could lead towards breaking this stalemate in border talks. Currently there are no journals or books written on this subject by scholars, though, some of them are writing open source articles and discussing on these lines in some seminars. The endeavour is to connect the dots and link them to resumption of talks for stabilisation of borders between India and China.

China had settled its territorial disputes in two phases, in the 1960s and 1990s and in both phases there were two factors viz, an internal crisis and lack of capacity to guard borders that forced it to seek stability on borders with some countries. In the Indo China context, a severe economic crisis leading to civil unrest in the society could be an internal factor and a Taiwan centric conflict leading to China's lack of capacity to guard borders could be an external factor. Changeover of President due to uprising or ill health and likely low morale in PLA has also been discussed.

Key Words: Internal vulnerabilities, China's economic crisis, popular discontent, people's revolt against Party, Taiwan conflict, capacity to guard borders, LAC delineation talks.

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"How many a dispute could have been deflated into a single paragraph, if the disputants had dared to define their terms." Aristotle

Introduction

The Himalayan land borders between India and China is not delineated and have not been peaceful since independence. Post-independence, despite prolonged periods of negotiations; it still led to the 1962 war. The cycle of prolonged negotiations repeated itself in various formats since 1988, number of incidents on the LAC continue to take place and the borders are not settled and stable. The positions taken by either side are so widely apart, that a solution seems distant and elusive.

Apart from the 1962 war, skirmishes took place in 1967 (Nathu La), 1987 (Sumdorong Chu), 2013 (Daulat Beg Oldie - DBO), 2014 (Chumar), 2015 (Burtse), Doklam (73 days tense standoff in 2017) Galwan (2020) and Yangtse (2022). Post Galwan the force posturing on both sides has increased into several division size forces, which continue to remain deployed in the forward areas. Currently approx 50,000 troops are concentrated on both sides of the LAC in Eastern Ladakh and our stand has been to restore the status quo ante, i.e., prior to Galwan incident of May 2020. In the current standoff Indian Armed Forces have occupied the Kailash Ranges, which surprised the Chinese and led to local restorations after prolonged negotiations. The bold initiative of the Indian Armed forces has sent a strong signal to China, which is something that China respects.

Whether, the activities on LAC happen due to misunderstandings or as part of deliberate strategy, remains a mystery. Analysis of Galwan incident suggests that this was deliberate, preplanned military operation sanctioned at the highest levels in the Chinese hierarchy. On 07 Sept 2020 shots were fired on the LAC, which was the first in last 45 years. Tensions were high and it is to credit of the local military commanders, on both sides, that the situation was brought under control. It is quite likely that the intrusions that became confrontations occurred due to improvements in infrastructure on both sides of the border, leading to better response timings and ability to patrol further and for longer durations. Resultantly the number of face offs have increased over time. The threat of hostilities always exists and the only permanent solution is demarcation of the borders or at least the LAC.

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Objective of this Paper

There is a classic stalemate in the border talks between India and China and no permanent solution of delineating the LAC is in sight. China is the stronger nation - economically and militarily - and is not inclined to grant any concessions to India. Incase peace has to succeed, it has to be on a '*win-win*' principle. The ideas expressed in this article are original and endeavour to theorise scenarios, based on open source material. Currently there are no journals or books written on this subject by scholars; though, some of them are analysing the impact of the economic crisis leading to popular dissent of the people against the Party and growing resentment of nations against the aggressive and belligerent behaviour of China, leading to gradual shifting of global supply chains. There is news on subdued discontentment of Chinese people against the Party control, however, strict State control and censorship will never allow these things to come out in openly in the media. The objective is to connect the dots and visualise theoretical contingencies/scenarios that could lead towards breaking this stalemate in border talks and force China to come on the negotiating table. These are very much in the realms of possibility and their occurrences cannot be totally ruled out.

