From the Managing Editor

This issue of the *Journal of Defence Studies* is being published 50 years after China attacked India across the Himalayas. A majority of Indians and Chinese today do not have any personal memories of the war. Since the war was seen as a victory for China and a defeat for India, it naturally evokes different sentiments in the two countries. For China, it was a punitive strike to teach India a lesson, to make it accept a lower position in the hierarchy of nations and, perhaps, an opportunity to convey its strength to the world at large, and particularly to the two superpowers of the day. It could also have been externalization of the internal power struggle in China. For India, it was betrayal by a fellow Third World country, an ancient civilisation like India, and a shared history of anti-colonialism. More importantly for India, it was, simultaneously, a humiliating experience and a wake-up call.

What often gets sidelined is that India and China were not each other's immediate neighbours before the 1950s. Tibet was a strategic buffer between the two. Their knowledge about each other was limited. The Himalayas, traditionally a natural barrier in the North, kept them separated. The annexation of Tibet changed the situation. Realizing that there was little it could do, India reconciled itself to the fait accompli on Tibet's annexation by China. It is well known that in the 1950s, the Indian political situation was stable but China was passing through a difficult phase internally. At the same time, while China's relations with the super powers were strained, India was playing an active role in world affairs, but was ignoring its defence needs in the process. The *Panchsheel Pact* of 1954 was taken seriously by India—a little too seriously for its own good. While the dominant narrative is that Indian leadership was responsible for failing to anticipate the Chinese invasion, an alternate view blames India for provoking China into launching the invasion.

Be that as it may, the relevant question today is whether India and China are destined to be rivals? Not necessarily. But this would require accommodating each other's aspirations. Their relations can be cooperative or confrontationist, or a mixture of both. What we are seeing today is the latter—cooperation in certain areas, while in other areas

suspicions and confrontations reign supreme. This leads us to another often-considered and debated issue: whether 1962 will be repeated? The answer is both yes and no. Whereas conditions that prevailed in 1962 are no longer applicable today, mutual distrust still prevails. China is distrustful of India because it views the latter as a competitor for regional dominance in Asia, because India is rising steadily despite its 'chaotic' democracy. India distrusts China because of its perceived betrayal in 1962 and continuous efforts to contain India. There is also an asymmetry in the balance of power between China and India, and the former's strategic behaviour is unpredictable. However, India is not without its leverages, nor is it intimidated by China's rise, even if it is yet uncertain about what China's rise means.

The geography that separated the two countries in 1962 has not changed. Yet, circumstances have changed: both India and China are now nuclear powers and regional economic giants. The tools and methods of mitigating the effects of geography have improved. Absence of a future conflict cannot therefore be predicted because of difficult geography. The Indian Navy and Air Force were left out of the 1962 war. They will not be staying out should there be a conflict in future. Moreover, an armed conflict in future will be rather expensive and, therefore, is best avoided. But, there have to be other means to avoid armed conflict. Assured deterrence is an even stronger tool than economic interdependence. The political, economic and military profiles of both the countries have changed considerably since the last war, though some endemic strategic thoughts still persist.

While history will judge if China's invasion benefited it, even if it caused humiliation for India, an important, though negative legacy of the event is that India will continue to remain distrustful of China in the foreseeable future. Nineteen sixty-two awoke India from its complacency and forced it to pay attention to its defence requirements. The defeat in the war was internalised by the Indian armed forces, particularly its army, despite the fact that some of its units fought well in battles against heavy odds. Yet, the war was lost for other reasons such as lack of defence preparedness, poor higher defence management, misjudgement about China's intentions and likely reactions, and the prevailing political climate, etc. Fifty years hence, we find that we are yet to institute far-reaching reforms in the defence sector.

