

China's Himalayan Hustle – Part IV
EU, India, and US – Framing
a Troika to Scuttle China's
Himalayan Strategy?

Webinar Report

August 16, 2024



Institute for Security & Development Policy

Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA)

ABOUT ISDP

The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighborhood.

www.isdp.eu

LIST OF SPEAKERS



Dr. Malcolm Davis

Dr. Malcolm Davis joined the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) as a Senior Analyst in Defence Strategy and Capability in January 2016. He has worked with the Department of Defence, both in Navy Headquarters in the Strategy and Force Structure area, and with Strategic Policy Division in the Strategic Policy Guidance and Strategic External Relations and Education sections from November 2007 to March 2012. Prior to this appointment, he was a Lecturer in Defence Studies with King's College London at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, in Shrivenham, UK, from June 2000 to October 2007. He holds a PhD in Strategic Studies from the University of Hull as well as two master's degrees in strategic studies, including from the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. His main research focus is on defense strategy and capability development, military technology, and the future of warfare.



**Dr. Ernest
Gunasekara-
Rockwell**

Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell is the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*. He previously served as acting director and managing editor of Air University Press and acting dean of the Air Force Research Institute. A former human intelligence collector and Korean linguist for the US Army, Dr. Gunasekara-Rockwell has also taught at various institutions, including the DOD's Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center. His work focuses on geopolitical and security issues in the Indo-Pacific region, making significant contributions to the field through his leadership and scholarly publications. He holds a PhD from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. The views he expresses in this report are his own and do not reflect the official position of Air University, the Department of Defense, or other US government agencies.



Dr. Medha Bisht

Dr. Medha Bisht is an Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations at South Asian University. Her research interests include philosophy and theory of International Relations, water governance, and diplomacy at international, transboundary, and local scales, transnational networks in International Relations (with a special focus on water, climate, and energy sector), Asian diplomatic thought, and qualitative methods. Her book, 'Kautilya's Arthashastra: Philosophy of Strategy' has been published by Routledge (London and New York 2020). Before joining SAU, she was an Associate Fellow at MP-IDSA, an independent think tank under the Ministry of Defence, and a Research Associate with the Institute for Social Studies Trust, an NGO with special consultative status with ECOSOC UN. She has undertaken consultancies with UNIFEM, ICIMOD, UNDP, IUCN, OXFAM, DFID/Asia Foundation, University of Arizona. Dr Bisht also regularly delivers lectures at Sushma Swaraj Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs on transboundary water issues and has participated in Track 2 and 1.5 dialogues on climate change. She is a member of regional and international working groups on transboundary rivers and climate change and has led and co-led international projects on water governance and diplomacy.



Professor Yoichiro Sato

Professor Yoichiro Sato holds a Ph.D (Political Science) from the University of Hawaii and currently teaches at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. He was a visiting senior research fellow at Yusof Ishak Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 2022-23. His major works include Re-Rising Japan (co-edited with Hidekazu Sakai, Peter Lang, 2017), and Alliances in Asia and Europe (co-edited with Elena Atanassova-Cornelis and Tom Sauer, Routledge, 2023).



Maj Gen Mandip Singh

Maj Gen Mandip Singh, SM, VSM, is President (Strategic Alliances) at the Droneacharya Aerial Innovations Ltd, a leading public company in the drone space, and an Advisor, at the Technology Business Incubation Foundation at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ropar, India. The General is a Visiting Fellow at the Mercator Institute of China Studies (MERICS), Berlin, and is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Land & Warfare Studies (CLAWS) as well as a Distinguished Fellow at the United Services Institute (USI), New Delhi. He retired after 38 years of distinguished service in the Indian Army. He was a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), a leading MoD think tank where he headed the China & East Asia Centre in 2011-12. Later he headed the China desk in the Army Training Command. He was the Dean at the Army's premier institution, the Army War College where he contributed to the thinking on operational art and strategic thinking.



Dr. Jagannath Panda

Dr. Jagannath Panda is the Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs at the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden. He is a Professor at the Department of Regional and Global Studies at the University of Warsaw, and a Senior Fellow at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies (HCSS) in the Netherlands and an International Research Fellow at the Canon Institute for Global Studies in Japan. Dr. Panda has testified to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at the US Congress. He is also the Series Editor for *Routledge Studies on Think Asia*.

DISCUSSION



How should India and the West really take note of the emerging trends and patterns, and what should be the medium of collaboration to check Chinese revisionism that is ongoing in the Tibetan plateau as well as in the Himalayan region.

– Jagannath Panda

The webinar on “EU, India, and US – Framing a Troika to Scuttle China’s Himalayan Strategy?” was conducted by SCSA-IPA, Institute for Security and Development Policy, on August 16, 2024. It was opened by **Dr. Jagannath Panda**, who welcomed all the panelists and shared that this was the fourth webinar in series. The first webinar covered China’s infrastructural planning in the Himalayan region while the second was about China’s economic dominance in the region. The third webinar dealt more with how the Chinese are trying to change the status quo in the Himalayan region.

The fourth webinar aimed to visualize the possibilities and potential for the EU, India, and the US to work together in order to highlight China’s revisionist actions in the Himalayan region, beyond the India-China border scuffles or the potential for limited war. For such a purpose, it looked into the following questions:

What are the ways through which the Chinese activities in the Himalayan states could be highlighted in the European Parliament and the US Congress?

What is the extent, scope, and impact of the massive military modernization in the Tibetan Plateau for the region?

In what ways can NATO be engaged to counter China’s military muscle in

the Tibetan Plateau, without aggravating the regional balance? Should there be a cooperative dialogue between India and NATO on the same?

What are the chances of the EU acknowledging / recognizing China's Himalayan hustle as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy? What is the level of awareness in the European Parliament about China's Himalayan revisionism?

What tactics can India, the EU, and the US together employ to undo China's clout in the Himalayas?

How can the US and the EU contribute to checking Chinese infrastructure activities and taking action against their negative environmental impact on the region?

Can the US and European policymakers bolster India's efforts to maintain its geopolitical influence and to fight against China's disruptive tactics in the Himalayas for the greater good of Indo-Pacific politics?

Dr. Panda said that China's Himalayan hustle has been discussed from different points of view but one of the key issues here that confronts all of us is that if India is willing to collaborate with the West,

particularly with the US, Australia or Japan or with the EU, then can we assume that India will be really open to a kind of collaboration bilaterally or should we become a little ambitious to think about a multilateral mode of cooperation. In order to do that, first we need to be clear about what's going on in the Tibetan Plateau, what's going on in the Himalayan region.

One of the worrisome factors has been PLA operational strategy, force modernization strategy and also the restructuring of the PLA that has happened in 2016 and 2017. Since then, many countries are facing the heat from China's military. India too has been facing tensions on the border issues. So how do you think that the PLA can be managed or what are the aspects of the PLA strategy that India and the West should take a strong note of. How should India and the West really take note of the emerging trends and patterns, and what should be the medium of collaboration among us to check China's military revisionism or the Chinese revisionism that is ongoing in the Tibetan plateau as well as in the Himalayan region.



