

CHAPTER – 4

CHINA'S WORLDVIEW

Thus far we have had a look at the Chinese Dream, their core interests, internal dynamics & certain other issues which have an external bearing. It is time now to study Chinese responses to these challenges. However, before doing that, it would be advisable and important to briefly look at the Chinese 'worldview'. In other words, their perspective about themselves and the world at large. Their world view & indeed that of any nation, always plays a critical role in shaping decisions & responses. Bypassing the same may lead to a flawed understanding of China's actions/responses & ultimately incorrect or at best imperfect conclusions.

Broad Strokes

China being an ancient civilisation has by now developed a mindset which can be said to be as heavily influenced by her history as by contemporary events. Following is a description of their broader world view.

One

China is an ancient civilisation and much like India a living one at that. A country with a long and ancient history naturally gets bound to some fixed notions. So, does China.

At the heart of Chinese thinking is that it is a great nation, had always been. It is true that China historically was a highly prosperous and

powerful nation where science and culture flourished. It has also been home to some of the greatest philosophers and thinkers who left deep influence on their national character and psyche.

In ancient Chinese thinking, China was at the centre of the world, a vastly superior nation surrounded by uncultured and backward vassal states. This deep-rooted belief together with its geography - sea on one side and inhospitable terrain on the balance three frontiers - turned it mostly into an inward-looking nation that traditionally shunned outside influence.

The Great Wall to its north is perhaps a manifestation of this very outlook.

Two

History has it that Lord Macartney presented himself at the Chinese Court in 1793 seeking the Emperor's permission to open an embassy on behalf of the British Crown. During his audience, he presented to the Emperor many gifts in response to which the Qianlong Emperor wrote back to King George III stating, "your sincere humility and obedience can clearly be seen, but we do not have the slightest need for your country's manufacturers." Remember by this time Britain had already embarked on industrialisation, yet its goods were seen as inferior or unworthy by the Emperor.¹⁰³

Not much later though in 1830, the British forced open the trade on the back of their military strength. This was the beginning of the collapse of the Chinese empire. What eventually followed was the '*century of humiliation*' at the hands of Japan and the West.

¹⁰³ Jon Berkely (04 May 2013). 'Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream', *The Economist*. Available at www.economist.com/news. Accessed 03 Feb 2017.

This 'humiliation' is deeply etched on the psyche of the Chinese people and has lent a sense of *victimhood*. Consequently, to the Chinese it is mostly 'us versus them'. The 'them' being those who colonised them earlier and now perhaps those who pose a challenge to her growing stature and dignity. Quite clearly the current 'them' are predominantly, Japan and the West (US in particular). *Incidentally, India does not seem to figure in that category as yet.*

Three

The above sense of victimhood has in fact been instrumental in forging *nationalistic sentiments*. The sense is that their best shot at greatness is in *staying united*.

Four

The *belief* that the 'century of humiliation' is well past and what lies ahead is *restoration of their rightful place as the greatest nation on Earth*.

Five

Lastly, *a yearning for the stability and order*. This could be one of the reasons for the CPC's continued strangle hold over Chinese society even when communist regimes have almost universally collapsed elsewhere in the world.

Foreign Policy

Having briefly seen their generic orientation, it might be instructive at this stage to study the makings & contours of their foreign policy which will shed further light on their worldview.

The literature on the subject suggests that there is considerable debate within Chinese think-tanks & institutions on the issue of foreign policy & various actions planned & taken by the Chinese central leadership. However, these debates & contents thereof must be viewed keeping in mind the kind of space (or lack of it) that is allowed within the Chinese system to air dissenting views & thoughts. Censorship is a reality to the extent that the Chinese have blocked the international social media platforms & created their own virtual space to satisfy this very basic human craving in modern times, while severely limiting the influence of outside world. Another disturbing practice is the extreme nature of the States retaliation to any view or action perceived to be damaging to the party or its actions. The responses have ranged from Tiananmen Square massacre on the one hand to long prison sentences for dissenters. Furthermore, China is believed to be the world's top executioner (with more than 2400 executions in 2014 alone). This clearly shows that the debates are, to a great extent, orchestrated & even managed to create a facade of participatory decision making favouring the popular demands & sentiments, whereas the decisions are in effect taken in a manner to ensure continued hegemony of the party (CPC) & what it believes is best for their country.

