



## **India and China: The end of a chapter?**

**Speaker:** Amb Nirupama Rao, former Foreign Secretary of India & former Ambassador to China & USA

**Chair:** Amb. Ashok K. Kantha, Director, Institute of Chinese Studies & former Ambassador to China

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**Venue:** Zoom Webinar, ICS Delhi

The speaker began her conversation by arguing that the Galwan tragedy on the night of 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020 disturbed the whole calculus of relationship between the two countries which was initiated with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December of 1988. China buoyed by military and imperialistic ambitions exhibited muscular attitude in line with their expansionist agenda and made claims along the Western sector of Line of Actual Control where India's presence is more visible.

The speaker noted that the implications of the choices that we make now in handling this crisis will have repercussions, and hence there is need for coherent thinking. The ways of handling China can be by way of complete disengagement with China and India entering into possible coalitions with friends and partners not only on military and security fronts but also on trade, investments, innovations, etc. But traditionally for India, balancing is at the core of her actions. So there is a need to have a calibrated diplomatic approach which brings more secure future than war or armed conflict. India should look at deploying diplomatic assets properly. Partnership with US is a valuable asset built over years. Naval exercises are underway with US and the leadership level pact between President Trump and Prime Minister Modi are also very strong. Naval and maritime cooperation with friends like Japan, energizing India's Act East policy, nurturing relationship with EU member states like Germany, France, UK and building multilateral strength for equality and mutual benefit should be part of India's diplomatic strategy. On the issues of Tibet and Taiwan also, there is scope for policy review on the Indian side.

Since transgressions along the LAC have increased steadily over the years, the speaker pointed for the need for strategic rebalancing, building military capabilities and infrastructure along the

LAC, and stronger strategic communication and information systems. According to her, China's capabilities are much networked in terms of Cyber, Command and Control, Communication, Computers (C4) and Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) which are areas that India needs to catch up.

On the geo economic front, the speaker argued that India needs to drive harder bargain with Chinese companies operating in India taking into consideration the security threats to India. The actions should be based on realism and assessment of relative strengths. China has imposed tariff barriers on Indian IT, Pharmaceutical products, etc but China has successfully made inroads into the Indian market.

China of today is different from the 1950-60s first generations People's Republic of China and has a different nationalistic undercurrent and a sense of entitlement. Many countries such as Sweden, Canada and Norway who were friendly with China are also experiencing intimidation from China. China doesnot have a shared ideal of democracy and human rights and that is raising questions on whether China has really been contributing to any global good.

According to the speaker, India needs to take a nuanced and well-defined action with China. It should seek de-escalation along the Chinese border and also review its dependency on China, strengthen business regulation and work on multiple domains such as pandemic global challenge, health, strengthening multilateral institutions like WHO, etc.

During the discussion, questions were raised by the participants on a whole range of issues concerning China. On the question of Galwan-like crisis in the past, the speaker drew reference to Chinese transgression in Sumdorong Chu which took several years to get resolved. On the question of Dalai Lama, the speaker answered that he is precious to India and proposed conferring on him Bharat Ratna recognizing his deep rooted connection with India. On the question of whether China considers other countries as equal, the speaker was of the view that China suffers from 'Great Power Autism' considering that their time has come signaling the end of US leadership in the world. Replying to the question of the newly developing Iran-China relations, the speaker said that it may be a step in the direction of China building a countervailing coalition with countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and now Iran. The reason for delay on India's part on implementing the Chabahar project also needs examination. On the question of whether balancing act with China has done anything good to India, the speaker said that there had been high points in India - China relations and also the efforts have contributed in maintaining peace and tranquility along borders. She also said that a white paper on border security should be tabled in the Indian parliament. On the question of whether companies like Huawei, ZTE should be banned; the speaker said that Indian government should be careful considering companies like Huawei having links with Chinese defense establishments. The speaker also opined that given India's strength in IT, government should have declared IT as a strategic sector and our country would have benefited from the potential skills available in that sector.

*This report was prepared by Amitava Banik, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies.*

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