The Chinese recognize that the key to having a military advantage over India is to have superior logistics, superior infrastructure and so that's what you are seeing with Chinese developments in at least in the military sense. They are investing in infrastructure and road and rail networks to allow them to rapidly achieve tactical mobility through the operational environment.

– Malcolm Davis

Dr. Malcolm Davis, Senior Analyst, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), started by saying that ASPI has done a fair bit of analysis on what the Chinese are up to in terms of their development of military infrastructure and development of capability in the Himalaya region. We are all very familiar with the nature of the overall clash or the confrontation between India and China in the Himalayas so I'm not going to essentially go over material that we're all familiar with but the key point that I would start with is that China's advantage in the Himalayas seems to be based around building infrastructure, road and rail logistics.

They recognize that the Himalayas are a highly challenging operational environment to work in that it's not like what they're facing in in regards to Taiwan or the South China Sea. It is a very harsh climate that that the troops are operating in and therefore, they recognize that the key to having a military advantage over India is to have superior logistics, superior infrastructure and so that's what you are seeing with Chinese developments in at least in the military sense. They are investing in infrastructure and road and rail networks to allow them to rapidly achieve tactical mobility through the operational environment.

Firstly the military infrastructure, the rapid buildup of roads, modernization of airbases allow a full range of PLA Air Force operations in support of troops operating in the high Himalayas. The rail

connectivity allow rapid mobility from internal regions of China to the Himalayas to rapidly redeploy and reinforce PLA forces there and that mobility is really important in terms of them gaining a tactical advantage. So when we think about how India responds, we have to think about how India can counter that tactical mobility that China is developing. The network of roads and rail links is complemented by logistic support, in other words rather than just having forces operating in forward areas without many supplies, they are actually building supply bases and shelters. This means that the Chinese have the ability to sustain operations at a fairly high operational tempo and continue to provide munitions and other essential military supplies to PLA forces engaged in operations.

They're also engaging in high altitude training and undertaking regular exercises in the Himalayan and Tibet region which is very important because the nature of the operations here are very different from the sort of operations that PLA forces are undertaking elsewhere in China, particularly in areas close to the Taiwan Strait. The high altitude exercises help to get troops acclimatized to the harsh environment but also to operate in a joint and combined manner. So whilst we look at the PLA deployments in the region in terms of light infantry, all of that is connected into longrange fires supported by not only the PLA Army but also PLA Rocket Forces as well as other aspects of

Chinese military power such as PLA Air Force operations, space capabilities, that can give them a situational advantage in terms of understanding what's happening in the environment. In that sense, building airfields that can operate forward deployed combat aircraft helicopters, even tactical fixed-wing troop transports as well as supporting operations by autonomous unmanned vehicles. This gives the Chinese sort of significant capabilities to operate and sustain combat operations through the area.

Moving on to force modernization, the Chinese recognize the importance of tactical reconnaissance strike complexes as a key element of combat operations in the area so what you're seeing is greater investment and deployment of autonomous systems operating along the line of actual control. These autonomous systems are the eyes and ears of the PLA forces that are linked back not only to the infantry that are operating in the area but also further back to the longrange fires that I talked about, the short range ballistic missile drones etc. The Chinese are moving from informationization of military to intelligentization of the military, where there is a greater investment in artificial intelligence and very sophisticated UAVs.

What you could see in coming years is actually a reduction in the number of ground troops that are forward deployed and a greater increase in the number of autonomous systems or robotic systems that are forward deployed so that they

can basically go in harm's way not just in a military sense but in an environmental sense and have greater operational tempo, greater sustained operational pace because they're using autonomous systems and artificial intelligence directed systems to be able to generate presence, to be able to generate effect and generate uncertainty on the part of the Indians. The nature of the terrain in the Himalayas is challenging for bringing in heavy armor. One is never going to see main battle tanks and heavy armored fighting vehicles operating in that area so the Chinese are investing in light armored forces. They've developed the type 15 light tank, which is specifically designed to be operated in that high altitude environment but is also complemented by special forces' capabilities including mountain warfare troops that are especially trained to operate in that Area.

So when you look at PLA force modernization and what they're developing, it's important to recognize that they are purposely designing their capabilities for those operational environments but they're also utilizing the full range of PLA capabilities including drones and longrange fires and so forth. To me, that step towards intelligentization in war, towards smart forces utilizing Ai and autonomous systems is really going to be significant in coming years because it could change the military balance quite significantly in that area without necessarily requiring the PLA to deploy large numbers of troops in the area

so that they generate increased combat mass.

As a result and that's important because the Chinese obviously face two very different operational environments. On the one hand, they are focused on operations in the Himalayas and along the line of actual control but clearly their main focus of military preparedness military modernization expansion is all about Taiwan and the Taiwan Straits. And of course the Taiwan Straits in the South China Sea is a completely different operational environment to what we're seeing in the Himalayas. So the Chinese have a challenge there in terms of how do they balance investment in two very different types of forces. This is once again where autonomous systems, intelligentization, artificial intelligence, drones, and longrange fires, those tactical reconnaissance strike complexes really will come to the fore. Certainly when you look at the lessons coming out of Ukraine, the Chinese will be focusing very much on how the Ukrainians have utilized large numbers of low-cost drones to be able to basically be the eyes and ears and then connect back through commercial satellite networks through to longrange fires. The Chinese will be thinking in terms of doing the same thing but they do have a challenge. If they are determined to take Taiwan and I believe they are probably in the second half of this decade, then how do they sustain modernization for that operation versus maintaining their

presence in the Himalayas. The financial pie is only so big; they can't afford to spend unlimited amount of funds so therefore they may have to prioritize certain types of capability investment over others. So that's why I do think that intelligentization really is the way forward.

In my opinion, we do face some serious challenges there along the line of actual control because the PLA does have an advantage in the logistics, in the tactical mobility through building road and rail networks and modernizing airbases. They are deploying forces in significant numbers that are trained and acclimatized to operate in those areas but the third stage of moving from informationization to intelligentization of forces is the key and that's going to happen in the next few years. India and other countries do

have to be prepared for that because if the Chinese can make that transition and gain a military tactical advantage that might induce them to actually be more aggressive along the line of actual control and be more provocative and may be willing to take some chances. That does raise the interesting question of would the Chinese consider doing simultaneous operations against Taiwan on the one hand and in the Himalayas on the other. I don't believe they would because the risks are too great. They would overextend themselves in both and thus not achieve success in either. What you will see is the Chinese thinking in terms of trying to use the Himalayas to distract India but also other powers such as the United States and Australia whilst they prepare for operations against Taiwan.



It makes sense to set up a joint intelligence task force and maybe lay the groundwork for greater Indian involvement with Five Eyes in the future. That's obviously been something that both India and Japan have been interested in from the Quad perspective. We could then share satellite imagery, communications intercepts and other relevant intelligence in a more timely fashion than what we do currently.

– Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell

Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, started by saying that it was important to treat the issue in its historical context. The Himalayan strategy for China goes back 70 plus years, with the invasion of Tibet, with the invasion of East Turkistan and then of course into acquiring Aksai Chin and Shaksam Valley. They have then this belligerent stance to almost a Lacan's Realm sort of policy in the region, where not only do they go in and conquer but they also then engage in Hanification of the populations. That is something that we have to take very seriously.

Malcolm spoke about the intelligentization and autonomous systems. It makes perfect sense for them because in in my speaking with retired Indian generals and diplomats, there's no real impetus in the Indian military establishment or policy establishment to go into revanchism or irredentism themselves and actually reacquire some of the territories that they've lost to China. This frees up China to engage in that buildup of autonomous systems and so on, and frees up other resources to perhaps pour into Taiwan because there's no real concern that India is going to pour across the border and take something back that China doesn't want to lose. In all these probing maneuvers that the Chinese have engaged in Doklam, in Galwan Valley and to some extent Arunachal Pradesh, there's always a lukewarm response on the part of the Indian establishment. So in Beijing,

the border issue with India is something that they need not be concerned about in terms of going against what they want, they can obviously build up forces and pull the trigger when they want to and make it something bigger than what it is but they're not worried about New Delhi doing the same thing and so that does allow them to experiment a little bit in terms of the modernization, acclimatization and all that in the region.

What we can do in the US? We have established some joint training programs and exercises. For example, we've got Vajra Prahar, where we are kind of bouncing back and forth between practicing in the Himalayas and in Alaska, and in the mountains of Washington state. How do we prepare for war in in those climates? Is it enough? Probably not. What we have done in the United States to get our troops ready in a similar environment is we've established the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies up in Alaska and there's a lot of professional military education geared towards preparing the troops for operations in a similar climate. It would be nice to see more Indians taking part in that and having more American troops go and study in the High Altitude Warfare School in India. We can share lessons learned. It's one thing to come in for an exercise for a couple of weeks and then you're back out, but it's another thing to actually spend more time there through the education maybe longer-term exchanges where we get to see how to do

things in those hostile environments. I think that would be somewhere we could really help out.

It also makes sense to set up a joint intelligence task force that's based on that kind of environment and maybe lay the groundwork for greater Indian involvement with Five Eyes in the future. That's obviously been something that both India and Japan have been interested in from the Quad perspective. If we look at it from that angle, it makes sense to start bringing members in a little bit more deeply into other establishments such as Five Eyes. We could then share satellite imagery, communications intercepts and other relevant intelligence in a more timely fashion than what we do currently.

We could do more exercises as well. We've got the new Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Alaska where we could do some more training, and not just the US and India but also maybe we can make it more multilateral. So we bring in NATO forces to engage in joint training with the Indians in that environment as well. It's not going to rattle China's cage the same extent as if we were doing it up in the Himalayas and all of the sudden you've got a NATO exercise right on their border. We don't want to create the same paranoia in Xi's mind that Putin obviously got with us getting cozy with Ukraine. So maybe doing the training in Alaska would be a little bit less concerning for Beijing and help keep the water from boiling too much in Beijing.

There's obviously diplomatic and economic cooperation that we could do too. We need to try to encourage US businesses, for example, to engage in more investment in Indian states that border China so that we can kind of build up more rapport and more resources in that region. But the main thing is, as Malcolm pointed out, all the modernization that's going on up there on the China side, we need to mirror it in on the Indian side. As we grow closer with India and as our allies grow closer with India, we should really focus on helping them modernize. Also there's another elephant in the room; we need to wean them off of their relationship with Russia. That's one thing that the DoD here is always worried about. We make all these agreements with India and then next week Modi's over in Russia giving bear hugs to Putin. It's like are you a friend or are you not our friend? Obviously, part of it's because India is dependent upon Russian weapons systems. So the more we can do to provide alternatives at a decent price and perhaps for indigenous production, that helps keeping pace with the modernization that China is accomplishing in the Himalayas. This enables India to kind of be able to stand up to them in like fashion.

Dr. Panda agreed on the possibility about Five Eyes collaborations. But, we must also be exploring in future whether there is a possibility to carry out this kind of collaborations where India is not a part of the Five Eyes. Sharing of satellite imagery, for instance, is already an area of collaborations between India and the US but it could also be expanded as could general exercises. The point about India-Russia ties is well taken but that's how diplomacy works. India's relationship with Russia has not changed much, but the US-India partnership is continuing to flourish and strengthen even though there are doubts on the India-Russia relationship at the strategic level.

He requested the next speaker to give their perspective about the current tensions and what are the most two-three problematic aspects about China's force deployment, military modernization, expanding defense expenditure? Should India be mindful? And what are some of these areas where India should have or possibly could have a real-time collaboration with the West? When it comes to boundary dispute, neither China nor India would allow any third party interference but there are greater issues in the Himalayan regions—ecological, climate, water, security, and technological issues where India could possibly collaborate with the West.



Despite 21 rounds of conversations between the Corps Commanders, at least 14 meetings between the working committees, and a whole lot of flag meetings, there is no disengagement. The stance as far as India is concerned is pretty clear that the situation has to revert back to status quo. The External Affairs minister has been very clear to say that it's not business as usual.

– Mandip Singh

Maj Gen Mandip Singh, President (Strategic Alliances) at Droneacharya Aerial Innovations Ltd, first explained what's happening right now at the LAC. A lot has been spoken about modernization by Malcolm but I'd like to focus on what is the likely PLA strategy and what is going to unfold on the LAC in the days or years to come before we take on some technology developments. Right now, the standoff on the LAC comes in three parts: There is a disengagement, then there is a de-escalation and then there is a de-induction. Disengagement means making contact which is happened almost everywhere except for two places on the LAC. De-escalation has not happened and means separating the forces by a vast distance back to their bases; and de-induction is when additional forces which have been brought in move out all together from the sector.

So we are still in the first part as we speak today and this is despite 21 rounds of conversations between the Corps Commanders, at least 14 meetings between the working committees, and a whole lot of borders and flag meetings that go on every other day. The stance as far as India is concerned is pretty clear that the situation has to revert back to status quo. The External Affairs minister has been very clear to say that it's not business as usual. So the issue about the border and this stand on the border is paramount when we talk about any issues concerning India and China. What is always been amazing

me and concerning is what did China gain from this, aside from raising a huge cost. All the confidence-building measures built over 60 to 70 years have all been thrown to the winds. They don't exist anymore and more importantly, we have 50 to 60,000 troops facing each other. Before the standoff, there were no permanent troops deployed on the LAC. They were just border troops and today you have 50-60,000, so it comes with a huge cost. For example, creation of habitat, food stocking, equipment, and ammunition, all of this doesn't survive very long on these kind of altitudes and needs to be regularly turned over so therefore stocking and maintaining such kind of stock piling is very difficult. The reasons why China did this has never been too clear and no benefits or tangible gains have come China's way by this.