The above notwithstanding, the value & insight the study of these debates offers should not be discarded. Given the nature of polity & the governance system prevalent in China today, these debates remain a powerful tool to analyse Chinese worldview & the decision-making processes.

To begin with, let us have a look at a study carried out by The Rand Corporation in 2009 for the US Air Force. Some of the conclusions drawn by this report allude to the following¹⁰⁴: -

- It is the goal of her leaders to establish China's status as a respected great power.
- Her foreign policy has five objectives viz. economic growth & development; reassurance; countering constraints; diversification & reducing international space for Taiwan.
- Domestic considerations have a deep & significant impact on foreign policy decisions.
- China is gradually shifting away from its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. It has in some cases resorted to use of influence in other countries. (*Some recent e.g. include Darfur in Sudan, Myanmar & China's attempt to prop up the anti-India Oli faction during the Nepal crisis of 2016*).
- China is quite willing to work within the international system, institutions & rules. However, at the same time it is not averse to shaping institutions in a way conducive to her own goals (e.g. EAS, AIIB, SCO & derailment of security council expansion proposals).
- Despite its deep discomfort at existing unipolarity in the world, it is neither seeking to dislodge nor replace the US from its numer-uno position.
- On the one hand, she has been successful in not allowing any anti-China alliance to be formed, on the other, it has been able to raise her profile

¹⁰⁴ Evan S. Medeiros (2009). 'China's international Behavior', *The Rand Corporation*.

amongst the poorer countries in Africa & Latin America where the US is seen as excessively dominant.

- Most nations are drawn to China because of her growing economy rather than her ideals.
- China is increasingly trying to wean away from excessive dependence on the US & other wealthy western countries for trade, technology & prosperity. To this end, it is diversifying in Africa, Latin America & East Asia. China has not displayed tendencies to seek territorial expansion or use of military force.

Not all of what the Rand Corporation assessed seems to be holding on,

there are certain distinctive signs of change: -

- On the issue of territorial expansion, China has shown clear signs of aggression & its willingness to use the military as a means deterrence if not as an instrument of coercion. Her actions in the SCS bear testimony to this fact.
- China today is not averse to frustrate US efforts in dealing with regimes the latter considers as inimical to maintenance of a peaceful world order. Her forming of beneficial economic relations with countries such as Russia & Iran are a pointer in that direction.
- In addition, China has in the recent past also asserted herself by voting and articulating against stated positions & actions by the US. Blocking India's entry into NSG & veto of US led proposal in the UN Security Council to proscribe Masood Azhar as a designated international terrorist are two prominent instances relating to India.

- While China may not be seeking to dislodge the US from its numero-uno position, it is certainly working towards becoming the number 2 power.

Let us now look at the conclusions drawn by some other studies/analysis as well. Some strands are as under¹⁰⁵: -

- *China's century has not arrived* – at least not yet. Reason – though China will eventually surpass the size of the US economy, its Comprehensive National Power (economic + political + military + cultural strengths) will remain far behind. US soft power is unrivalled.
- China faces a '*rise dilemma*'. Therefore, great improvement in relations with US is an unrealistic dream to follow. However, it does not see a military conflict in the offing even in the distant future. They are acutely conscious of the mistakes committed by Germany & Japan.
- *Neighbourhood Orientation*. In the words of Wang Jisi, a scholar from Renmin University, "how China could be more powerful yet feel insecure". "The answer" he said, "was the weakness in China's neighbourhood policy". Li Yonghui, Director of the School of International Relations at Beijing Foreign Studies University states, "rising powers need a friendly periphery". He calls this, "*a strategic peripheral belt*". Others warn of extending the definition of periphery beyond the immediate neighbourhood for fear of excessive expansion. This thought process seems to have been echoed by Xi Jinping as well. In November 2014, Xi made a speech at the Chinese Communist Party's Central