The problems in bilateral relations have not vanished since 1962. The China–Pakistan strategic nexus, unresolved boundary issues, suspicions about diversion of river waters emanating from the Tibetan plateau, the

increasing assertive behaviour of China, its military preparedness and opacity, competition for strategic and economic resources, and efforts to constrain India's geopolitical space—are all matters of concern for India. Normalisation of relations and absence of war will depend greatly on how China behaves, and whether it accommodates India's core interests. Given its economic clout, it may very well choose to ignore India's concerns and let distrust grow further; yet it could also be more mindful of the need for mutual respect and accommodation. It must be remembered that doublespeak—talking peaceful development, while at the same time trying to undermine India—will, in the long run extract some costs. India, on its part, has learnt the art of talking softly, but not trusting blindly. It understands that its foreign policy will succeed only if it is backed by the requisite defence capability. It also has its red lines and will defend them resolutely. Reciprocity is likely to come increasingly in use.

It has been 50 years since India and China went to war and the *Journal of Defence Studies* has put together this special issue on the occasion. We commissioned articles especially for this issue, aimed at analysing the *causes* of the conflict and not just a bland critique for the conduct of war, per se. R.S. Kalha begins by contextualizing the historical background to the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 with Tibet as the core issue and which, to this day, dictates the direction of their relations. Bhavana Tripathi analyses distinct differences in Indian reactions, both public and government policy driven by Nehru, to the 1959 Tibetan revolt and its aftermath. Examining fresh archival material which is now available in the public domain, Johan S. Jensen analyses India's strategic 'Forward Policy' in the backdrop of the Sino-Indian border dispute which eventually led to the 1962 war, and the impact of this controversial event on subsequent strategic thinking in India.

When will states begin to bargain while fighting, and when will they evade intra-war negotiations, asks Oriana Skylar Mastro. Her article addresses this question with respect to the 1962 Sino-Indian war and provides an insight into the question of why talks did not take place for the duration of the war. S.K. Bhutani examines the role of the great powers, especially the then Soviet Union, and other actors as well as skirmishes along the border as a precursor to the 1962 Sino-Indian war. R.N. Das highlights the stormy Parliamentary debates in the post 1962 Sino-Indian war, as also India's position on China's entry to the UN and its Tibet policy.

P.K. Gautam's article deliberates on some basic tactical and operational issues, induction training of units, an understanding of the locals as it

relates to the Kameng region of Arunachal Pradesh, and the creation of myths and insights on scholarship by some leading political scientists on the methodology of writing their books. Rahul Bhonsle comprehensively analyses the causes of the strategic failure at the level of the defence hierarchy at the decision-making levels, the government, and the military top brass, down to the field commands and the lessons learnt. P.R. Chari highlights three major causes responsible for the debacle: civil-military relations, the failure of intelligence, and the structural defects existing at that time in the higher defence decision-making process. He then addresses whether and what defence reforms were effected, and their impact on defence preparedness post 1962.

The article by Manjeet S. Pardesi analyses China's reasons for attacking India 50 years ago. His assessment is that Sino-Indian relations will continue to remain competitive and conflictual as the status of Tibet, the on-going border dispute, and also because of the Chinese fears of containment continue to bedevil Sino-Indian relations. Shruti Pandalai's article argues that the 1962 war cemented an enduring discourse of contested perceptions that have woven themselves into nationalistic narratives in both countries, and are independent of the ongoing talks, or the climate of talks between the two governments.

Dibyesh Anand analyses the two dominant betrayal narratives of the war as it is recalled in India: one blaming the Chinese alone and the second blaming Chinese expansionism as well as the naïve leadership of Nehru. He critically analyses the assumptions made by these betrayal narratives, and suggests that these narratives prevent an honest evaluation of the military and diplomatic failures that contributed to the border war.

Srinath Raghavan reviews three recent publications on China and implications for India: *The Rise of China: Implications for India*, edited by Harsh V. Pant; *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behavior: Growing Power and Alarm*, by George J. Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham; and *A Resurgent China: South Asian Perspectives*, edited by S.D. Muni and Tan Tai Yong.

History is also a teacher. It teaches us through events and through perceptions and memories of those events. Oral history is often as important a source of information as recorded, official or approved versions. This special issue also includes an interview of the highly decorated veteran officer and Marshal of the Indian Air Force (IAF), Arjan Singh, on his recollections of the war.

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