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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE -07

The Long View

**Reading China Right: India's Challenge
from the Himalayas to the Taiwan Strait**

In Conversation with

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli

Guest host

Prof. Ashok K. Kantha

**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations
Chanakya University, Bengaluru**

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**Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations,
Former Ambassador of India to China**

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Reading China Right: India's Challenge from the Himalayas to the Taiwan Strait

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Key Takeaways

- Relations are at a “positive stalemate”: Border-level dialogue has resumed since the 2024 Kazan meeting, but a hiatus in most of the ~30 pre-Galwan structured dialogues, app bans, and investment restrictions remain in place. Normalisation is only partial.
- Geopolitics has shifted against India: Warming Trump–Xi ties (Busan/Beijing summits, talk of a “G2”) have eroded India’s role as a US-backed balancer against China, giving Beijing more room to press its own terms.
- China leans on Pakistan as leverage: Continued arms transfers (~\$24B) and reported operational collusion during Operation Sindoor show China treats the China–Pakistan axis as its primary tool against India, while categorizing India’s engagement with the US as “third-party interference.”
- India is building “asymmetric deterrence”: Without a formal doctrine, India has moved from pure dissuasion toward harder deterrence aimed at avoiding surprises like Galwan and Doklam, not at matching China militarily.
- Chinese Nuclear dynamics are evolving but still US-focused: China’s arsenal is projected to grow from ~600 to 1,000–1,500 warheads, with a shift toward “launch on warning” postures — primarily to deter the US, though medium-range systems in Qinghai/Xinjiang keep India within range.
- The long-term fix is structural: Kondapalli’s three recommendations — build Comprehensive National Power, adopt a realist lens on China, and revive indigenous strategic scholarship echo how China itself has doubled down on classical strategic thought.

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Editorial Note:

This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity, readability and continuity while preserving the substance and conversational character of the original discussion. The views expressed by the participants are their own and do not necessarily represent those of Chanakya University or the Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations.

Transcript

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Welcome to seventh episode of the Long View. Let me first of all tell you something about Longview. It is a conversation space created by Subhash Chandra Bose Chair of Chanakya University. It's a space for India-centric evidence-based discussions on forces and trends that are shaping today's chaotic world. Trends which are seldom caught in headlines today, for which you need to step back a little, look at continuities, but also look at ruptures, and then identify what is really happening in the world today. For that, we have an interlocutor, a guest, who is a subject expert, and we discuss one particular issue in every episode.

In today's episode, we are going to discuss reading China, India's challenge from Himalayas to the Taiwan Strait, and we couldn't have asked for a better, more informed, more illustrious guest than Professor Srikanth Kondapalli.

Welcome, Srikanth, to The Long View. Srikanth is one of the leading Sinologists of the country. He has been observing China very closely for three decades. He's a Professor of Chinese Studies in the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He was earlier the Dean of SIS, and one unique feature that he brings to his research is his ability to go to original documents in Chinese language because he was trained in China for an extended period, including for his post-doctoral fellowship. He did some remarkable work on the PLA, his first book was on PLA in transition, then his subsequent monograph was on the PLA Navy. And he has gone on to build a very impressive portfolio of publications. He's a commentator on China on various platforms. He is also an extremely admired teacher of Chinese studies. So, welcome again, Srikanth to this show.

I thought what we can do today is to, see what are the debates that are taking place about China. First, starting with India-China relations. Because we are poised at a difficult juncture in trajectory of India-China relations. It's already been more than 6 years since the Galwan tragedy. It's close to 2 years since Prime Minister Modi met with President Xi at Kazan, which led to the beginning of re-engagement. Some steps have been taken to put relations back on a more stable footing. Yet, if you look at the situation along the borders, it remains highly militarized. It's still stable, but not normal. Likewise, there has been some progress towards resuming people-centric contacts, but we are far from returning to a normal state of affairs in India-China relations, either along the borders or in the relationship as a whole.

How will you characterize the present state of India-China relations? Do you see us moving towards a reset, a genuine thaw, or is it only a sort of tactical change which has taken place? And what is your prognosis for the next 2-3 years of India-China relations?