¹⁰⁵ Antoine Bondaz, François Godement, Agatha Kratz (2015). 'EXPLAINING CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY RESET', European Council on Foreign Relations. Available at http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/explaining_chinas_foreign_policy_reset3001. Accessed 23 Jan 2017.

Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs where he laid out a seemingly new order in China's diplomatic objectives - he spoke of prioritising the promotion of neighbourhood diplomacy over the management of relations with other major powers. There is also Xi Jinping's call for the country's neighbours to "*free-ride*" on China's economic development.

- **China's 'One Belt One Road' policy is a manifestation of this outlook.**
- The ability to ride through the 2008 global financial crisis when western countries' weakness was exposed gave China a new-found confidence & stature. Thereafter China's foreign policy took a more assertive & strident undertone.¹⁰⁶
- Having repeatedly raised nationalistic sentiments for the sake of regime survival at home, the Chinese leadership has had to pursue immediate interests at the cost of using her rising power status to bolster global common welfare.¹⁰⁷

Military Orientation

Given the fact that China has been resorting to use of her military power to further her foreign policy goals, one other useful means of ascertaining China's worldview would be to assess the orientation of the Chinese military power.

¹⁰⁶ Suisheng Zhao (2013). 'Chinese Foreign Policy as a Rising Power to find its Right Place'. Available at http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Suisheng_Zhao.pdf. Accessed 23 Jan 2017.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

China has been publishing Defence White Papers (DWP) since 1998 & every two years since then. It would be beyond the scope of this dissertation to study these papers in detail. Therefore, we will limit our focus to the following three important & relevant aspects impinging on China's foreign policy as can be deduced from the recent DWPs alone: -

- **References to Overseas Activities & Interests.**¹⁰⁸ Both the 2013 & 2015 DWPs talk of Chinese military activities meant to safeguard world peace & regional stability such as UN peace keeping operations, safeguarding of SLOCs, international humanitarian aid and disaster relief, and joint exercises/training undertaken with foreign militaries. DWP 2013 clearly indicates that '*overseas interests*' are national interests and had to be safeguarded as they were necessary for supporting China's *economic and social development*.
- **Aspiration to Develop into a Maritime Power.**¹⁰⁹ DWP 2015 states that "the traditional mentality of land outweighing the sea has to be abandoned". In addition, it instructs the PLAN to undertake force building so as to make itself capable of undertaking *offshore waters defence and open seas protection*.

¹⁰⁸ Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces", April 2013, Part V - Safeguarding World Peace and Regional Stability. Available at http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm. Accessed 24 Feb 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, "China's Military Strategy 2015", April 2015, Part IV - Building and Development of China's Armed Forces, Force Development in Critical Security Domains. Available at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm. Accessed 24 Feb 2017.

- **Description PLA's Roles and Tasks.**^{110 111} As per DWP 2015 they now include safeguarding the sovereignty and security of China's territorial land, air and sea; safeguarding the unification of the motherland; *safeguarding China's security and interests in new domains (maritime, cyber and space); safeguarding the security of China's overseas interests*; maintaining strategic deterrence and carrying out nuclear counter attack; participating in regional and international security cooperation and *maintaining regional and world peace*; maintaining China's political security and social stability and supporting national economic and social development and *remaining a staunch force for upholding the CPC's ruling position. As can be seen the role & scope of PLA's activities now has a greater overseas orientation while retaining its allegiance to the party as an important ingredient to ensure regime survival.*

China's View on India

India does not figure too prominently in Chinese discourse. This is evident from an article published by Minxin Pei in 2011¹¹² where the author points out that in Apr 2011 there were only five articles published on India in major publications linked to the website titled "The People's Daily," China's

¹¹⁰ ibid

¹¹¹ Information Office of the State Council Of the People's Republic of China, Beijing, "China's Military Strategy 2015", April 2015, Part II - Missions and Strategic Tasks of China's Armed Forces. Available at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm. Accessed 24 Feb 2017.