Border Negotiations

India and China since 1980s have attempted to get the borders delineated, but without much success. Inspite of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) of 1993 and 1996; Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for Settlement of Indo-China Boundary Question of 2005, 15 meetings of Joint Working Groups (JWGs) between 1989 to 2005 and 22 rounds of Special Representatives (SRs) talks, these have not succeeded. It would be prudent to reexamine the existing agreements/MOUs/Border cooperation pacts on Border Question and LAC i.e., 1993, 1996, 2005 and 2013 and get them updated. The 1993, 1996 and 2013 agreements/border defence cooperation are military and LAC specific. These have been repeatedly violated by China, in the stand offs in recent times. The JWGs and SR meetings have run their course and clearly demonstrate China's 'long game' strategy of keeping things festering. The 2005 Agreement was the closest to any breakthroughs on border delineation, and mentioned 'settled populations along borders' in order to accommodate each other national sensitivities and concerns. The 2005 Agreement probably coincided with the land mark '2005 Indo US Nuclear Deal'; where China may have appreciated that getting closer to India was only possible, if they could provide matching diplomatic achievements. China opposed the ibid nuclear deal tooth and nail though. The next important milestone was India's recognition of TAR as part of 'one

China' in 2006. However the Chinese surprised India by claiming the entire ALP as part of so called 'South Tibet'.

Post 2008 the PLA transgressions spiked and post President Xi Jin Ping's coming to power in 2012, they have never shown a downward trend. China's aggressive behaviour across all domains in Taiwan, South China Sea, Japan, Hong Kong, Tibet, XUAR etc is unlikely to change till the current authoritarian leadership exists under Mr XiJinping. A final settlement of the border issue would be in the interests of both nations. However, China seems to be using unsettled borders as a leverage at opportune moments and India continues to respond strongly on the LAC.

Currently India has changed its take on border in two respects. Since 1988 it had gone along with 'normalisation' with a hope that, in due course of time this would lead to military stability and border settlement with China. However, this did not materialise and India changed this causal logic to *'border stability being essential for further normalisation'*. Delhi has also replaced the centrality of border settlement issue with 'delineation of LAC' as a more urgent issue, than border settlement. Statements were made towards this effect in various forums from time to time, however, there has been no positive development so far.

Post Galwan, the summer of 2023 witnessed heightened activity along the LAC, with PLA all along the Northern Borders. 21 rounds of Corps Cdr level talks have taken place, with the last one being on Feb 2024. The two sticking points of troop disengagement remain in Depsang plains and Charding Ninglung Nallah (CNN) track junction at Demchok in Eastern Ladakh (Pandit, July 28, 2023)[i]. PLA has the capacity to orchestrate friction on any new point on the LAC, if it chooses to do so.

In the meantime PLA has been consolidating its positions all along LAC in terms of bunkers, posts, gun positions, forward tracks, helipads, upgrading its forward air bases. As per current analysis, the forward deployment is here to stay.

Mr Shyam Saran (Saran, July 19, 2023)[ii], ex Foreign Secretary during his visit to China in July 2023 for World Peace Forum, had a closed door session with Chinese scholars on the border issues. His analysis was that China had concluded that the border issues had stabilised and there was nothing more to discuss. Further, China has stated that the border issues was only one component of a range of issues and should not define the overall character of the relationship, between the two countries. The Chinese also feel that India is nibbling away at its territory, which Mr Shyam Saran countered by stating that this was precisely the reason for a joint exercise for demarcation of LAC, which has been studiously rejected by China in the past. The Chinese response was that in 2004 when the negotiations commenced, the Indian side had put forward 'exaggerated claims' which compromise China's territorial claims. It can thus be concluded, that not demarcating the LAC creates ambiguities and provides convenient elbow space to China to up the ante, at times and places of his choosing on the LAC. Mr Shyam Saran's conclusion was that there was no chance of restoration of 'status quo ante' of May 2020, which India has been insisting upon, since the Galwan incident. However, there was a view point that peace and tranquility agreements concluded earlier need to be updated.

China believes in *'deception and concealing its real intent', which* is aptly demonstrated in its military doctrines and philosophy. While it is currently embroiled with the US over Taiwan, it may use LAC as a leverage for diverting attention from the Indo Pacific. India needs to remain aware and prepare for an all-out war. China is in no hurry to grant concessions to India and give it a chance of becoming a regional power. China can initiate a conflict at any time and use its state propaganda machinery to remind India of 1962. However, China is aware that India and its Armed Forces have majorly transformed in the last six decades and would not be easy push overs.

Stalemate on Border Negotiations

There is a typical stalemate between the two nations on the border negotiations, which is holding up normalising of overall relations. China does not feel the compulsion of coming to the negotiating table to resolve the border issues. It perceives itself as the stronger nation, but, is insecure of India's closeness to US and its participation in anti-China groupings like QUAD etc. China considers India's bonhomie with the US as a threat and if it cannot woo away India from this relationship, then teaching it a lesson is the next likely option.