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: Thank you very much, Ambassador Ashok Kantha, for this invite. I'm deeply honored and delighted to be part of this podcast.

How do we characterize the current India-China relations, given the Galwan clashes? 20 Indian soldiers passed away, and an estimated four by the Chinese side assessment. That has upset bilateral relations. As Dr. Jaishankar said 2 days after the June 15th incident, unless

border stability is achieved, we will not have the bilateral relations improved. Since then, we have had so many discussions, the WMCC meeting, the core commander level meetings. And then at the special representative meetings, we had so many other talks and back-channel talks. You rightly mentioned about the Kazan meeting on October 23rd, 2024, and a decision taken in terms of normalizing relations. We subsequently had the Tianjin meeting of the SCO, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where Prime Minister Modi visited China to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting. We also had a 45-minute meeting between the two leaders regarding opening bilateral relations into different fields. Before Galwan, we had about 30 structured dialogues.

The strategic dialogue by the foreign ministries, the strategic and economic dialogues between NITI Aayog and NDRC. There is the annual defense dialogue between two defense ministries. There was also the youth dialogue. There is a financial dialogue. There is a steel dialogue. There used to be think tank to think tank and media to media connections. So, we had about 30 structured dialogues. All of these were shut down because of the Galwan incident, and we also had some restrictions on the Chinese apps, 218 applications, IT applications. Restrictions on Chinese investments in the infrastructure projects in border areas as well as shutting down of the Confucius Institutes or Confucius Classrooms in India. These restrictions have not yet been lifted, and we also have not diversified other than the WMCC core commander level SR level meeting.

So, in other words, this situation of normalization is not extended to all other areas. Trade is happening, but that is between the private sector in India and state-owned and private sector in China. So, this is slightly abnormal and how do we characterize this? I would say this is a stalemate, but in a positive way. Stalemate in the sense that there is movement. India gives less visas compared to the Chinese 85,000 visas issued last year. We issued some 4,500 visas which means that India is still reluctant to open up to China. So, this can be characterized as a stalemate, but in a positive way, not in a negative way because the doors are open but not fully. It is a stalemate.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: I think you have described it very well. Looking ahead, I would like to expand the conversation a little bit because what happens in India-China relations is not always bilateral. It's shaped quite significantly by what's happening around us in the world by the larger geopolitical context in which this relationship is developed. Do you think that context is becoming more challenging? I'll just refer to a couple of developments there. Something you have commented upon quite a bit in your writings.

China tends to look at India through prism of its strategic contestation with the USA. But in the last several months especially since Busan summit between President Xi and President Trump, one can see a very deliberate effort by two countries to stabilize relations. We saw during Beijing summit in May that Washington accepted a construct proposed by China of a strategic constructive relationship and stability, which is for the first time in several years, wherein the USA has accepted a Chinese framework. They're very reluctant to do that. Trump left Beijing empty-handed. And there was this perception that in this game between the two powers, Trump in fact had acceded to a G2 kind of arrangement that was proposed there. China perceives a certain advantage at this point of time vis-a-vis USA.

At the same time, in parallel, there is a visible stress in India-US relations. The way USA looks at India, it is no longer so keen to look at India as a strategic counterpoise to China. China is aware of these developments. How do you see this context where we are under some pressure from Washington D.C. And Beijing? Beijing is not so keen to make concessions at a time when they think we are under pressure and we are coming to them from a position of weakness. Do you see India and China being able to address some of the more critical, more substantive issues in relations, or are we limited to, what China sometimes calls, low-hanging fruits? Take for instance, their proposal is that we agree to a separate settlement on Sikkim and normalize our business relations. Where do you see us going? Are we going towards a more stable, balanced relationship which caters to our concerns and interests, or something which will be more along the lines of Chinese preference?

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: As you rightly mentioned, there is a balance of power shift. The Chinese have become the second largest economy and they're at the center of supply chain mechanisms. They have now, through the Belt and Road Initiative, 1.4 trillion dollars of investment in other countries, and they seem to have an edge overall in international relations. It has not yet, of course, translated into power terms, but this is the background.