But what ahead? What is the PLA strategy? You really don't have to go too far. If you see the Science of Military Strategy 2020 and if you open chapter 7, Prevention & Handling of Military Crises, it is very lucid and very clear. I do believe that the Chinese follow the book to a tee. There are four issues that I'd like to flag in. The first is hot shelving, in other words keep the pot boiling so as to keep the opponent in a state of disequilibrium. You see, for example, what happened at Yangtse in December 2022 or every now and then when the Prime Minister or President visits Arunachal Pradesh, there will be pin pricks keeping the issue alive by protesting against the visit of the PM or

the president. For example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama went to Ladakh and there was huge amount of protest by the Chinese government about why is he going?

The second thing that the book teaches the PLA is relevance of national laws. Let me quote what it says, it says when international law conflicts with national interests, insist that national interests are above all and focus on finding the basis of military action in the relevant national laws and regulations. That is why you're suddenly seeing this the New Border Law, for example, to legitimize the occupation of the Border Villages about 642 if I remember correctly all along the LAC. All of these are to legitimize the claims of China so that's the legal part of the so-called warfare strategy. The third thing is to control the crisis. It says, isolate the extent, limit the crisis in space, don't internationalize it, keep room for negotiations and maneuver and, if required, use coercion or blockades or ultimatums.

In the same vein, China has successfully been able to keep any crisis away from internationalization. They don't approve of any nation commenting on it and they are always vociferous about anybody commenting calling its internal affairs of China. They have kind created issues, like for example they physically blocked access to our troops at Daulat Beg Oldi, or for example, sheep herders have been blocked from going into pastures where earlier they were permitted to go, so there is this thing of blocking and restricting, limiting

the crisis and controlling it.

The fourth thing is which is what concerns us the most is seize opportunities created by the crisis. If you really go back to see what happened in 2020, it was during COVID, China was on the firing line. Everybody was blaming China; world opinion was against China and then it was all about reputation. But they have actually seen an opportunity in the crisis and even now as we see the standoff, it doesn't rule out the teaching that says that if there's an opportunity, go for it so we cannot let our guard down because you just don't know when they are going to exploit the situation. If you were to ask me what is going to be the future of the LAC, I would say that it's going to be a hot LAC legally supported by national laws unlikely to expand in scope, keeping communications and negotiations open and yet exploiting fleeting opportunities to increase bargaining power. That is the strategy.

So far as technical developments are concerned, a lot of the infrastructure and modernization has been covered by

Malcolm. A lot of the new technologies that China boasts of, the PLA boasts of is visible and we're seeing it on the LAC. For example realtime satellite intelligence, space based intelligence, stealth aircraft (we have seen the J20 is coming into Kashgar), deployment of SRBM coming in from the East to the West, particularly the raising of a Dongfeng 26 MRBM Brigade opposite our areas. We've seen topline tanks, their T99A2 which is a heavy tank came in along with their new light tanks which is ZTX15. We have seen a very sophisticated layered kind of an air defense system now, which is vertical and in depth. A lot of EW measures have been taken, and large numbers of drones. There are a whole lot of drones flying all over the LAC. But that's not all. Its also happening down below; we are also seeing activity in the maritime space where we seeing submarines popping up left, right in the Indian Ocean very frequently. More recently, the presence of research ships ostensibly to map and survey but they also come to monitor some of our weapon systems.



Despite this neutrality and reluctance to get itself involved in the border dispute issues, Japan is moving a step closer to supporting India's actual line of control but in the least direct way. The new connectivity initiatives in northeastern India is a significant first step.

– Yoichiro Sato

Dr. Yoichiro Sato, a Professor at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, said it is actually very interesting to hear about the military perspectives of the borderland disputes and a lot of tactical implications. I approach the issues from a slightly different, more diplomatic angle largely because I do not currently see any direct tactical involvement of Japan in India's territorial dispute with China. And nobody, neither India nor China want a third party to get involved in their border disputes. Neither does Japan wish to get itself involved in the border dispute between China and India politically. Japan has maintained neutrality on the Indian border territorial issues.

Having said that, what is the role of Japan in the Himalayan region? I would argue that despite this neutrality and reluctance to get itself involved in the border dispute issues, Japan is moving a step closer to supporting India's actual line of control but in the least direct way. Earlier, the issue of infrastructure for connectivity was emphasized and for India, the northeastern part of its territory has suffered from the lack of development and largely due to the lack of connectivity with the growing center of the country. So for India improving connectivity of this northeastern region with both the central part of India, major cities as well as with the neighboring countries, most importantly Bangladesh and if it becomes more reasonable to expect also with Myanmar as well. Currently, connectivity

with Myanmar is very problematic because of the instability there. Connectivity into Bhutan is also important as China's influence in Bhutan is growing. Japan is willing to aid India in such a domain. I would like to make this point by just looking at some of the recent Japanese approved aid projects and of course the northeastern part of India especially the mountain region is important for water resources.

Japan's aid has previously focused on industrializing urban centers not in northeastern India but for the last two years Japan has started approving couple of projects. I'd like to specifically refer to two of those. In March 2022, Japan and India agreed to yen-based loans for the phase six of Northeast States Road Connection Improvement and for the amount of 23 billion and 129 million yen. This project would improve the connectivity of Highway 208 and this connects the northeastern part of India from south to north. Two years later, another project in the northeastern part of India has been approved and that's phase three of the Road Improvement

Project for 34 billion and 537 million yen. This will connect Dhubri in Assam State to Meghalaya State. A bridge will be built for the length of some 20 kilometers across the Brahmaputra river to actually connect the northern and southern part of the Highway 127b. This will improve connectivity within the region as well as with neighboring areas.

So this is new for Japan in that Japan is doing something in the least developed part of India where the transplants for Japanese manufacturing corporations are pretty much irrelevant at the moment. The previous aid was to support Japan's manufacturing transplant in India by improving road and port infrastructures and electricity supply and so forth. But this new connectivity initiative in northeastern India has the Indian economic connectivity and dual use for security purposes as the primary objectives rather than Japanese corporations' interest. The amount is not that big but given the limited budget resources and other competing priorities of Japanese aid elsewhere, this is a significant first step.



If you really look at Tibet's land use policies, one cannot really treat Tibet as an internal affair of China. What happens in the Tibetan Plateau influences the climate and atmospheric changes not only in Asia but also in Europe. India really needs to spread this message in a very conscious manner.

– Medha Bisht

Dr. Medha Bisht, Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations at South Asian University, opened by highlighting the importance of the context and landscape within which we actually find China's Himalayan strategy. There are two broad patterns: One, the Chinese strategic design, and the second is India's response to this strategic design. Both these strategic frameworks have significant geopolitical and a geo-economic components attached with them, which to my mind are really manifesting in a very unique balancing act. This balancing act is both externally directed as well as internally driven. So if you really look at the internal balancing of China, what we see is the military buildup in terms of the force structures, the air bases, the heliports and the air defense structures. Then there are the large scale civilian infrastructure settlements which are coming up on Tibetan borders, a sort of fusion of both civilian and military, and thirdly, is the recruitment drive happening in the Tibetan border villages.