India needs to keep building infrastructure along its borders, improve its response timings and strengthen its Armed Forces. This is directly related to India's economic growth as we aspire to become a $5 Tn economy. China is currently more than five times our economy at $ 19.37 Tn. Even in the next 25 years, this gap is likely to be considerable.

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Vulnerabilities that may Alter the Stalemate

It would be interesting to theorise scenarios that can alter this stalemate; which could lead to China coming to the negotiating table to delineate the borders/LAC with India. There could be two basic vulnerabilities that may compel China to stabilise its borders with India, thus, leading to resumption of border talks. The first one could be, an '*internal vulnerability*' that may threaten the Party's control over a restive society that seeks greater economic prosperity or greater democratic freedom. This could happen due to drastic slowdown of China's economy leading to a discontented public rising in revolt against the CPC (Tinanmen type scenario). The second vulnerability could be a '*lack of capacity to guard borders*' for eg Taiwan specific conflict which renders its armed forces weak and unable to guard the LAC with India. Let us examine such scenarios in greater detail.

Scenario: Slowdown in Chinese Economy and Lack of Global Popularity of China

Indicator: Early Signs of Distress in China's Economy. China's economy is showing definite signs of slowing down and is currently growing at 5 % annually, while India's economy is on an upward trajectory with 8% growth. The youth unemployment was at a record 21.8 % in July 2023 post which, China has stopped publishing this data. The reality sector which constitutes 30% of China's GDP is under duress, with its major firm Evergrande defaulting in its finances. After more than 20 years of construction, China has more homes and flats than its people can live in. The disposable income of residents is continuing to decline and for homebuyers this is undoubtedly a huge expenditure. Further, China's national household debt, three-quarters of which is from property, reached 63.5 per cent of the national gross domestic product (GDP) in the second quarter of 2023, according to the National Institution for Finance and Development. This is a massive rise from 17.9 per cent in late 2008.

Ongoing Western efforts to de-risk their supply chains away from China, have led to disappointing trade with the United States, ASEAN countries and the European Union. According to the US Commerce Department, the US imported 25 per cent less from China in the first seven months of the 2023, year on year, the equivalent of around US$203 billion in goods. ASEAN countries make up 15.8 per cent of China's exports, followed by European Union which make up 15.5 per cent of China's total export value in June 2023. In July 2023, China's overall exports fell by 14.5 per cent from a year earlier to US$281.76 billion, compared with a fall of 12.4 per cent in June 2023.

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Conversely, there is a trend of increasing exports from ASEAN Countries to Europe and US implying that the supply chains are shifting gradually. In response to the shifting global supply chains, Beijing has stepped up diversification efforts closer home and further, repeated a narrative that countries involved in its Belt and Road Initiative are becoming more important export locations, despite the West's calls to de-risk from China.

Indicator: Growing Popular Dissent in China. As per an article in Tribune, 09 March 2024 by Jayadeva Ranade, President Centre for China Analysis and Strategy (Ranade, March 09, 2024)[iii] there is a growing popular dissent among the people which has the potential potential to negatively affect the President and CCP's leadership role. This was evident from China prohibiting official Chinese organisations from reporting the number of protest and strikes, taking place across the country. It was reported by Nikkei Asia in Nov 2023 that 50 to 70 demonstrations occurred every month. Freedom, House China, dissent monitor stated that 1777 demonstrations linked to the property sector took place between June 2022 and October 2023. The Human Rights in China (HRIC) reported that protests by students on 27th and 28 December 2023 had involved 10,000 people, which was the largest Chinese protest last year. The Hong Kong based China Labour Bureau reported in January 2024 that in the last six months, they were 1104 strikes in China, and 976 protest by workers, striking for wage arrears etc. In another indication of stress and Chinese economy, it has been learnt that government employees' wages are being slashed across the country by 15-20%. Graduate unemployment is at an all-time high and youth are not getting married, pointing to a drop in birth and lower productivity. There is a high outflow of funds from China indicating that Chinese businessmen are uncertain about the countries, economic growth and policies. China state administration of foreign exchange revealed that USD 53 .9 billion in September 2023, left the country which is the highest since January 2016. The Chinese have been emigrating out of the country and exit bans have been placed on them. The figure in 2016 stood at 5000 while that in 2020 stood at 39,000. Unless the Chinese economy begins to grow and people's lives improve, the Party will face increasing popular discontent. These indicators of China's difficult economic situation and growing popular discontent, including within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) need to be monitored. These have the potential to negatively affect President Xi Jinping and the CCP's leading role.