We also have the Americans recognizing China's rise. There used to be a bipartisan consensus within the United States on countering China's rise in one way or the other. Successive national security strategy documents mention about 'emerging challenger', 'strategic competition', 'small yard high fence', or other phrases over a period since the mid-2000s. On the other hand, coinciding with the 123 Civil Nuclear Agreement between US and India, China started calling India's engagement with the US, as third-party role. The Chinese would, since then, agree that India is siding with the United States as a part of the natural allies, that is, democracies. And as Condoleezza Rice, the former Secretary of State, mentioned in Sofia University in 2005, about helping India to become a major power in 21st century, against that background, the Chinese had expressed some concerns on the US-India relations because that has transformed into a lot of foundational agreements between India and the US, such as the LEMOA, BECA, CISMOA and others. Also, significant arms transfer has taken place between the United States and India.

So, in this background, they have expressed concerns on US-India relations. To my mind, it is unfair that China had raised the US and India relations' growing trajectory because this violates the Panchsheel principles. How India shapes its foreign policy is India's business, not China's business. And this is a very unfair position that China had taken that US-India relations have been of concern to China.

When India raises the third-party role, we mention about Pakistan and the all-weather friendship between China and Pakistan. As the Chinese have transferred the nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and 54% of their arms transfer is to South Asia and specifically to Pakistan. About \$24 billion has been transferred so far to Pakistan. And India has a concern because Pakistan utilizes many of these equipments supplied to Pakistan to counter India. We have seen this in 1965, 1971, during Kargil in '99, and during the Operation Sindoor last year in May. Many of the Chinese equipment have been used by Pakistan and in the last conflict in Operation Sindoor, we saw active Chinese role on the side of the Pakistanis. So, India's third-



party role formulation pertains to the role of China in Pakistan. The Chinese mention about US and India relations. India as a balancer to China is one of the American ideas since 2005. Since Condoleezza Rice speech. However, with President Trump announcing G2, this has taken off. The balancer role is taken off at least in a peripheral way. So, India loses that kind of leverage which it used to have for the past 21 years. And so, there is a paradigm shift between China, US, and India.

The second angle is that the the Americans, even though they have taken a position that China issue should be addressed as it happened in their QDR, NSS, and other documents. But we saw Trump administration completely changing that dynamics. With the latest NSS mentioning China not as a challenger and relacing the words Indo-Pacific to Asia-Pacific. Replacing Indo-Pacific Command with the original Pacific Command. And Shangri-La dialogue speeches by Hegseth, the Secretary of Defense, not mentioning much about the South China Sea and other issues. All these indicated that China-US angle is getting traction. And the Trump administration's tariffs on China have now been reduced. While as you rightly mentioned, the the India tariffs have increased substantially. And President Trump also mentioned about zero growth rate in India and, some colorful words were also used by him in relation to depict India. So, this is the context where the Chinese would, like to seek more diplomatic concessions from the United States, on South Asia. Of course, even before they were seeking such concessions. If you remember the Obama-Hu Jintao joint statement about South Asia. The Chinese say that this is under the American pressure that they have included South Asia, in the 2009 joint statement. Nevertheless, the G2 thread, that is active in the US-China relations. So, it is right to a certain extent that, the, changed, global strategic situation resulted in China upping the ante on India, and seeking more concessions. The Chinese banned the export of rare earth metals to the US and actually to everybody else. It's only when Dr. Jaishankar went to Beijing last June, we saw the germanium, gallium, and other rare earth metals ban being lifted by China selectively, but, that Damocles sword is still hanging – the rare earth metals.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: Yes. The ifs and buts are still there, and this is the reason why India joined the the silica Pax Silica and also recent visits by Prime Minister Modi to Australia and Indonesia to look at the critical minerals related matter. So, China has some leverage, and it is trying to use against all, including India and the United States. And to an extent, it is successful.