¹¹² Minxin Pei (23 May 2011). 'Dangerous Misperceptions: Chinese Views of India's Rise', Center For The Advanced Study Of India, University of Pennsylvania. Available at <https://casi.sas.upenn.edu/iit/pei>. Accessed 23 Feb 2017.

most important official newspaper, despite the fact that the same month China had hosted the third BRICS summit attended by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh amongst others. Similarly, in another article By Li Xin in late 2103¹¹³ the author describes how on Oct 28, just three days after Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrapped up a rare state visit to Beijing, out of 10,000 news pieces chosen for display on Sina, which is China's most popular news portal and largest aggregator & whose news section- with its vast- audience, plays a major role in shaping the nation's media consumption, only 50 items dealt with India that too mostly on insignificant issues. Li goes on to describe India as "*a gigantic blind spot in China's foreign policy*". Yu Longyu, director of the Centre for Indian Studies at Shenzhen University says,¹¹⁴ "Among China's neighbors— Russia, the Koreas, Japan, even as far as Iran—Chinese interest and accumulated knowledge towards these countries is much, much stronger than it is towards India."

One of the reasons for this rather glaring absence of interest in India amongst the Chinese is the lack of social & cultural exchanges between the two countries. For instance, China ranks a distant 11th amongst source countries for foreign tourist arrivals into India with a mere 1.06 lakh tourists as compared to 12.13 lakhs coming in from the number one contributor i.e. the US.¹¹⁵

Another aspect that contributes to India's visibility, or lack thereof, in China is the type of items exported by India to China. The principal items of

¹¹³ Li Xin. 'India Through Chinese Eyes', World Policy Journal: Winter 2013/14. Available at <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/winter2013/india-through-chinese-eyes>. Accessed 25 Feb 2017.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

¹¹⁵ Leading source countries of foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2015. Statista, The Statistical Portal. Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/207005/foreign-tourist-arrivals-in-india-in-2010--by-source-country/>. Accessed 25 Feb 2017.

Indian exports to China comprise of ores, slag and ash, iron and steel, plastics, organic chemicals, and cotton.¹¹⁶ Quite clearly these items being primarily raw materials, do not concern the public at large.

Yet another potential cause of ignorance is the fact that India is but one of the 14 neighbours with whom China shares a boundary. Geographically China is very big & Indian borders are far from the Han Heartland.

The above notwithstanding, it would be wrong to conclude that the Chinese establishment, businesses & elites are completely unconcerned about India. India is watched by this segment with fair amount of interest. For a long time though, China viewed India as country whom they had 'taught a lesson' in 1962. India was considered to be too weak to be a challenge. As a consequence, India was mostly ignored till she popped-up on their radar post 1998 nuclear explosions. *Remember, soon after these explosions the then Defence Minister Sh George Fernandes had labelled China as India's potential threat number one*¹¹⁷. For obvious reasons this statement had not gone down well with the Chinese establishment.

In official discourse, India is often cited as a prime example of why democracy doesn't work. India, known as the world's largest democracy, is deemed dysfunctional.¹¹⁸ One of the main reasons for this is to portray their

¹¹⁶ Indian Exports to China. Business Maps of India. Available at <http://business.mapsofindia.com/trade-relations/india-china/indian-exports-to-china.html> Accessed 24 Feb 2017.

¹¹⁷ Manoj Joshi (18 May 1998). 'George in the China shop', India Today. Available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/china-is-the-potential-threat-no.-1-says-george-fernandes/1/264241.html>. Accessed 20 Feb 2107.

