

## Doklam Stand off Misadventure Portends Danger of War

A state of military stand-off had emerged between India and China and still continuing at the tri-junction ( India-China-Bhutan ) in Doklam area when the news came that China's PLA was constructing a motorable road in Doklam area and the Indian Govt. had objected to it and marched its troops into the area. Anti-China, jingoistic propaganda and war hysteria with calls to kick out the Chinese 'aggressors' had dominated for a while in a section of media and political circles in India. The Indian Army Chief General Bipin Rawat had thundered that the Indian Army was "fully ready for a two and half war simultaneously." Then China came with the comment that those who are talking about war in India are not learning lessons from 1962. Arun Jaitley, India's Defence Minister had readily replied that the Indian Army is many times stronger than it was in 1962. The Vice Chief of Army staff Lt. General Sharat Chand had gone further. He said, "China's expanding influence across Himalayas into our neighbourhood .....is bound to be a threat for us in the years ahead". Stating that "South Asia continues to be one of the most volatile areas" in the world, he asserted that "India being at the centre of it is security provider for this region." China had unleashed its own counter propaganda.

The BJP government is using the standoff at Doklam to whip up anti-China sentiments and national chauvinism. The RSS&Co is distributing millions of pamphlets containing anti-China propaganda and asking people to boycott buying of goods from China. It is a concerted effort the fruits of which they want to reap at a future opportune time while at the same time to divert the peoples' attention from the basic issues.

Japan, US imperialism's most important Asian ally, came out backing India's stance on Doklam issue. Japanese ambassador to India, Kenji Hiramatsu defended the intervention of Indian troops on the territory India has no legal claim, saying India has a "treaty of understanding with Bhutan". He also suggested, without naming Beijing, that its attempt to expand a road on the disputed plateau was tantamount to "unilaterally" trying to "change the *status quo* by force".

This support came after a day of holding a 2-by-2 meeting between US secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Defence secretary James Mattis and their Japanese counterparts respectively Taro Kono and Itsunori Onodera. The meeting decided that the US and Japan will work together "to advance the trilateral and multilateral security and defence co-operation with other partners in the region" notably South Korea, Australia and India.

The same type of arrangement was proposed by the US President during his telephonic talk with Narendra Modi on the occasion of August 15, that the two countries will "elevate their strategic consultations" by establishing "2-by-2 ministerial dialogue" involving their foreign and defence ministers.

As a continuation of strategic partnership signed by US and India in 2009, India is conducting joint naval exercises with US and Japan. India now allows US war planes and battle ships to make routine use of its military bases and ports and shares intelligence with the pentagon on Chinese ships and submarine in the Indian Ocean. The strategic partnership with US began when Vajpayee was the PM and continued through the UPA rule. During the last three years of his rule Modi turned India into a counter weight to China in the US strategy of isolating China and curtail its access to the Indian Ocean. If the ties under strategic partnership further strengthen, it makes India a subordinate partner to US imperialism's strategic aim of establishing its hegemony over the world with disastrous consequences to the people of India.

Let us look into the facts concerning the present episode:

1. Doklam area, where China is said to be constructing the motorable road, is part of a disputed territory between Bhutan and China. China and Bhutan held 24 rounds of talks since 1984 to clinch the issue. In early 1990s, China offered to renounce its claim over 495 Sq. Km of territory in the northern part of Bhutan in exchange for a small tract of 295 Sq. Km. of disputed territory in the west under Bhutan's control. The then Govt. of Bhutan seemed favourable to this, but the deal was not signed by the two governments. If at all, there can be any objection to the construction of a road in Doklam area it can be from the Bhutan Govt., because the said area is still a disputed area between Bhutan and China but continues to be under the control of Bhutan. It is a matter between Bhutan and China.

2. Curiously, the Indian troops had moved into the Doklam area raising a false alarm that the Chinese PLA had trespassed into the Indian side of the LAC. But when the authenticity of this version was questioned, the Indian Army Chief Bipin Rawat had to rush to the area where he found that nothing of the sort had occurred. Even then, the Indian Govt. sought to defend its act of moving its troops into Doklam area on the plea that it had done so on the invitation from the Bhutanese Govt.

3. The Indian rulers always viewed and dealt Bhutan as their satellite. As a small and weak country, situated at a strategically sensitive point, Bhutan had to wage a difficult and complicated struggle against the Indian rulers to withstand as an independent and sovereign country and live in peace and tranquillity.

The 1949 Friendship Treaty between Bhutan and India had placed Bhutan's External Policy in the hands of Indian rulers. This Treaty was revised in 2007 allowing Bhutan to conduct its own defence and external affairs. Article 2 of this treaty said that India and Bhutan "shall co – operate with each other on issues relating to their national interests. Neither country shall allow the use of their territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other." In practice, it was a check on Bhutan than on India.