I would say this is in the short term, because in the medium to long term, we will all have supply chain restoration of critical minerals as well as other items for which China has carried out trade weaponization. So, in other words, the US-China-India triangle, which some Chinese have actually floated before, has now become slightly more skewed in nature. So, it is advantage China to an extent. But India is no pushover in this context and the recent visits by Prime Minister Modi to different countries and the free trade agreements signed with EU, UK, Oman, New Zealand, the trade upgrade with Australia, with Japan and other countries, indicated that we also have something up our sleeve and we are trying to kind of find our feet in this international system. It is slightly skewed in favor of China right now. But India is no pushover on this matter.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: I would like to tell listeners that Professor Srikanth Kondapalli, he's done pioneering work on China's PLA and also on, our defense equation with China. So, I'll take our conversation in that direction.

As Professor Kondapalli rightly brought out and something I entirely agree with, I've also been writing along those lines. The larger picture has shifted there to our disadvantage and to China's advantage. And any deterrence matrix we had with China, the role of external balancing has been eroded. That's the point to note he made. I would like to add that we can't really depend so much on USA when it comes to any continental conflict with China. You also referred to developments in China-Pakistan relations. We saw during Operation Sindoor, how there was an unprecedented level of operational collusion between China and Pakistan. So, in a way, we have moved into new territory when we are dealing with Pakistan. China will be an ever-present factor in any military conflict, also providing support to Pakistan.

So, in this more complicated context, how do you see, asymmetric deterrence, which is talked about in India's strategic community? What are the components of asymmetric deterrence? Is it a doctrine or is it still just some kind of talking point? What does it involve? Does it involve deterrence by denial, deterrence by punishment, deterrence by resilience? As someone who has studied this subject deeply, I would like you to share your thoughts with our listeners on nature of asymmetric deterrence strategy we are supposedly developing vis-a-vis China and to certain extent vis-a-vis both China and Pakistan.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: That's a very interesting topic, sir. It's not yet an official doctrine because we don't find anything in the official media. We also do not find it in some of the esteemed military thinkers' writings yet.

Let's break down this concept of asymmetric deterrence. Asymmetry, of course, we know there is 19 trillion-dollar GDP of China and 4 trillion-dollar GDP of India. China spends officially 290 billion dollars in defense budget. We spend about 80 billion dollars on the defense budget. They have 10 trillion dollars of investment in infrastructure. We have less than a trillion in infrastructure spending. So, asymmetry is compounded in every sphere. Civil, military, and other spheres. How do we address this asymmetry?

There is the suggestion that we first find the Achilles' heel of China in order to address those asymmetries. The second concept is deterrence. And deterrence, we generally know, is imposing maximum possible punishment. Denial or punishment. We used to practice denial because of the 1962 background and other Chinese coercive diplomatic statements given on the border situation and on others. For example, Tulung La in 1975, Sumdorong Chu in 1987, Dopsang Plains in 2003, you also have the Doklam and Galwan clashes in 2017 and 2020. So, we did see there is a lot of coercive diplomatic pressure emanating from Beijing. India has used deterrence both in conventional and nuclear domain primarily against Pakistan. Deterrence posture in nuclear domain and in general, we have minimum credible nuclear deterrence as a broader announcement. Although we tweak this by suggesting that if there is an attack on India by chemical weapons or others, we will forego the 'no first use' and we will be operating in a first use mode. We have also recently, about a month ago, we have mated the warheads with the launchers selectively, which indicates that we are in a slightly more



advanced position in the deterrence posture vis-à-vis China. We have 'no first use'. They also have 'no first use' since 1964. But we have used extensive dissuasion in terms of the nuclear factor with China.

Our deterrence with Pakistan, and in fact with both Pakistan and China, is based on dissuasion. Dissuasion is generally through CBMs. Confidence-building measures. Dissuasion is through dialogue process. Dissuasion is through official negotiations. For example, in the strategic dialogue between the two foreign ministries, a few minutes were spent on the nuclear dimension routinely. It has now become stable because the Indian side is convinced that we should have some escalatory control procedures. The Chinese would brush that aside saying that India is not a nuclear power. And India should abide by the 1172 resolution in the Security Council.

