



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG POLICY BRIEF

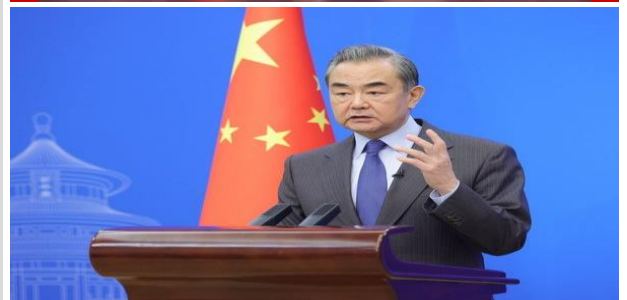
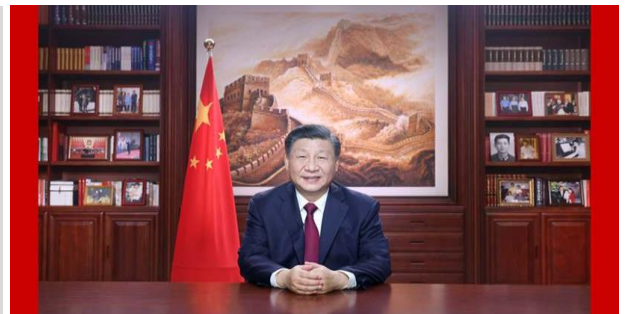
Managing China Going Forward

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Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

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Cover Photographs:

Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered his New Year's Address on December 31, 2022. Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations on December 25, 2022. Source: Twitter (@China_Amb_India)

The Surface to Air Missile Brigade of the Air Force under the PLA Central Theater Command practice using the missile guidance system during around the clock combat training exercise on November 2, 2022. Source: China Military Online.

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Managing China Going Forward

by
Nalin Surie

At the end of 2022, only an inveterate optimist can be sanguine about Sino-Indian relations in 2023. It would appear that there is still no recognition in China that its malign actions in East Ladakh in June 2020, its negotiating positions since in the mil-mil talks to rectify the situation there, and the most recent attempted incursion in Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh, have virtually destroyed whatever trust that had begun to be established between the two countries, particularly in the 21st century.

What is worse, China is now questioning the very edifice on which the Peace and Tranquility (P&T) and CBM arrangements were established starting with 1993 and thereafter built upon in 1996, 2005 and beyond. The very basis of what constitutes "mutual and equal security" is now being challenged and unilaterally interpreted. Significant in this context is the public stance postulated by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in his year-ending speech on foreign policy on December 25, 2022 in Beijing. He stated that China is "committed to upholding stability in the border areas" and on that basis it is ready to work towards the steady and sound development of bilateral relations. In contrast, the "ironclad friendship with Pakistan" is to be consolidated. It is to be noted that "stability" is not a defined term in our bilateral relations, and in any event is no substitute for P&T in our border areas and restoration of the status quo in East Ladakh.

There appears to be scant realisation in China that public opinion in India has clearly turned against China.

While India has made it clear that without P&T being effectively restored on our borders, bilateral relations cannot normalize, the Chinese seem to believe that this issue is not of such overriding significance and should not be allowed to dominate or hijack the entire relationship; that cooperation on multilateral issues can become the basis of building the bilateral relationship; and cooperation on the development of the South provides a historic opportunity for India and China to establish a fair and equitable international order. At the same time, many Chinese strategic thinkers and analysts reportedly believe that India does not count in the Chinese scheme of things.

In effect, managing China in 2023 will undoubtedly be a dominant feature of India's foreign, security and economic policies. This would not only be in the context mentioned above, but also in the backdrop of Xi Jinping's stated



objectives at the recent 20th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that China will play an active part in the region, in the global system of governance, in setting global security rules, in safeguarding regional security, in establishing a strong system of deterrence, and in resolutely defending China's sovereignty, security, development interests and maritime rights and interests. For this purpose, the PLA will be further developed into a force that is world class and fights to win.

Under Xi going forward, security will precede development.

Given the above framework, what must India do to manage and conscribe China?

The structure of the bilateral relationship painstakingly built up, especially in the 21st century, will have to be renegotiated and reordered.

Undoubtedly, the first priority going forward will be to ensure the security and sanctity of our borders with China. This will require, inter alia, comprehensive infrastructure upgradation, appropriate kinetic and non-kinetic deployments along the border, improved surveillance along the LAC and the border regions to have real time intel on PLA deployments and activities in Tibet and Xinjiang, and military, space and cyber platforms for purposes of cross purpose and hybrid operations.

The process of negotiations and diplomatic dialogue, including at the military level, must be sustained but from a position of strength and on the basis of mutual and equal security. What the latter means may now, however, need to be better defined to ensure that our security interests are not compromised.

China is fast growing and upgrading its nuclear weapons and missile arsenals and capabilities. We cannot allow this to become a permanent disability for India.

The P&T and CBM agreements will need to be redone.

Efforts to arrive at a border settlement based on the April 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles would need to be pursued once some level of mutual trust is restored.

Several of India's major river water systems rise in Tibet. Our interests as a lower riparian will have to be safeguarded.



The economic pillar which so far had been the fastest growing but lopsided pillar in the bilateral relationship will need to be restructured. The process has begun and has the support of Indian public opinion. But, in the weaning-off process, complete decoupling is not necessary. India's private sector will also have to start looking beyond easy bottom lines and to home shoring.

Interference in India's internal affairs will have to be countered and cyber-attacks on our infrastructure and other facilities prevented. There is need for active defense in these dimensions.

China's efforts to challenge and contain India in South Asia must be pushed back. Efforts will have to intensify so that China is not able to vitiate Indian influence in the region. The China-Pakistan axis will need greater attention, not only in the bilateral but also regional and international contexts. Afghanistan conceivably offers opportunities.

The QUAD and the Indo-Pacific architectures will have to be strengthened and fleshed out.

India's Act East, Act West and Indian Ocean policies will need to focus on greater strategic content and implementation of projects/agreements.

The Japan and ROK partnerships need to be further diversified and strengthened. So too the partnerships in Central Asia and East Africa.

Our relations with Russia, the country straddling the Eurasian landmass, stand on their own and need to be sustained. This is notwithstanding the Sino-Russian agreement of February 4, 2022.

In international fora, the Chinese assault to reform international governance structures, and build on their permanent membership of the UNSC through the Global Development and Global Security initiatives enunciated by Xi Jinping, will have to be countered as was done for the BRI. Allies will have to be found for this effort. Incidentally, China is now focused on arguing that the most important aspect of UNSC expansion is permanent membership for Africa.

On other multilateral issues on the global agenda, we must not allow China to hide behind our coattails till convenient and strike out and make deals beneficial for itself when convenient.

The Chinese offer of jointly working for uplifting the South is heady but unlikely to be of comfort for India. In the evolving new international architecture, which may have three distinct blocs, there will likely be a tussle



between China and India to influence the South. This competition will have to be managed.

India's chairmanship of the G-20 and SCO during 2023 could conceivably be complicated by China acting on its own or on behalf of its proxies. This will require skillful diplomacy and coalition building to neutralize and counter China's intentions.

The course of action suggested above is obviously not comprehensive but focused on essentials. Managing China will not only require an all of government approach but an all of country approach to protect and ensure India's own sovereignty, territorial integrity, development, core interests and aspirations. It will also require India to sustain and build partnerships not only with countries in our immediate and extended hinterland, but also with those in the West and with Russia.



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