A year after Galwan - India-China Relations

What is the issue?

- On June 15, 2020, the Line of Actual Control (LAC) witnessed its first deaths after 1975, in a violent clash with China in Galwan in Ladakh.
- After an year, here is an assessment of the military and geopolitical situation.

What is the current situation?

- Militarily, the current situation in Ladakh is not bad.
- There is a continued deployment of 50,000-60,000 soldiers.
- With this, the Indian Army has been able to hold the line to prevent any further ingress by the China's People's Liberation Army (PLA).
- The Chinese presence on the Indian side of the LAC in Gogra, Hot Springs and Demchok gives the PLA some tactical advantage.
- But the area which majorly jolts Indian military plans is the Chinese control of Depsang Plains.

What are the shortcomings in India's approach?

- Militarily, Chinese incursions in Ladakh have shown that the idea of deterrence has failed.
- Many retired military officers feel that the Indian Army had only weakened its negotiating position during the talks with the PLA.
- In any case, there has been no progress in talks after the disengagement at Pangong lake and Kailash range in February 2021.
- There is no record of the Cabinet Committee on Security being convened to discuss the Ladakh border situation.
- No official briefing or press conference about the situation in Ladakh has taken place in the last 13 months since the Ladakh crisis.
- The official excuse was operational security, but the actual reason was to avoid political embarrassment for the government in power.
- This is because PLA soldiers remain in control of what was hitherto in Indian control.

What is the recent policy in this regard?

- Defence Minister recently approved a revised policy on how India compiles, archives and disseminates its war documents and related history.

- As per the new policy, once an operation/war is completed, the first cut of history is to be prepared.
- It will be disseminated for internal circulation within 5 years.
- Whether this first draft of history is to be placed in the public domain or not, will be determined on a case by case basis.
- It will depend on the sensitivity of the operation/war.
- [Predictably, the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat report relating to the 1962 war with China, which is still under wraps, will not be part of the new policy.
- Apparently, another committee will take a view on previous wars.]

How does the future look?

- A return to the status quo ante of April 2020 in Ladakh remains a far from reality.
- The Chinese side refuses to engage meaningfully.
- India argues that there could be no normalcy without restoration of status quo ante at the borders.
- With the widening power gap between New Delhi and Beijing, the challenge is as much economic as it is geopolitical.
- A new reset in bilateral ties is difficult because China is now in a different league, competing with the U.S.
- India will never be comfortable taking sides in a new Cold War between the U.S. and China.
- Beijing seems as keen as New Delhi to avoid a military conflict, though accidents such as Galwan can never be ruled out.
- India thus has to live with this tense and uneasy calm with China for some time, a challenge brought to the fore by the Ladakh crisis.
- The Ladakh crisis has also led India to relook external partnerships, particularly with the United States.
- The military importance of the Quad remains arguable.
- The choices made in New Delhi will have a significant impact on the future of global geopolitics.

What is the way forward?

- The Galwan anniversary should encourage the Indian government to set up an independent panel of experts.
- This should review the institutional lapses that led to an altered LoAC (Line of Actual Control) in the Ladakh sector.

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express



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