On the other hand, India gradually also began shifting from dissuasion on a journey towards deterrence vis-à-vis China. For example, the DRDO has built canisterized weapon systems, 24/7 launch systems through solid propellants in Agni series of missile batteries. We have also deployed some of these in Assam and that's in the nuclear domain. In the conventional domain, India has raised mountain strike forces. This is basically a conventional deterrence posture. And the Cold Start doctrine that we used to have on Pakistan has now, in a way, been shifted towards China. We have shifted some of the strike corps, which used to be deployed against Pakistan, towards China. These postures suggest that we are tweaking the traditional deterrence postures.

In 2009, the Indian Armed Forces began to accept a slightly higher threat level. And a two-front war under nuclear threshold was mentioned at the time. And the Indian armed forces have been constantly preparing for that kind of scenario. A two-front war under nuclear threshold means Pakistan, China, and the nuclear threshold. We are in a situation where Pakistan and China will combine both in conventional as well as in the nuclear domain. How do we prepare? We have roughly about 16-17 years of experience in this, in Armed Forces planning, and you may recall in the reports, we deployed the S-400 systems between Pakistan and China somewhere in Jammu and Kashmir. This indicates that we are practicing the two-front war under nuclear threshold related scenarios, and it basically means deployment of BrahMos regiments in the northeast. And deployment of various conventional platforms on the northern borders.

Also going into ISR: the intelligence surveillance reconnaissance, space and cyber domains. We see that the Indian side had mobilized both the land forces as well as air forces. And it is now in the process of transiting to theater commands, which is a project that they are trying to build up while China has already graduated to what they call "CAB-ization", combined arms brigade forces in Tibet and other regions. So, given the kind of asymmetries we face both in conventional and the nuclear domain from China, asymmetric deterrence is frequently talked about. So, it basically includes how we address the DF-21D, DF-16, DF-26, Dongfeng 26 and other missile systems placed by China in Delingha, Qiaotu, Da Qaidam in Qinghai province, and the conventional superiority that China has over India. But here the problem is, of course, China has extended supply lines into Tibet from the Chengdu military headquarters, the western theater command, to Tibet forward areas. There are still a lot of problems in terms

of logistics – in terms of hostile terrain, high altitude terrain. If they plan to wage multi-domain operations – this is not a given for China – the costs on China are also higher. India is preparing for this kind of a scenario. I do not think India's asymmetric deterrence is to defeat China but to see to it that we don't have surprises like Galwan. We don't have surprises like Doklam where the Chinese started building a road to Jampheri Ridge. India's asymmetric deterrence doesn't have the same kind of offensive features that are generally attributed to deterrence. India's game plan is still defensive in nature. This is important to understand because while Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping were talking in Chennai in Mahabalipuram in October 2019, simultaneously two brigades, 10,000 troops strong, began moving from Aksu in Xinjiang and overrunning the Depsang Plains, cutting off our patrols position towards the borders, the Line of Actual Control. So, that was a big surprise. We were lulled into the belief that China will go by the script on CBMs that we signed since 1988. And we placed our confidence in the Chinese; we learned once again a lesson in Galwan.