Yet, Jigme Thinley Govt. in Bhutan sought to pursue an independent course. It held talks with China and had shown the interest to solve the border dispute with it. It established diplomatic relations with China. It signed an agreement with China to maintain peace and tranquillity along the border. But the Indian rulers were not happy with all this. They wanted to arm twist Bhutan to force them to abandon this course. In 2013, the Man Mohan Singh Govt had withdrawn the energy subsidies to Bhutan on the eve of general elections that summer. It contributed to the defeat of Jigme Thinley's Party. Again, when the new Govt. headed by Tshering Tobgay was preparing to hold border talks with China, the Indian rulers had intervened in the situation to 'advise' the Bhutanese Govt. In the context of present Doklam episode, the Indian rulers had straight away marched their troops into Doklam acting themselves as the self appointed protectors of Bhutan's territories and interests. Bhutan Govt. had neither confirmed nor denied the Indian Govt's claim that they had sent their troops into Doklam area only on the invitation of Bhutan Govt. The Bhutan Govt. had demanded China to stop the road construction as it affects the prospects or demarcation of border between the two countries.

Left to themselves, the Bhutanese people wish to maintain peaceful and friendly relations with India as well as China. They do not want tensions on the borders. They also do not want to be dragged into a conflict between India and China and to be used as a tool by others to flare up tensions and war like situations. While maintaining its claims on certain disputed territories in Doklam area, the Bhutan Govt. had been and still is striving to arrive at an amicable and final settlement with China. Big brotherly attitude of Indian rulers and uncalled for interference in the affairs of Bhutan and into the problem between Bhutan and China are only complicating and aggravating the problems.

4. It is a fact of history that Sikkim Kingdom was a British Colony. It remained independent for long even after the British transfer of power to the Indian ruling classes in 1947. Later it became a part of Indian Union through an act of annexation by the Indian rulers in 1975. China had given its consent to India's takeover of Sikkim only in 2003, that too, on the condition of India's acceptance of a Convention signed by China and Great Britain in 1890. This Convention clearly states that "the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its effluents flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet." China maintains that Sikkim – China sector of the LAC, accordingly, is a settled border. China mentions a letter written by the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the Chinese PM Chou-en-Lai in 1959 validating the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890.

Surprisingly, in June 2017, the Indian troops entered into "water parting" territory which defines the boundary. The Chinese Govt. had taken a serious objection to it. The Indian Foreign Secretary S.Jaishankar had expressed the hope of "resolving the differences" with China soon, but, at the same time, insisted that "no part of the border has been agreed on the ground." China had reacted to it sharply. It said that the Sikkim and China border is a settled question and crossing this border amounts to creating a dispute. It demanded an immediate withdrawal of Indian troops before China and India enter into any talks.

In the given situation, the Indian government should be made to focus its attention on:

1. Continuing the course of dialogue with China on the border question with all earnesty and seriousness with an aim of arriving at amicable, reasonable and final resolution. It must pick up the threads of dialogue and best of the possibilities that were opened for a political resolution in the period of Jawaharlal Nehru but were allowed to slip out of hands and culminate into a success.

Views or attempts to seek to solve the problems through war would only prove disastrous for India as well as China. Especially for India, it will drive India into a dangerous, enslaving trap of imperialist powers who are masters in using the disputes, conflicts and hostilities among the other countries to bail themselves out of crises and reap billions out of the sale of arms.

2. India cannot protect its legitimate rights or interests by listening or relying or acting as a tool of imperialist powers in general and US imperialism in particular with which the Indian rulers had entered in to a strategic alliance. The interests of imperialism are fundamentally opposed to the interests of Indian people. The imperialists, in their relations with India, only act in accordance with their own designs for plunder and oppression and use India as a tool, cannon fodder and spring board to realise their aims of world domination.

3. India can have friendly, durable and mutually trustworthy relations with its neighbours like Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangla Desh only on the basis of recognising and treating them equally as independent and sovereign Countries. Showing a big brother's attitude, cherishing expansionist ambitions towards them, interfering in their internal affairs and trying to use one neighbouring Country against the other would only boomerang against India. It will alienate these countries and people from India. The Indian rulers have had enough experience from this kind of behaviour and practice.

4. Jingoism and war hysteria sought to be flared up by the India rulers and a section of Media in the context of Doklam episode found a few takers in the world as well as even in India. It is good. But consistent attempts to rake up national chauvinism should not be allowed. These methods may serve the short term purpose of Indian rulers to rouse emotions and divert the people's attention from the real problems. But, in the long run, once the people come to know of facts and the real intentions of the diversionist tactics are exposed, it becomes too difficult for the Indian rulers to face the wrath of more conscious, organised and united people.

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