Indicator: Lack of Global Popularity of China (Gupta, March 25, 2024)[iv]. The gloomy economic scene in China is borne out by facts and figures. China's net FDI plummeted to $33 billion in 2023, about one-tenth of $344 billion in 2021, as per China's State

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Administration of Foreign Exchange. The American chip-related global investments in China plunged from 48 per cent in 2018 to 1 per cent in 2022, shifting to India, Singapore and Malaysia.

Expatriates from the West and other regions stationed in China are also decreasing. China gave 7, 11,000 residence permits to foreigners in 2023, which is down 15% from 2019 as per National Immigration Administration data. The number of passport renewals, as per US Embassy in Beijing has sharply reduced from pre-Covid levels. British nationals in China has declined by 50% from 2019 to about 16,000 only as per British Chamber of Commerce in China, the Japanese have reduced by 13% and South Koreans by around 30% in 2019 as per official figures.

Foreign tourist arrivals in 2023 was down by 60% from pre-Covid levels. Major Chinese airports are eerily empty with international flights bringing few foreigners due to China's increasing quarrels with the US and other countries, reports of arbitrary arrests and detentions, China's obsession with security and its support for Russia in the Ukraine war.

Foreign students in China returned to their home countries after Covid and most of them are yet to return back to China. This is due to geopolitical tensions, decline in Chinese economy, high unemployment, low prospects of getting a decent job and China's new counter espionage law, which has made it difficult to do research work. Many keen on learning Chinese, are instead going to Taiwan. American students in China declined from 15,000 in 2012 to 350 in 2022, as per figures by US Embassy in Beijing. According to Chinese Ministry of higher education number of foreign students enrolled has dropped from 1,72,571 in 2019 to 1,14, 112 in 2022.

In erstwhile times, globally people wanted to visit and participate in doing business with China. This has reduced considerably now since most countries like US, UK, EU countries, India, Philippines and Japan etc. consider China as a aggressive and belligerent nation, that does not respect a international rules based order and are taking steps to reduce their dependence on China and relocating their supply chains to safer and friendly nations where labour is cheap and business environment is friendly. The complete exclusion of China from global supply chains may be difficult to achieve due to its vast industrial and manufacturing complex, it is definitely happening at a slow pace.

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Indicator: Likely Projected Growth of GDP of India, China and the US. Currently China's economy is approximately five times of India's economy in GDP terms. Therefore, by rough estimates, by the centennial periods of 2047 and 2049 for India and China respectively, this economic gap may be considerably large. However, by 2075 this picture is likely to change considerably with China's economy being the largest followed by India and the US. Near parity would have been achieved between Chinese and Indian economies. These deductions can be theoretically made from the GDP projections by IMF and Goldman Sachs, given in the following Table No 1.

Table No 1 GDP Projections by IMF and Goldman and Sachs (USD in Trillions)

Year	US	China	India	Remarks
2023	26.855	19.374	3.737	> US economy is 1.32 times Chinese economy > Chinese economy is 5.2 times Indian economy
2028	32.3	27.4	5.5	> US economy will be 1.2 times Chinese economy > Chinese economy will be 5.0 times Indian economy
2075	51.5	57	52.5	> Chinese economy will overtake US economy > Indian economy will overtake US economy and be at near parity with Chinese economy

Source:- Compiled by author based on open source material from IMF And Goldman Sachs 24 July 2023 (IMF & Goldman Sachs, July 24. 2024)[v]

This data follows mathematical logic and does not factor in the geopolitical situations in the globe which can alter these equations like, wars/conflicts. Chinese economy is under duress and these projections may alter considerably. These data trends may alter considerably if the Chinese economy gets affected by a Taiwan specific conflict. The Indian economy would also get affected and cannot remain insulated from such conflicts. India needs to continue to build its economic muscle and take advantage of relocation of global supply chains to Indian shores. This a complex and long drawn process, but, we must not offer shelf space for cheap Chinese products and indigenise our industries instead.

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All indicators explained in the scenario above are pointing towards, all not being well in China. It would be interesting to note, if over a period of time these indicators show sharper trends, finally leading to severe discontent and people rising up against the Party's leadership. This 'internal vulnerability' may force China to stabilise its borders with India, in order to revive its economy.

Vulnerabilities Leading to Lack of Capacity to Guard Borders.

