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Galwan valley clash unmasks China's geopolitical intent and India's delusion with China

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The deadly clash in the Galwan Valley on 15 June night 2020 is a culmination of weeks of rising tension on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) which goes back to the Indo-China War in 1962. Despite the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's friendly policy to China -Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai, Asian Solidarity, and India's support to China's inclusion in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)- China took a belligerent approach towards India by waging a war against India. The war in

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1962 and 1967, standoffs in 1987, 2013, the Dokhlam standoff in 2017 and the recent standoffs between the two nuclear-armed Asian giants have been attributed to mainly to the enduring conflicting strategic rivalry and the differing perceptions about the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the Indo-China border. However, a range of factors including China's desperate attempt to use the humanitarian crisis of the Covid-19 outbreak to achieve its geopolitical goal is responsible for the deadly clash on the LAC that was not seen until 1975.

China has been under attack for undermining the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic, embarking of misinformation war, and influence the World Health Organization. China, after containing the disease reasonably well at home, first used medical aid diplomacy and then began to flaunt its economic and military prowess especially in the Indo-Pacific. This is quite visible in security law in Hong Kong, its aggressive behavior in the South China sea against Vietnam, Japan, and the Philippines and predatory trade policy by imposing tariffs against Australia import. China is using the humanitarian crisis of Covid-19 to achieve its geopolitical goal and sees an opportunity to dislodge US primacy especially in the Indo-Pacific. This has intensified the US-China strategic rivalry and concerns are being

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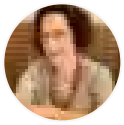
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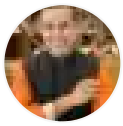
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raised about the rules-based order and strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific due to China's military assertiveness. The US and its allies and partners have been making moves to balance China's geopolitical ambition and fix the global supply chain which China has come to dominate by default. India has emerged as a significant counterbalance in both geopolitical and global supply chain context. China's military assertion along the LAC is a message that India is not a match to China.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi responding to the killing of 20 Indian soldiers said that India wants peace but if provoked India is capable of giving a befitting reply to China. China may be economically ahead of India, but when it comes to the strategic arena, contrary to the general perception, India can not only defend its border but can inflict severe damage to China. By several accounts, India has a strategic edge over China. Over the past two decades, India's defense preparedness has focused on tackling the dual-threat from China and Pakistan whereas China has been engaged on many fronts including the perceived security threats from the US in the South China Sea. But in the world politics friends are equally important.

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Besides its defense capability, India has more friends than China. Unlike the 1962 scenario, today India converges politically and strategically with the US and Political-West on global commons including the rules-based order and strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific. India has formidable strategic partnerships with the advanced defense powers the US, Russia, France, the UK, Israel, Japan, and most of the Chinese wary countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Except for China, all four United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent members back India's candidature for permanent membership to the UNSC. India continues to have an enduring defense partnership with Russia. This trend has continued during the LAC standoff as visible in India being invited to the US to the next G7 meeting, the US troops being moved from Europe to the South China Sea in the wake of the Chinese aggression against India and the US allies in South East Asia, India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh's three-day visit to attended Russia's Victory Parade, and the steadfast support from France to India on India-China standoff. Whereas, China is left with only two allies Pakistan and North Korea.

But Chinese assertion on the LAC is part of the evolving strategic geometry where China perceives India's growing strategic presence and the evolving units of Indo-

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Pacific strategies obstructing its geopolitical goal to map the future of the region. Rory Medcalf, a recognized security expert and as a former Australian diplomat has been policy practitioner of the cognitive content of the Indo-Pacific, in his book *Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future* dexterously intertwines a wide range of issues, ongoing display of power politics. He asserts that the unfolding Indo-Pacific strategy of the rising economic and political powers woven around deterrence, defense, and economic cooperation is going to be decisive in shaping a stable, shared, and prosperous Indo-Pacific to counter the Chinese domination. The Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical construct which acknowledges the re-emergence of India as significant to the strategic stability of the region.

In this context, Quadrilateral Initiative-the US, Japan, India, and Australia-, India's deepening defense ties with the US, and recent developments on security ties with Australia are significant. Quad is being extended as Quad-Plus to include South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. India and Australia signing the two important military pacts- Australia-India Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement and the Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement- are

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significantly considered as the first step in the deepening of the defense relationship between the two Indo-Pacific maritime powers. India's strategic partnership with the United States is all-encompassing and has a very strong defense and military overtone- with no ambiguity on balancing an aggressive China. India's strategic ties with the United States in the field of defense commerce, joint-military exercises, and intelligence sharing, and the emerging Indo-Pacific strategies of China wary countries are aimed at thwarting the Chinese expansionist agenda. Amid these strategic developments, China sees India as a major player in the US-backed China containment strategy and foiling its aim to dominate the Indo-Pacific.

China's military aggression against India, the South East Asian countries, and threatening trade policy against Australia have unmasked its geopolitical intent and predatory trade policy. China's actions are nothing less than a reverberation of Germany's aggressiveness under Hitler prior to the Second World War. The emerging security challenges can not be handled by a single power. Inclusiveness, shared interests, and commitments can thwart the Chinese challenges posed to the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. The sacrifice of 20 Indian soldiers must end India's delusion of imagined

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togetherness with China in the so-called Asian century- a Nehruvian legacy that continues to haunt India till date. India's military alertness and the ban on Chinese businesses are much-needed actions. India must siege the opportunity to make a transformation leap in its economic development and provide a transparent and trustworthy option to the global supply chain and underpin the strategic ties with friendly nations to thwart the Chinese aggression.

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