Countering Chinese offensive

jagdish batra @Ethicalperspectives
JUN 05, 2020, 15:38 IST

The present Chinese offensives along the line of control with India has an element of deja vu about it. If we put the not-so-old visit of Xi Jinping to India and the hyped bonhomie at that time, the scene brings out the uncanny resemblance with the situation in 1960 when the then Chinese premier Zhou Enlai visited India and the slogans of ‘Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai’ ranted the air. That make-believe friendly phase was subverted by China with a full-scale war along the McMahon Line.

The conflicting signals from Beijing with Xi asking the army to prepare for war and his deputy foreign minister claiming later normal relations with India are characteristic of the duality in the conduct of Chinese foreign relations. How can one believe the Chinese ambassador’s overtures in such a situation? Not only this, but China has also egged on Nepal to create a fresh map laying claim to Indian territory. Pakistan has always been incited to carry on its proxy war of terror against India. While Pakistan has existed based on India-bashing, Nepal would soon realize the implications of falling into the Chinese trap. It would do well to take a cue from Sri Lanka which has revised its policy towards China after the latter controlled the port built by it on Sri Lankan soil for defaulting on payments.

What has caused surprise in some quarters is the timing of the confrontation. It has come at a time when the whole world is battling the China-born Covid19 epidemic. Nothing explains it better than the reports (even though confirmation is impossible about what happens behind the iron curtain) about unrest in China following the setback to its industry for which China alone is responsible. It’s posturing about WHO suggests its complicity in wreaking havoc in the world through the deadly virus.
That has rightly alerted most of the countries in Europe and elsewhere so that Chinese imports are now hot potatoes for them.

The situation in Hong Kong has already been a pain in the neck of the Chinese government which, again is solely responsible for reneging on its promises to the residents of this erstwhile British colony and coming out with stringent laws to curb democratic opposition there. These are some obvious factors which may have forced the Chinese government to create tension with India so that the attention of the Chinese people can be diverted. In doing this, it has even put at stake its huge export surpluses in its trade with India. But if China has a more sinister design in actually forcing the matters on the LoC issue, then it would mean it has chosen the time which favours it strategically. The new China of Xi Jinping is no different from the one under Mao Tse Tung in denying their subjects any rights including that to life.

Time alone will tell if the Chinese action at the border is pure brinkmanship or more, but going by history, we have to prepare for any eventuality and India has rightly amassed troops and arsenal in equal measure at the border. The Chinese will be miscalculating if they thought they could repeat what they did in 1962. Nehru’s airy idealism is a thing of the past. Modi and BJP believe in the ancient dictum shathe shathyam samacharet (The shrewd has to be countered with shrewdness alone). They are far more realistic in approach and have the political will as was evidenced in a surgical strike in Pakistan or in abrogating the seven century-old Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. It is time India became vocal on the issues of Hong Kong and Taiwan. The WHO enquiry panel is being chaired by India and one hopes, we shall not feel cowed down by Chinese aggression – something which is definitely at the back of the mind of the Chinese strategists.

What stands out as an odd irritant is the attitude of the Congress Party whose leader Rahul Gandhi, much in keeping with his wayward and thoughtless words and actions, visited the Chinese embassy in Delhi in January this year and his party, knowing well its implications, tried to push the news under the carpet. Why he met the Chinese ambassador, we won’t ever know, but it did send a signal to the Chinese about the fractured nature of our polity. At least, in matters related to foreign policy, we must speak in one voice, particularly, when it relates to an enemy nation.
The public at large is better aware of this danger and we see initiatives in promoting swadeshi and boycotting Chinese goods. An onslaught has been made on Chinese applications used in mobile phones. There is a long way to go here. While some Chinese goods can be boycotted right away, there are some like vital components of machines or ingredients of medicines which will take time to be replaced with indigenous components. But surely, if we move sincerely in this matter, the small steps can lead to big results.