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February 22, 2021

**The Ladakh compromise**

This Valentine’s Day, China sent special white roses with a letter to India’s ‘glorious seven’ – Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh, Raksha Sachiv Ajay Kumar, Generalissimo Rawat, General Naravane, Lt-Gen Mohanty, Lt-Gen Paramjit Singh and Lt-Gen Joshi.

The disengagement agreement between Beijing and New Delhi mirrors the Treaty of Versailles (1919) dictated to Germany by the winning powers – Britain, France and US. The German plenipotentiaries, Muller and Bell, simply subscribed to its Ts & Cs, but after returning to Berlin they admired the French pastries/coffee they had in Jardins du chateau de Versailles.

Another comparison of the India-China disengagement can be made with what Hitler prescribed to Neville Chamberlain at Bad Godesberg on November 24, 1938. After returning to London, the Tory prime minister – avoiding the word ‘appeasement’ – called it "peace for our time”.

Rajnath Singh, after receiving a copy of the diktat from China, gave a speech at the Rajya Sabha on February 11, saying: "the agreement that we have been able to reach with the Chinese side for disengagement in the Pangong Lake area envisages that both sides will cease their forward deployments in a phased, coordinated and verified manner”.

According to the agreement, which I call India’s acquiescence, the Chinese PLA troops will gradually withdraw to the northern bank of Pangong Lake’s Finger-8 position. In reciprocity, Lt-Gen Menon’s Fire and Fury (XIV Corps) forces will retreat to Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger-3. Both sides agreed to dismantle infrastructures built since April 2020. They will also observe a moratorium on patrolling/reconnaissance.

Both sides will address the other territorial issues like Hot-springs, Gogra, Depsang and Naku-la, in due course. They will ensure disengagement along the 3,500 long Line of Actual Control. These terms of peace are nearly the same as were discussed between India’s MEA Jaishankar and Chinese FM Wang Yi in Moscow on September 10, 2020.

India has formally acknowledged China’s military dominance in the 60,000 sq km Ladakh region. By withdrawing from Pangong Tso’s south bank, the Northern Command has conceded its tactical advantage on the entire Kailash Range. This means that China will gain control of the Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers. The over-militarised subregions of Kargil and Leh have become vulnerable to the PLA, which means that XIV Corps HQ may be relocated from Leh to the south – Jammu and Himachal Pradesh.

The government of Pakistan in a timely manner demonstrated its geostrategic prudence by issuing the country’s political map in August 2020, according to which Ladakh’s other district Kargil has already been included in it.

Indian politicians have lambasted the Modi government’s capitulation to China. Congress MP Manish Tewari has stated: “By signing this humiliating agreement, India’s ability to negotiate has been severely conscripted, owing to its diminished net national power over the past 80 months of BJP rule….ravaged economy, coupled with cut-to-bone defence spending has left India increasingly vulnerable”.

Rajya Sabha member AK Antony, who was India’s defence minister (2006-2014) and Kerala chief minister (2001-2004) commented: “this disengagement agreement is a complete surrender of our rights….it has embarrassed the Veergati (martyrdom) of Col Santosh Babu and twenty others, and over a hundred critically wounded Deshbhakt Sainik (patriotic soldiers)”.

The Bharat Shakti dreams of Ajit Doval, Nitin Gokhle and Happymon Jacob have been shattered. The Indian intelligentsia is demanding answers to questions raised in the 1963 Henderson Brooks-Bhagat Report that analysed India’s 1962 war with China. They declassified the commentaries of Neville Maxwell. Several retired officers are seeking the actual reasons behind the resignation of then Indian army chief General Pran Thapar just after losing the Sino-Indian war of 1962. They argue that India lost a second war to China in 2020 the way it lost the first in 1962, but if General Thapar could step down in 1962, General Rawat must resign now.

China had annexed half of Ladakh in 1962; it has captured another one-quarter in 2020. One retired colonel, who was an instructor at the over-rated High Altitude Warfare School (HAWS) at Gulmarg, contends that it is easy to project the notion of surgical strikes on Pakistan but why conceal the surgical surrender to China?

Today’s reader of strategy and tactics looks beyond Clausewitz, Liddell Hart and Eisenhower. S/he will ask why Lt-General Harinder Singh moved his troops to the Pangong Lake in the first place? Certainly, as the current commandant, he may not convince his cadets at the IMA, Dehradun. Why is the Indian Army in the north playing with China the game of Fingers: finger-8 for the PLA and finger-3 to the XIV Corps?

There is a Russian proverb: ‘Never finger a sleeping bear, his fingers are sharper than yours’.

Historically, Napoleon’s armies played the game of fingers when they tried to invade Russia, but French Marshal Augereau’s fingers fell short of Russian Imperial Marshal Kutuzov. Napoleon never recovered from that humiliation.

During World War I, German General Carl Hoffmann tied his fingers at the Eastern Front. He was decisively beaten by Russian Field Marshal Aleksei Brusilov. As a result of that, Germany was forced to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

Again, during World War II, Hitler’s Generalfeldmarschall Brauchitsch played the game of fingers with Marshal Zhukov and, consequently, Nazi Germany lost the war.

General Rawat is a wise commander, as is General Naravane. If Premier Modi has the demeanour of Adolf Hitler, at least Rawat shouldn’t be behaving like Field Marshal Keitel, whom Kleist used to call ‘Lakeitel’ (personal servant).

The ongoing farmers’ rebellion may escalate the downfall of the BJP government. The Bharat Sena’s defeat-with-humiliation against the PLA has demoralised junior officers/soldiers. Kashmir will imperil India’s security once the military lid is removed. The growing China-Pakistan maritime cooperation is menacing Indian presence in the Indian Ocean. The Biden Administration may downgrade its strategic partnership with India. US-China relations may soon enter competition mode by giving up Trumpian belligerence. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal have started making independent policies. The people of Pakistan have rejected ineffectual/atrophic political leadership. The incumbent government is gradually achieving political stability and bolstering national security.

India needs to do some reality checks before it is too late. Treat all regional countries with respect, abandon the confrontational approach towards neighbours, redirect resources towards emancipation of over a billion poor masses and invest in their wellbeing. Remember, a nation that continues spending more money on the military than on social uplift ends up in eternal spiritual doom.

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