¹¹⁸ Li Xin. 'India Through Chinese Eyes', World Policy Journal: Winter 2013/14. Available at <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/winter2013/india-through-chinese-eyes>. Accessed 25 Feb 2017.

system as superior to open functional democracies in a context where they have no choice but to acknowledge India's remarkable growth.

However, there are some contrarian & saner voices as well e.g. scholars like Ma Jiali, a leading South Asian scholar at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), who is believed to advise the government on its India policy, argues that many people in the Chinese government realise that despite historical differences, there are growing commonalities in relations between the two countries and their positions on international issues. 'There is also the common goal that both countries do not want to see a uni-polar world'. For him, India is a close neighbour, a developing country with common goals, a rising power and an increasingly important international player, and, therefore, "*We must have good relations with India, or our national interest will be damaged*".¹¹⁹

Apparently, they do not view India as a primary or even major adversary as that status seems to be reserved for the US & Japan. But surely, they are now ceased of India's rise & are particularly riled at the amount of interest shown in her growth story by the west who are bent on conspiring to contain China.

Some other highlights are as under: -

- Territorial disputes mainly on Tawang & Arunachal Pradesh (South Tibet for them) together with relative freedom of action & speech to the Dalai Lama are major irritants. They view Dalai Lama as responsible for

¹¹⁹ Baladas Ghoshal (Oct 2013). 'China's Perception of 'Look East Policy' and Its Implications', Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

continued world attention on Tibet even though they have more or less been able to assimilate Tibet into their country's territorial boundaries.

- Particularly disturbing to the Chinese is India's increasing closeness to the US & Japan. The moment India is looked at in this context, the entire view changes as India is seen as having the potential to contest & rival China's dominance of the Asian continent.
- India's 'look east policy' also bothers the Chinese. They are aware of the cultural and spiritual ties that India shares with Southeast Asia & the soft power pull thereof. Their assertiveness in South China Sea has not helped matters. In such a security dynamic, it is natural for the ASEAN countries to look for friends & partners who can side with them in resisting the Chinese aggression. Here India is seen as a major potential rival to the Chinese especially in conjunct with the US.¹²⁰ To this end, China's opposition to India's entry as a permanent member of the UNSC can be seen as aimed at ensuring that India's stature is not increased to the level of China especially in Asia.
- Their India policy seems to be guided by considerations of economic pragmatism & containment. Their willingness to collaborate with India on issues of national interest to them such as BRICS & climate change & otherwise obstructing India's entry into NSG & UN Security Council are indicative of these tendencies.
- There was a brief period of higher expectation in improvement of bilateral ties after Xi Jinping's Sep 2014 visit to India & the reciprocal visit by PM Modi to China the following year. However, these expectations have

¹²⁰ *ibid*

since been tempered on account of India's look east policy & increasing closeness with the US & Japan.

- They are somewhat appreciative of India's economic orientation & reforms but are of the view that India's chaotic democracy & Kashmir problem will keep us from realising our potential to grow as a rival power to China.
- However, they believe that they can easily contain India by propping up Pakistan militarily & buying the loyalties of India's other neighbours economically.

Lastly, in sum China's worldview can be described as under: -

- *China is a great nation poised to take its rightful place on the global high table.*
- *Existing global powers will try their best to contain China's rise. China should therefore pursue her national interest by utilising all available resources (primarily money power & military might) without getting weighed down by moral considerations.*
- *Continued economic growth is the best means to secure internal stability as well as international stature (also perpetuates CPCs hold over power). To this end, diversify risks & opportunities by cultivating the periphery through economic inducements largely beneficial to herself.*
- *Concurrently, keep acquiring & expanding military power especially in the maritime, cyber & outer space domains targeted at a much wider geographical expanse.*

- *Continuously work towards growing her voice & profile in international fora & institutions in defiance of the US & its allies by following an increasingly assertive & strident foreign policy.*