Externally, one can really see China's engagement with the South Asian neighbors, particularly Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. We know in the last two decades or so, Bhutan-China negotiations have actually moved forward to a considerable degree to what they were in the early 2000s. The pattern now is very different. Similarly in the case of Bangladesh, China is one of the primary investment partners, particularly in the

power sector, connectivity projects and renewables. In Nepal where I see that China is not really doing so much vis-à-vis its BRI strategy but at the same time they really do have the strategic convergences in place and the issue really came up in 2020 around the Mahakali Kalapani dispute. So that was about China's external balancing.

Coming to the Indian response, we see that India has been doing the same thing internally. India is coming up with the Arunachal Pradesh Highway Frontier which will be completed in 2027. There is an East West Connectivity Corridor, a Vibrant Village program. India is also rebalancing its core structures, where a lot of focus on mountaineous strike formations where even collaboration with the US is going on.

Interestingly, the Indian external balancing act is not really happening in South Asia but in Southeast Asia. India's relationship with Philippines, and Taiwan have considerably improved over the previous months. India's strategic partnership with Australia, Japan and US becomes important. So as a consequence of China's Himalayan strategy a strategic board is emerging and is in fact merging South Asia and Southeast Asia together. I would say any recalibration or deliberation should take cognizance of this pattern. Today, the Himalayan strategy and the Indo-Pacific strategy are converging in interesting ways.

What most people are actually missing in this very dynamic board game is the

environmental narrative. If you really see this landscape primary through the lens of ecology, a different configuration will emerge. This configuration can have social, economic and political ramifications, particularly for the Asian countries. Before coming to ramifications I would like to really highlight why the ecological context becomes very important. The first thing we need to keep in mind is that the Himalayas are young mountains and are still growing. We know that Northeast India is a seismic zone, prone to earthquakes and landslides. Infrastructure and dam-building activities therefore will have consequences. So while connectivity projects are happening but we also know what will happen in due course if there are disasters, they are not going to be cascading disasters primarily because of the interference which it will have with the debris and the human settlements which live along the riverine area.

The second ecological aspect is related to the Himalayan rivers. We know about the industrialization and dam-building activities going on in Tibet. The Himalayan Rivers actually carry a lot of sediment and, in fact, these sediments have a direct bearing on the health of the delta in the Bay of Bengal. A scholar by the name of William Schendel said that Bangladesh is nothing but flattened Himalayas. This is very critical because it really tells us about how upper riparian interventions are in fact really impacting and connected to the lower riparian areas. Therefore, any intervention which happens on account

of deforestation, mining, dam building, among others, will have an impact on the Himalayan Rivers. This is a missing discourse particularly in the international climate diplomacy is really the Hindu Kush Himalayan range. Now during the Paris Summit in 2015, when we're really looking at whether India is revisiting its Tibet policy, the issue of the Third Pole which is of course Tibet was raised. Scientists in fact claimed that a 1.5° celsius rise is too hot for the glaciers in the Himalayan region. There are a lot of glaciers which are really sitting there as ticking time bombs. In a scenario where there are flash floods, how do we really adapt. It has also been pointed out that a 1.5 degree celsius rise would be 0.3 degrees higher in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region.

There is another point which has been coming up in recent reports. If you really look at Tibet's land use policies, one cannot really treat Tibet as an internal affair of China. The role played by Tibet particularly in the global climate system is being highlighted. What happens in the Tibetan Plateau influences the climate and atmospheric changes not only in Asia but also in Europe. India really needs to spread this message in a very conscious manner.

Last of all, we all know about the dam race happening in the lower stretches of the Brahmaputra. These dams are casted as renewable energy projects but given the social and the cultural consequences, both the countries really need to go slow on

them. With this ecological backdrop, there could be potential reconfigurations at the social, economic and political level.

I'm talking about the Lower South Asian riparian countries and the lower riparian Mekong countries. At the economic level, we all know that the food, energy and water systems are linked and interdependent on each other. In both South Asia and the Mekong countries, the agricultural sector is really the backbone of the economy. Water scarcity can not only impact the region in terms of food security but can also make the lower Mekong countries dependent on China which can have if you take a scenario an impact on the supply chains particularly in the lower Mekong countries and the kind of leverage China can have in case of drought.

From a social lens, the Mekong countries are facing lot of water diversion. Drought is giving rise to a distinct migration pattern which is also being linked to human trafficking. The political aspects also again need to be looked that in the long term because given the political regimes particularly in the Southeast Asian countries, there could be a high dependence on China. If one looks at the project patterns of the BRI in the Southeast Asian countries, they are primarily benefiting the elites. In a few years in the case of water scarcity, would political stability be impacted and how the political regimes again can be leveraged. That could really impact the potential political equations there.

When you start relooking at the scenario primarily from an ecological lens, the whole discourse around connectivity in fact really gets intersected and interfered by the ecological factor which is very important. How we really think about basin river management and the impact of upper riparian interventions on lower riparian areas, Tibet becomes a very important aspect for India to look at. Beyond just the human rights and the religious freedom, India really needs to take up the issue of environmental degradation.

Dr. Panda appreciated the point about politics in South Asia and Southeast Asia have come together and that there is hardly anything to distinguish between them. Moreover, the Himalayan narrative that is emerging from the ecological point of view of the third pole from Tibet's point of view and particularly from the construction of dams, are all issues which should be discussed at the level of Indo-Pacific powers.

He pointed to a question by Debasis Sarmah: What extent do you think India's neighbors in the Himalayan regions, particularly Nepal and Bhutan, play a role on maintaining the balance of power against China and if that balance of power tips in favor of China, do you think India may be on the edge for the foreseeable future regarding the 22 kilometers wide chicken snake that connects Mainland India to the northeastern states.

Dr. Panda raised two further questions. First, the world at large particularly the military establishments from the West, let's say for example NATO, has clearly seen China as a future threat. From that point of view, is there any scope for NATO to play a role in terms of sharing a complementarity, in terms in of sharing information and intelligence inputs with India or vice versa? Do you think in NATO's collaborations with Indo-Pacific powers pertaining to the politics in the Indo Pacific is possible?

Second, do you think India could possibly discuss some of the issues with the European Union? Can we really talk about infrastructural collaborations or climate issues? Medha rightly mentioned that the environmental degradation in Tibet and the Himalayan region is not only an issue that India or the South Asian countries should really be mindful, but the whole world should be mindful about. So given that context, do you think there is scope and the role for European Union to play in the region? If yes, how is it possible and what are the possible avenues of collaboration that India could possibly have with NATO or European Union going forward?

Replying to the questions, **Dr. Malcolm Davis** pointed to a trend where increasingly states are working together on critical issues. AUKUS is a classic example where Australia, US and UK are working together to not just build nuclear submarines and

work on critical emerging technologies but to deter China. One is seeing something similar at the political and diplomatic dimension with the Quad, with India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. Now we have something called the Squad which includes South Korea, Japan, Australia, the US and the Philippines. These are not quite minilateral but more than minilateral but not multilateral arrangements either. It's a new interesting dynamic in 21st century security relations which is worth looking at. So in terms of India and NATO, there's ample grounds for NATO to work with India. NATO is trying to become an Indo-Pacific power so there's a clear linkage with India that we can explore where that leads. I'm not one of the people that believes in an Asian NATO. I don't think that's really a viable approach but on specific issues, in the same way that AUKUS is working, one can do something similar between NATO and India or develop the Quad into something more than a diplomatic arrangement to deal with some harder security issues, such as what's happening on the LAC. That's certainly one area where India could start to work with other states and start to deal with some of the issues that it's facing in the Himalayas.