History of China Settling its Border Disputes. China had settled its territorial disputes in two phases. The first phase saw disputes settled with Myanmar in 1960, with Nepal in 1961, with Afghanistan in 1963, with Mongolia in 1964 and with North Korea in the years 1960-1965. In the second phase of 1990-1998, it resolved disputes with Russia in 1991, with Laos in 1992, with Kazakhstan in 1994, with Tajikistan in 1998 and with Vietnam in 1998. The first phase of settlement can be attributed to two reasons for internal vulnerability viz. the '*Tibetan rising in Lhasa in 1959'* (post annexation of Tibet in 1951) and the '*Three Lean Years*' after the '*failed Great Leap Forward from 1958-62'*. The 1959 Revolt threatened China's strategic communication lines to the border régionss with India, Nepal and Myanmar, leaving them borders virtually undefended. China started negotiations with Myanmar and Nepal and these disputes were settled in 1960 and 1961 respectively. The failed Great Leap Forward brought about immense political instability in the periphery and led to the mass migration of over 100,000 Uighurs from Xinjiang to the USSR from 1954-1963. These events forced China to settle the borders with Afghanistan in 1963 and Mongolia in 1964, since they could not commit forces to man these borders. In case of Afghanistan, China did not claim any area and agreed to the border decided by the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1895. In case of Mongolia, it formulated one of the most comprehensive border agreements and that consisted of "678 cement and rock markers, has 68,000 words and 105 maps". Regarding China-North Korea border, there is no public record of negotiations or settlements and neither side has yet asserted claims on other lands, thereby indicating a tacit understanding of their border perceptions.

Second Phase of Border Settlements. Like the first phase, China faced two internal vulnerabilities and was compelled to negotiate with some of its neighbours. The first vulnerability was its '*international isolation brought on by the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989*'. The second vulnerability was '*worsening of the unrest in Xinjiang that got pronounced due to disintegration of the Soviet Union'*, which forced China to guard new frontiers that were initially part of the Soviet Union. Tiananmen massacre presented a direct challenge to the

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Party's legitimacy and isolated China internationally. It became imperative to build trust and appear as a responsible State in the comity of nations. The compulsion of economic growth was also vital to Deng Xiaoping's strategy of 'opening and reform'. Therefore, China settled disputes with Russia and Vietnam to show the world that it was a responsible nation and that the Tiananmen massacre was just an aberration. The unrest in Xinjiang could be exploited by Uighur 'rebels' from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, due to the porous borders, which compelled China to settle the border dispute with Russia in 1991, with Kazakhstan in 1994 and with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 1998.

Thus, it can be safely deduced that all border settlements of China took place in the wake of internal vulnerabilities and lack of capacity to defend its borders. In case of India and China too we have to look for scenarios where these conditions can manifest in the future and force China to come to the negotiating table as a sensible strategic option for its continued growth and prosperity.

Likely Conflict in Taiwan. The '*external vulnerability could be a Taiwan specific conflict'* where it falls short of military capacity to handle multiple fronts. In this case, China may decide to close the land border front with India, through border negotiations. This is well within the realms of possibility. China has taken an uncompromising stand with US on Taiwan and stated in its Defence White paper of 2019 that it would go to any stage of conflict to protect its sovereign rights over Taiwan.

China's 2019 Defence White Paper (Cordesman, 2019)[vi] brings out that America and China are the main competitors for becoming a superpower and China's growing military forces will be able to challenge the USA at some point in time. It blames the US for adopting unilateral policies and strengthening Asia Pacific alliances that add complexities to regional security. As per China, it is USA that is provoking intense competition among countries and forcing them to increase their defence expenditures. It describes China's modernisation and expansion of armed forces as defensive. It states that from modern times China has suffered from aggression and wars and have learnt to defend their peace. It further claims that China since founding of PRC in 1949, has never started any war or conflict.

