

Presentation

by

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Presentation at Session I: Strategic Communication

- Thank you for the invitation – to Ambassador Luo.
- Speaking in my personal capacity not as DG, ICWA – my colleagues at the Council have written in detail on the Wuhan & Qingdao summits.

- This seminar focuses on strategic communication.

It would be useful to describe and agree on what this means. What objectives is it intended to serve?

What are the issues covered by such communication?

- The Wuhan (27/28 April 2018) & Qingdao (9.6.2018) summits provide some clues.

Let me list some of the more critical ones:-

1. Such communication can be at different levels including/especially the highest.
2. Should address, inter-alia, regional and global issues/major issues of common concern/mutual interest.
3. Such communication should be held on a sustained basis through various forms/channels.
4. Such communication is necessary as India & China "as two major countries" need to work together "to enhance stable and balanced development to promote in the 21st century the rejuvenation of oriental civilisation" (Chinese position) and address their 'wider and overlapping regional and global interests'. (Indian position)
5. These two major powers enjoy "strategic and decisional autonomy" (India) and "insists on strategic autonomy, non-conflict and non-confrontation" to build a new type of international relations (China). In effect the India China relationship is now that between "major countries/powers".
6. The Closer Development Partnership must be sustained and preserved.

- To complement the above, at Qingdao, Xi described Wuhan as "a new starting point in our bilateral relationship" while Modi described the summit "as a milestone". In effect, the need is to build on the platform that has painstakingly been put together and developed over the last three decades.
- Thus the need to go back a little into history.

Post 1998, the India-China relationship can arguably be divided into two stages. Prior to this, very important steps had been agreed to at the highest level in 1993 and 1996 to maintain peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the India-China border areas. Since the enunciation of the principles for cooperation during the Vajpayee visit of June 2003, there has been a further refinement of these principles. But in practical terms, the Chinese approach to India appears to have changed since the beginning of the global financial economic crisis and its aftermath. While the relationship developed and diversified, it did not reach anywhere near potential. The limits of diversification have been narrow and intended for unilateral advantage; elements of confrontation seem to have gained in salience over those favouring cooperation. Competition seems to have replaced collaboration.

Fortunately the plethora of dialogue mechanisms and the understanding at the highest levels of the mutual benefit inherent in this partnership has permitted management of the relationship so as to keep matters generally on an even keel. But the waters have remained choppy. Wuhan thus represents a watershed moment.

- We at the working level, and public opinion, have to honestly assess why this happened. Our top leaders have clearly understood that it is to mutual benefit that this state of affairs must change and that we must go back to ensuring that building a qualitatively new relationship must be based on 'mutual respect and sensitivity for each others' concerns, aspirations, be based on equality and the principle of mutual and equal security'. These are not abstract words. These are

principles defined by our top leadership in the present century. Without adhering to these principles, which incidentally underline the outcome of the Wuhan & Qingdao summits, there cannot be 'trust development' between our countries and our joint desire to make this the century of Asia will be adversely affected.

- If you are an observer of India-China relations, you will be justifiably perplexed at what you see happening in the relationship. Our leaders have met very frequently since the beginning of the century at the very highest levels and yet the 'trust deficit' remains; India has not been consulted on flagship Chinese projects which affect its sovereignty and territorial integrity; India's core concerns are not treated with gravity; serious violations of the LAC have taken place. The trade balance is another issue. And there are other important ones too. Perhaps the Chinese side too have their own list of grievances.
- The first objective of strategic communications should therefore be to have a structured dialogue at different levels to understand each others' sensitivities, aspirations and core concerns. These must cover the bilateral, regional and global aspects. There has to be a package approach. This has clearly been recognised at Wuhan and reiterated at Qingdao viz. to develop the parameters of major country relations between India and China. The effort must be to arrive at a consensus. Where a consensus eludes us, there must be agreement or understanding on how this lack of consensus does not become an obstacle or road block for the development of the partnership. Quid pro quos will need to be worked out. None of this will, however, be possible unless peace and tranquillity is maintained along the LAC and in the India-China border areas and the sovereignty and territorial integrity concerns of each other strictly respected.
- In brief some of the other major issue that need to be addressed to strengthen the process of trust building, the parallel development of our economies and retaining independence in decision making include:-

1. Progress on clarification of the LAC.
2. Working out a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable boundary settlement based on the political parameters and guiding principles of April 2005.
3. Cooperation on shared water resources.
4. Consensus on an Indo-Pacific architecture that is open, inclusive, transparent, ensures balanced and equal security for all and is based on respect for international law especially UNCLOS. PM Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue on 1.6.2018 is the reference point.
5. Giving substance to the India-China CDP such that it is mutually beneficial, sustainable, based on competitive advantages and is technologically advanced.
6. Genuine collaboration in the fight against terrorism.
7. Genuinely learning from each other's development experiences and collaborating to mutual benefit.
8. Collaboration as equal partners on regional and international issues and in regional and international organisations including on reform of the international political and economic architecture.
9. Regular high level interaction between our two Ministries of Defence and Armed Forces is necessary to demonstrate/ensure strategic stability.

- I have no doubt that most of you would have read the article by Xu Jian written on 4.6.2018 for the China Institute of International Studies entitled "China's Major-Country Diplomacy and Sino-Indian Relations". On the latter aspect, he makes five points I would like to highlight:-

1. "The sound development of China-India relations in this perspective is particularly important for China".

2. "maintaining a peaceful, stable, friendly and cooperative relationship is an important mission for both sides"
3. "both countries have been also similarly sensitive to maintaining independence when formulating their foreign policies"
4. today, China & India share even more similarities..... In an increasingly multi-polarizing world China & India have even more similar interests and important responsibilities to share....." and
5. " on the other hand, the ultimate influence of third party factors on Sino-Indian relations is up to how China and India react to them".

These are wise words that those participating in strategic communications on both sides would do well to keep at the back of their minds. So too should think tankers.

- There is no inherent contradiction in the parallel rise of India & China so long as we adhere to the principles jointly enunciated by our leaders in contemporary times. These principles are in sync with contemporary and evolving reality. Sometimes though it appears that our systems are not in sync with the joint vision of our leaders of how best we can collaborate to meet our developmental requirements and the needs of regional and international peace, stability, development and sustainability.
- To convert potential into reality will require a major mindset change the first signs of which appear to be visible now in China. I trust this will be sustained. The top down approach needs to be majorly supplemented by a bottoms up approach. Consultation and consensus development must be the watchword. The imperative has to be collaborate and work together. Competition and rivalries will have to be curbed.

- To conclude let me quote PM Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue on 01.06.2018. He said: "I firmly believe that Asia and the world will have a better future when India and China work together in trust and confidence, sensitive to each others' interests."