To be honest, the key impediment to this at the moment is India's relationship with Russia. India cannot really progress much so long as it maintains close relations with Moscow given that the war in Ukraine is not likely to end anytime soon and certainly it doesn't look likely that the

Putin regime will be removed from power anytime soon. I do think India needs to make some hard choices on its relationship with Russia and it would be better advised to start thinking in terms of building series of minilateral or multilateral relationships with Western liberal democracies in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe. That's really where the future lies, not with Russia. If China is the key challenge, the no limits partnership between China and Russia should speak volumes to India about the wisdom of keeping a relationship with Russia.

The EU is the other alternative. People in the past have dismissed the EU as a security actor but I have to say with the possibility of a second Trump Administration and the uncertainty that creates for NATO, we would be sensible to have a look at the EU as a fallback if NATO's Article 5 were to be undermined by a second Trump Administration. Then, the EU basically becomes the principal security guarantor of Europe in which case the EU then becomes the political entity of choice for India to engage with.

Agreeing with Dr. Davis about the EU, Dr. Panda said the EU's mandate is expanding in the Indo-Pacific region, so there is a possibility that EU could collaborate with India on some of these issues.

Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell also seconded everything Dr. Davis said, but went back to the Russia issue. The invasion

of Ukraine, he said, also creates a diversion for NATO to the point where you have to wonder how many resources and attention it can apply to the Indo-Pacific right now when it's faced with an existential threat on its very borders. This may be amplified by recent events with Ukraine invading into Russia. What's Putin's response going to be? Is it going to draw NATO into the conflict? So that's something we have to be concerned about and as Malcolm mentioned, we can't really talk about being friends with Russia but being adversaries with China when they're connected at the hip now. If you curry favor with Moscow, you're basically strengthening Beijing in doing so. I understand India's point about not everybody has to be friends with everybody, but there are certain people that you have to a red flag to say maybe this is a bridge too far. So I don't know if NATO at this point is going to make a substantial difference in in India and other actors in the Indo-Pacific are able to do. I'm not that well versed in the EU to able to speak to that.

I would say that just as problematic as a new Trump administration might be in terms of NATO, having a Harris administration is also worrisome because there is a dearth of foreign policy experience in the leadership. She has none, her running mate has none, so hopefully they'll bring in somebody as Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense that has that kind of chops but at this point I don't have a whole lot of hope. It's a kind of a tossup as to which one is more worrisome,

the devil that you know or the devil that doesn't know anything.

The environmental issues that have been brought up are of concern but how far are the EU and the US willing to push given that China is the main source of batteries for all these electric vehicles we're trying to pour into our economies now. We have mandates here in some of the states that we won't be selling internal combustion engines after a certain date, everything will have to go to electrical. If China continues to hold the monopoly on some of the elements that go into creating those batteries, they hamstringing us in what we can do in terms of some of these initiatives that we're talking aimed at the Indo-Pacific, and the Himalayas in particular. We've got folks in the DOD that are even talking about electric tanks. Where are you supposed to charge that in the Middle East or wherever the hell we have a tank, right? But it does speak to the need to bring the environment and ecological things into the equation, not just from diplomatic and economic perspectives but also from the military perspective.

Maj Gen Mandip Singh said he had five straight points on which the EU, the West and Japan could perhaps assist or do towards what's happening in this part of the world, particularly related to the LAC and India and China. First and the foremost is nothing can be direct. Nobody's expecting a direct intervention. We can handle the LAC on our own but what

I'm going to suggest is indirect. There's a need to fragment Chinese power and that can be done by what is called a 'binary split' which could be both horizontal and vertical. Some panelists have spoken about a binary split horizontally between building pressure on Taiwan as also on the LAC which stretches the PLA but then there is also the vertical binary split where while we have a confrontation on the land borders, it can also be stretched into the maritime domain in the Indian Ocean and in the Indo-Pacific. Whatever can be done to fragment Chinese power will always assist everybody in handling or controlling the Chinese expansion.

The second point is about the no limits partnership between China and Russia. They have even set up factories in Tatarstan region where they're now making 6,000 drones and giving them to Iran. What stops a similar no limits partnership between India and the EU. Why are we only looking at that side?

The third point I'd like to make is about suggesting to the EU and its member-nations, please raise your defense budgets. You need to free the US from providing an umbrella over Europe. If that happens, please see the difference that it makes so that all the focus can then shift towards China. Right now, the US is split between the Middle East, Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

The fourth is the maritime sea denial. One of the strongest ways in which the West and others naval powers, whether it

be France, UK, Germany, Japan, can subdue China is by denying them the maritime space. It will affect them economically, it will affect them militarily. One is not saying that you be restricted to the Indo-Pacific. Why not, for example, challenge them along the African and the South American coast. Why, for example, can't you have a maritime Asian NATO that has been spoken about in some places. The getting together of like-minded nations in the maritime space will definitely offset a lot of the Chinese expansion.

Lastly I'd like to talk about exercises. The Indo-Pacific strategy for some reason seems to be focused towards the maritime domain only. We find that the only nation involved in this and which has a land component in this dispute with China is India. Everyone else has maritime disputes. So I suggest is that a greater number of exercises with the EU, with the West on our land borders will possibly assist in putting pressure. It will also assist in familiarizing these nations with the kind of problems that we have on our land borders. Just for the record, we have only two exercises with Japan, three with the French -one in each that is Army Navy Air Force, three with UK -which is Army Navy Air Force and only four with the US- out of which two are Air Force one Army and one Navy. This must increase manifold and a lot of it can focus on our land frontiers.

Professor Yoichiro Sato said that the NATO as a whole and NATO members

individually bilaterally dealing with India are slightly different issues in my view. If you bring it to the level of NATO, then the UK is a member of NATO and the generalized cooperation must be available to the British as well. For that matter I think India often finds bilaterally dealing with Southern European countries is easier, especially France for example. India is comfortable with whatever the assistance India receives to improve the indigenous defense capability of Indian military forces whether the partners are from Europe or from Japan or from US. Having a good relationship with India is the interest of maritime powers of Europe, Japan, the United States -so they should cooperate with India without expecting much in exchange like Donald Trump's transactional diplomacy or whatever you want to call it. I think there is a benefit in helping India, even if it's one way.

Dr Panda: There is a question on energy issues in the region. The question is, China seems committed to open green and clean cooperation towards inclusive and sustainable developments with the BRI incorporating many projects designated to promote clean and renewable energy. Do you think a project like that will be made or is already planned for this region and if there is a solution, do you think a country like Nepal could put pressure on China? There are a lot of question about China's transparency regarding BRI projects. There has been widespread debate and it is

acknowledged throughout the world that when it comes to transparency, when it comes to environmental friendly projects, the Chinese definitely fall short. Now can we really pressurize China to address some of these issues and build a coalition to address some of these issues and how to build that coalition and what can be done between India and the West.

