

Settling differences with China

Mukul Sanwal

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The relations between India and China need not be – and should not be – a zero sum game, and the time is ripe for settling differences with China as the major political parties share this objective.

The Congress manifesto speaks of "resolution of the differences of perception about the border and the line of control" and Narendra Modi, the leader of the BJP, in an interview to the Times of India, stated that "it is in the realm of possibility for us to solve our problems with China and take our relationship with China to a new level". What would that entail?

The current importance of the Henderson-Brooks Report on the events of 1962, for foreign policy rather than military operations, is the light it sheds on the border, which is the root cause of the problem between the two countries. The operational issues raised in the Report are rightly of concern only to the military and the Ministry of Defense. The public interest is also not being served by focusing on the individuals involved, as that is largely of historical interest.

The national debate should really be on whether the assertion in the leaked report that Dhola Post, where it all started, was located north of the McMahon line, and whether this was known to the Defense and Foreign Ministries, or inadvertently located wrongly by local commanders and the mistake was not brought to the notice of the government. If this was indeed the case then statements made by the Chinese leaders at that time of teaching India a lesson would reflect a response to a local situation rather than Chinese expansionism.

There are other references in the leaked Report that the Government was advising caution, and the entire communication from the Defense Ministry was not transmitted by Army Headquarters to the ground formations. There are also statements that new posts were to be established only in Ladakh, where there was no agreed border, and their location was being ordered directly from Army Headquarters.

Apparently, there was no government direction to establish new posts as part of the "forward policy" in Arunachal Pradesh with its McMahon Line. The report categorically states that Dhola Post was established inadvertently north of this line, on the basis of incorrect coordinates, by the ground formation and not by Army Headquarters. The mistake was realized and reported but no action taken, and it invited immediate requests from the Chinese not to cross the agreed border.

The nation needs to know whether this was indeed the case, and what the files of the Government of India have to say, because they were not available to the Henderson-Brooks Committee.

A re-look of the intentions of the Chinese is important because according to an objective analysis of long-term economic trends by the OECD around 2030 Asia will be the world's powerhouse just as it was prior to 1800. Currently the OECD has two-third of global output compared to one-fourth in China and India, and by 2060 these two countries will have a little less than half of world GDP with OECD's share shrinking to one-quarter. China is expected to surpass the US by 2016

to become the largest economy in the world, and India's GDP is expected to exceed that of the US by 2060.

India's GDP will increase from 11% to 18% as a share of global GDP while China's share will remain at 28% during this period, just as it has been since the dawn of civilization.

The primary factor holding us back will be the growing demand for food, water and energy, which is expected to double, and will require reshaping a global system that served the natural resource and security needs of 20 per cent of the population to one that will share prosperity and peace with all of humanity in an interdependent world faced with ecological limits.

India and China will have to reconstruct international relations theory, as the focus of both realists and idealists is on material force and material benefit whereas we now need a global vision of sharing natural resources and technology. A shared vision of prosperity for four billion people who have yet to benefit from globalization will provide the legitimacy to reshape the global order.

Therefore, the shift will require new global rules based both on markets and social considerations. Creating markets for economic growth and then creating new markets to clean up have led to the current global ecological crisis; climate change is an example of market failure. Global environmental change is not about physical but social processes shaped largely by patterns of resource use and urban design.

In climate change there is already a close collaboration with China. We have the opportunity, as we build our infrastructure and China shifts to consumption, to make our two countries increasingly interdependent economically, to allay future concerns as we will continue to grow long after China's growth stabilizes. A shared global vision will overcome both the global rulemaking deficit and competition inherent in the rise of two Asian giants.

Changing the political relationship between two rising powers seeking to establish their territorial integrity, identity and rightful place in world affairs requires that both countries use the opportunity provided by their shared interest in global governance reform to develop close cooperation and trust, which will lead to a demarcated border rather than let a colonial legacy dominate relations.

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.