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The ibid White Paper brings out that it's armed forces, defend, important waters, islands, and reefs in the East China Sea, the South China, Sea and Yellow Sea to acquire full situation awareness of adjacent waters, conduct joint rights, protection and law, enforcement operations, properly handle maritime and air situations and resolutely respond to security threats, infringements, and provocations on sea. China resolutely opposes wrong practices and provocative activities of US regarding arms sales to Taiwan, sanctions on the CMC equipment development department and its leadership, illegal entry into China's territorial waters and maritime air spaces near relevant islands and reefs and wide range and frequent close in reconnaissance. It discusses *Taiwan issue being critical to Chinese strategic interest and indicates willingness of China to escalate to any form of serious conflict with US.*

Scenario: Change of President in China. Another situation could be change of leadership in China. The current President, Mr Xi Jinping has been in power since 2012 and has declared himself as leader for life. By the end of his third term, which is from 2022 to 2027; he would be 74 years old and a fourth term for him from 2028-2032, would imply him being 79 years old. Firstly, as per PRC State Council Data the average life expectancy in China is 78.2 years and he may not be expected to live so long. Even if he does, his abilities of being an effective leader are likely to be hindered due to age/health issues. In the latter case there were numerous reports in media about his health deterioration. It was speculated that President Xi Jinping is suffering from 'cerebral aneurysm' and was hospitalised at the end of 2021 (India TV, May 15, 2022)[vii]. Rumours were abuzz that he preferred to be treated with traditional Chinese medicines rather than going for surgery. In March 2019, during Xi's visit to Italy, his gait was observed to be unusual with a noticeable limp and in France during the same tour, he was seen taking support while trying to sit down. Similarly, during an address to the public in Shenzhen in October 2020, his delay in appearance, slow speech and coughing spree again led to speculation about his ill health. The truth will never emerge, since China is known to manipulate data, keep things ambiguous and under wraps.

Therefore, change in Presidency scenario contingency is a possibility that cannot be ruled out. A likely change in leadership would definitely bring in winds of change which may have an impact on our border negotiations and international dealings. The counter view is that none of the Chinese leaders in the past have shown an inclination to discuss borders. However, we need remain positive that a new leader may usher in new policies, to include mending relations with India which have stalled as of now.

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Scenario: Low Morale of PLA. The PLA is CCP's army and owes its loyalty to the Party; unlike India where the Armed Forces belong to the nation owe their loyalty to the Constitution of India. Mr Xi Jinping needs PLA to be firmly on his side through handpicked loyalists, placed in critical positions. However, unfavourable conditions may force PLA to compromise its loyalty towards its leader. The Defence Minister General Li Shangfu went out of public view since August 2023 and was replaced without explanation by General Dong Jun; possibly sacked on charges of corruption. Two senior Rocket Force Generals were removed on earlier on charges of corruption. In a major purge of the Chinese military, nine senior generals of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), including senior officials of the country's Rocket Force, have been dismissed from Parliament on 30 Dec 2023 (The Hindu, Dec 30, 2023)[viii]. The report carried the announcement of the Standing Committee of the NPC but did not attribute any reason for their disqualification. Corruption is rampant in PLA and may be difficult to root out completely. Strong arm measures may lead to loss of morale in the senior ranks of the PLA and also affect the lower ranks in the Army. This scenario will lead to loss of morale in PLA and may compromise its operational efficiency and capacity to guard borders.

There is no historical evidence to suggest loss of morale in PLA since it's raising in 1927. However, purging of senior Generals in such large numbers is unprecedented in history of PLA. Even if does not affect the morale, it does affect the operational efficiency of a fighting organisation, for example, the Rocket Force; albeit temporarily. As research scholars and defence strategists we need to keep a close watch, to see if such fissures are likely to develop in the future.

Conclusion.

The statement of the problem is how to achieve stability on borders with China, based on negotiations and delineation of the LAC. Settlement of border issues is in the best interests of both nations, however, China has not given any indications towards this effect. India has stated its position very clearly and a classic stalemate persists. China is in no hurry and continues to play the long term game. However, as proven by history, a grave '*internal crisis*' or '*lack of capacity to defend its borders'* may alter this situation towards a border negotiation with India.

The scenarios visualised in this article, though theoretical, are interesting and within the realms of possibility. These scenarios may take years to fructify and we should be thinking on compressing these time lines. For example, China needs the thriving Indian markets to

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSSS.2024.5102

revive its economy. We should be very deliberate in our approach and impose costs on China. Similarly, we should capitalise on the shifting of global supply chains and create conditions for their shifting to Indian shores, by taking advantage of positive global sentiments in our favour.

India has earned a respectable place in the global arena, is steering the global south agenda and its voice is heard with respect. Its closeness to US is causing discomfort to China and we must play our cards carefully, keeping our policy of strategic autonomy in mind. It would be axiomatic for India to signal from a position of strength and hope for a border resolution on equal terms.

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