Dr. Medha Bisht said that one has understand Chinese foreign policy by listening to the narratives and the double meanings embedded in the narratives. These need to be unraveled, they need to be unpacked. So the best way to respond to the Chinese is to first really understand the narratives and create a counter-narrative of sorts in terms of trying to balance China. So a counter-narrative strategy is really needed in terms of responding to Chinese foreign policy on any of these issues.

When the Chinese are trying to project a particular thing, they align it with some of the international vocabularies, some of the international standards and much of it really goes unscathed. This is particularly happening in the case of Tibet.

Two, we know that the Indo-Pacific and the Himalayan strategy are converging. We also know that there is a balancing act which is going on between China and India. One of the ways through which the balance can in fact really tilt towards India is through the ecological narrative. For that India will have to look at its own policies, for instance with its neighbors

in particular. Now there's something I want to add here before I really go into the specifics. If you really look at India's own diplomacy with the neighborhood, there is this good space of really highlighting the ecological aspects and highlighting the more inclusive aspects which are needed in terms of bilateral cooperation with the neighbors. The second thing is if you really look at EU's own involvement in Asia, it's primarily around issues of sustainability and climate change. I would say rather than India being influenced by the NATO argument or really trying to bring some of those strategic frameworks to the Asian theater, Tibet should be projected as a concern for Global Commons. This is important because the carrying capacity of Tibet again when you look at some of the narratives is a big issue of concern. Its impact on global climate really needs to be taken up seriously. India can really take a lead in this context, even in platforms like the UNFCCC.

The questions of supporting the Tibetan cause primarily from an ecological perspective becomes important. India has not really gone outright talking about human rights, etc., but here the Tibetan Plateau impacts the Southeast Asian countries, the lower Mekong countries and the South Asian countries. India should really take it forward particularly when we are seeing that India's policy towards Tibet is developing and could be on its path of being revisited to a certain extent, given that since 2008 or 2009 India has

not reiterated the One China policy in the public domain. So there is an opportunity here and one should in fact take it forward.

Dr. Panda said he did agree that India needs to relook at the Tibet issue particularly from the ecological point of view. But with this note, let me go to the two questions for the final rapid fire round. What is one problematic trend in the Himalayan region you will like to highlight and point out that the world should note? What the Chinese are doing in the Himalayan regions or in the Tibetan Plateau that the world should really take a strong note of? How to try to convince the smaller Himalayan countries in the region?

Two, what is the recommendation you will offer to the Himalayan community, particularly countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, should they really look at some of China's BRI projects. Should they try to reassess their relationship with China and should not really accept everything on face value. What would be your that one recommendation to some of these Himalayan countries?

Dr. Medha Bisht said that when we talking about Tibet, it's not really the water which is being diverted, it's the entire ecosystem - so it's the ecological degradation going on in Tibet which needs to be taken up seriously. Water is not just water. Water is the entire ecosystem, it's your wetlands, your forests, your biodiversity, and it's even your sediments. I think that is very

important when you're talking in the Himalayan context.

The second thing, it is time for India to recalibrate its own diplomacy with its South Asian neighbors. There are definitely some bright spots there given that what's really been happening in the BBIN region with a lot of connectivity projects, inland waterways are coming up where, in fact, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh all look towards India in terms of connecting to Southeast Asia. China is really trying to constrict India to a great extent so it will be in India's own long-term interest if it really takes the ecological issue out front. It's been really doing that at least domestically when it really comes to water issues. There have been some progress with our neighbors. It's time to really look at our water diplomacy with the BBIN countries. The treaties which are very archaic, technical and managerial need to be revisited. One needs a holistic basin management perspective in that context that will be good for India in the long term.

Professor Yoichiro Sato felt that it's very important that the countries between India and China remain connected to both directions. They should try to not to be dominated by China. The neighboring countries are not going to reject those BRI offers as long as those offers are economically beneficial, and unlike the port in Sri Lanka, the ownership, questions of debt diplomacy and all that is not the same with regard to land infrastructure. Land

infrastructures can be more diverse and there will be more alternatives. India needs to keep up with China, playing this game of infrastructure assistance to Southeast, South Asian neighboring countries such as Bhutan and Nepal. It could be about tourism traffic, it could be about electricity supplies or water-related resource issues but the connectivity should stretch also to third parties like Bangladesh. I think Bangladesh is critical if you want to secure the northeastern territory of India. Without cooperation from Bangladesh, the sea access to those territories will be hampered. This north-south kind of infrastructure system should be very well coordinated between not only India and Bangladesh but also other countries into Bangladesh like Japan. Trilateral discussions for that matter will be very useful.

Maj Gen Mandip Singh said he would focus more towards the west and the EU. I have two suggestions. Let me be very candid in staying that we don't need your blood or we don't need your treasure. What we need is technology, and unconditional technology and that's why I alluded to the 'no limits' partnership. If China and Russia which have huge differences of their own can have a 'no limits' partnership, so can we. If India's relations with Russia is an impediment, then I'm afraid it's not going to go anywhere. So the first point is unconditional technology and the second, which has been spoken about is full spectrum, real-time intelligence. I

think these two should help us contest the Chinese expansion.

About the Himalayan region, I would like to relate a small Chinese story about the dam wall and the adjacent pond, and how water when it finds a weakness on the wall, it pushes through with a force ultimately affecting everything that is on the other side. So I'm just trying to bring out that there's a Himalayan wall and any incursion and break into this wall, whether it is in Nepal or Ladakh or Bhutan, when it forces through and it punctures through, it affects all of us on the other side.

Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell said, continuing with the General's analogy, there's already a hole in the dam, and it's Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. So, the CPEC – and all of that – is working at least towards making that a permanent penetration. The Chinese are just looking then to acquire more and more territory to build that infrastructure and to make it more problematic for India but also more lucrative for China. My recommendation to the Himalayan nations is 'wake the heck up'. The BRI is nonsense, it doesn't do what it claims to do. I'll use Sri Lanka as the example because that's where my wife's from, that's where I've spent the most time in South Asia. Yes, it's built some nice highways but what has it genuinely done for Sri Lanka? You have a highway that goes out to Hambantota where you can drive and not see anybody for miles. Elephants walk across the road and it's

a road to nowhere. Instead, it's bought politicians in Sri Lanka. That's exactly what the BRI has aimed to do throughout the entire endeavor is to buy the politicians.

Look at Nepal, it's almost a puppet state. The Communist Party in charge there is beholden to the Communist Party in China. Don't let that kind of same thing happen in Bhutan and elsewhere in the region. Maintain your sovereignty but lean a little bit more on other folks like India, US, Japan whoever to fund those infrastructure projects. Don't fall for the siren song from China because that's all it is and it will lead to loss of sovereignty and potentially turn you into the next Tibet.

Dr Malcom Davis suggested the region is facing two potential military developments or military revolutions if you like that are quite interesting and at opposite extremes. One is a very new one which is intelligitization of warfare- role of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems - that could dramatically change the military equation and the military balance of power across the region. It's really important that we do not allow China to gain a decisive military advantage with these new technologies. I think that what needs to happen is for western states to work with India to ensure that a relative balance of power in these new critical and emerging technologies, these new 21st century weapons and capabilities, are maintained because if you don't, then you basically cede the military initiative to

Beijing. They will be tempted to use that power aggressively and to expand their reach.

The second military dynamic is an old revolution, which is the return of the salience of nuclear weapons. India, China, Pakistan, Russia are all nuclear weapons states. The region we're talking about in the Himalayas is sparsely populated making it ideal environment for use of tactical nuclear weapons, particularly very low yield tactical nuclear weapons. It's very interesting to watch how Putin has been rattling his nuclear saber in Ukraine, and intimidating and coercing NATO into restraining itself in terms of supporting Ukraine. That has extended the war, its cost lives and it's left Ukraine in a difficult position to win even with the ongoing gambit that's now underway. China will be watching how the West responds to those Russian nuclear threats and learning

lessons. Then, India has to think about not just a tactical nuclear threat from Pakistan but China as well. There needs to be some sort of dialogue or process whereby we dissuade China from going down that path. We have to find some way to turn off that drift towards a very dangerous and unstable tripolar nuclear arms race in the Himalayas at the tactical nuclear weapons level, not strategic but tactical. Maybe, the intent on the part of Beijing to think that they can actually get away with using these things in terms of very low yield weapons that might be 5 kilotons or a kiloton but it's still a tactical nuclear weapon.

Dr. Panda thanked the panelists for their brilliant and useful comments. We have been immensely benefited in this project on 'China's Himalayan Hustle' and we are going to prepare reports on the whole series of four webinars.

KEY TAKEAWAYS


- The Chinese recognize that the Himalayas are a highly challenging operational environment. They are investing in infrastructure and road and rail networks to allow them to rapidly achieve tactical mobility through the harsh environment.
- The Chinese are moving from informationization of military to intelligentization of the military, where there is a greater investment in artificial intelligence and very sophisticated UAVs. India and other countries have to be prepared for that because if the Chinese can make that transition and gain a military tactical advantage that might induce them to actually be more aggressive along the line of actual control and be more provocative and may be willing to take some chances.
- In the US, the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies up in Alaska is geared towards preparing the troops for operations in a mountain terrains. It would be nice to see more Indians taking part in that and having more American troops go and study in the High Altitude Warfare School in India. It's one thing to come in for an exercise for a couple of weeks and then you're back out, but it's another thing to actually spend more time there through longer-term exchanges where we get to see how to do things in those hostile environments.
- We need to try to encourage US businesses to invest more in Indian states that border China so that we can kind of build up more rapport and more resources in that region. All the modernization on the China side needs to be mirrored on the Indian side.
- What is the PLA strategy? You really don't have to go too far. If you see the Science of Military Strategy 2020 and if you open chapter 7, called prevention and handling of military crisis, it is very lucid and very clear. I do believe that the Chinese follow the book to a tee. The first is hot shelving, in other words keep the pot boiling so as to keep the opponent in a state of disequilibrium. The second thing that the book teaches the PLA is relevance of national laws. That is why you're suddenly seeing this the new border law, for example, to legitimize the occupation of the border villages all along the LAC. All of these are to legitimize the claims of China. The third thing is to control the crisis. It says, isolate the extent, limit the crisis in space, don't internationalize it, keep room for negotiations and maneuver and, if required, use coercion or blockades or ultimatums. The fourth thing is which is what concerns us the most is seize opportunities created by the crisis. So India cannot let her guard

down because you just don't know when they are going to exploit the situation.

- Despite their neutrality and reluctance to get itself involved in the border dispute issues, Japan is moving a step closer to supporting India's actual line of control but in the least direct way. Japan's aid has previously focused on industrializing urban centers not in northeastern India but for the last two years the trend has been a little different. Specifically, Japan has approved phase six of Northeast States Road Connection Improvement connecting the northeastern part of India from south to north, and phase three of the Road Improvement Project. The latter will connect Dhubri in Assam State to Meghalaya State and include a 20-km long bridge across the Brahmaputra.
- As a consequence of China's Himalayan strategy, a strategic board is emerging and is in fact merging South Asia and Southeast Asia together. Any recalibration or deliberation should take cognizance of this pattern. Today, the Himalayan strategy and the Indo-Pacific strategy are converging in interesting ways.
- If you really look at Tibet's land use policies, one cannot really treat Tibet as an internal affair of China. What happens in the Tibetan Plateau influences the climate and the atmospheric changes not only in Asia but also in Europe. India really needs to spread this message in a very conscious manner.
- In terms of India and NATO, there's ample grounds for NATO to work with India. NATO is trying to become an Indo-Pacific power so there's a clear linkage with India that can be explored. The key impediment to this at the moment is India's relationship with Russia.
- One has understand Chinese foreign policy by listening to the narratives and the double meanings embedded in the narratives. So a counter-narrative strategy is really needed in terms of responding to Chinese foreign policy on any issue.
- The EU's own involvement in Asia is primarily around issues of sustainability and climate change. Rather than India being influenced by the NATO argument or really trying to bring some of those strategic frameworks to the Asian theater, Tibet should be projected as a concern for Global Commons. Tibet's impact on global climate really needs to be taken up seriously. India can really take a lead in this context, even in platforms like the UNFCCC.
- It is time for India to recalibrate its own diplomacy with its South Asian neighbors.

It is time to really look at our water diplomacy with the BBIN countries. The treaties which are very archaic, technical and managerial need to be revisited. One needs a holistic basin management perspective which will also be good for India in the long term.

- India needs to keep up with China, providing infrastructure assistance to Southeast, South Asian neighboring countries such as Bhutan and Nepal. It could be about tourism traffic, it could be about electricity supplies or water-related resource issues but the connectivity should stretch also to third parties like Bangladesh.
- What we need from the West and EU is one, unconditional technology and two, full spectrum, real-time intelligence. I think these two should help us contest the Chinese expansion.
- Western states need to work with India to ensure that a relative balance of power in these new critical and emerging technologies, these new 21st century weapons and capabilities, are maintained because if you don't, then you basically cede the military initiative to Beijing. China will be tempted to use that power aggressively and to expand their reach.
- China will be watching how the West responds to those Russian nuclear threats and learning lessons. Then, India has to think about not just a tactical nuclear threat from Pakistan but China as well. There needs to be some sort of dialogue or process whereby we dissuade China from going down that path. We have to find some way to turn off that drift towards a very dangerous and unstable tripolar nuclear arms race in the Himalayas at the tactical nuclear weapons level, not strategic but tactical.



Institute for Security and Development Policy
Västra Finnbodavägen 2, 131 30 Nacka, Sweden
www.isdp.eu | info@isdp.eu