Asymmetric deterrence is to defend ourselves so that we have no surprise again, because in 1962, Nehru passed away with that shame. And no other leadership in India wants to take that kind of position again. Therefore, asymmetric deterrence is to prepare well so that we are not surprised.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Just to pick a thread from what you just said. You talked about the two-front challenge under nuclear overhang. This is a formulation which is not very often used. Two-front challenge is there. When we had the standoff situation in Eastern Ladakh beginning summer of 2020, during that period there wasn't any talk of a nuclear dimension being introduced. I recall, in his book *Choices*, former National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon, argues that there is a basic equilibrium in the nuclear dimension between India and China. Despite disparity in size of the nuclear arsenal of the two countries, that equilibrium is likely to continue possibly at a higher technological level, as both countries move up the technology chain in nuclear matters. But there have been developments recently over last 5 years or so which cause some concern as to whether that basic equilibrium is under stress. And I wanted to have your comments on that. I'll just flag two or three developments. One, of course, is rapid increase in size of China's nuclear arsenal. At present projected at, perhaps 600 plus, and likely to go up to 1,000 by 2030 and to 1,500 by 2035, if you go by Western estimates. We don't have our own estimates. But there is enough evidence to suggest that the size of the nuclear arsenal is growing. That's one. Second aspect is, of course, continued modernization of nuclear weaponry. Also moving into hypersonics and different areas. Thirdly, one can see a significant change in the nuclear doctrine. To my mind, perhaps that's more worrisome. They're talking about early warning counter strike, which is a launch and warning posture. Or in strategic literature, 'no first use' being qualified in so many different ways. In a way, even early warning counter strike goes against grain of 'no first use'. And finally, China developing capabilities, counterforce capability using conventional weapons, which will not be effective against USA, but they might be effective against India. They might, who knows, sort of degrade our second-strike capability. How do you look at this, especially in the light of what you commented earlier, two-front situation under nuclear overhang? How worried we should be about these developments in both China's nuclear posture and the doctrine?



Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: Interesting points. We saw during Galwan or during other testing times between India and China, the N-word was never used by the two leaderships. And so, this is more of speculation. There is some sort of background preparation on both sides. But there is no N-word being used. The Chinese use the word “Shāshǒujiǎn” (杀手锏) – an assassin’s mace weapon – and we do not know exactly what that weapon is in the Chinese inventory. Some speculate that this is an electromagnetic spectrum weapon. Some have commented that this could be some kind of a BMD, ballistic missile defense, or a HGV, hypersonic glide vehicle, which has also now entered the Chinese inventory.

From an Indian perspective, Prime Minister Modi visited Ladakh, Leh, soon after the Galwan incident. In his speeches, he mentioned Sudarshan Chakra, which is a traditional way of looking at Vishnu carrying the Sudarshan Chakra. So, an ultimate weapon system that is generally used as a stand-off weapon, but many commentators suggested the Sudarshan Chakra is not a nuclear weapon, but it is a ballistic missile defense. For example, S-400, which we acquired, when Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh went to Moscow in September 2020 soon after the Galwan incident, and the Russians gave us those weapon systems, nine weapon systems including the S-400s. The nearest parallel we have towards this is the Shāshǒujiǎn and the Sudarshan Chakra, pitted against each other, but not exactly confirmed as nuclear weapons. In reality, as you rightly mentioned, the stockpile in China is increasing. China has roughly about 42 places where they can generate highly enriched uranium or plutonium. Plutonium has now been kind of downgraded in their nuclear systems, not enriched uranium, and the estimates of the RAND Corporation and Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, suggest, as you rightly mentioned, anywhere from the current 600 to roughly about 1,500 warheads by 2030.

In Urumqi and other areas in Xinjiang and Qinghai, there are also plans to construct ICBM silos, and an overall spending of 32 billion dollars only for this purpose has been reported by the Pentagon papers on the PLA. In June, they came up with these. China is preparing in the nuclear domain, but I think it is mainly the United States that is the target. Even though in their PLA Rocket Forces reorganization exercise and their doctrine in the white paper issued on national defense suggested that they will have medium to long-range firepower. Medium to long-range would mean an IRBM or an ICBM. IRBM is where India comes in, in terms of, the coverage that it has from Qinghai. If you have a radius, it’s roughly about 2,200 km, roughly amounting to an IRBM. ICBMs, of course, as the recent SLBM JL-3 test indicated, their target is the United States or its allies in far away regions. It doesn’t mean China has given up on India in the nuclear domain. We see, as you rightly mentioned, there is the launch on warning and launch under attack. Increasingly, the Chinese literature on the nuclear issue speaks about limited nuclear deterrence under launch on warning and launch under attack. Launch under attack is a quick way of retaliating. And Chinese scientists, they started suggesting openly that if the adversary is going to attack their ICBM silos or if the adversary is going to attack the strategic hubs in China, the strategic hub is the Pudong Special Economic Zone, Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, the Three Gorges Dam, all other strategic assets including possibly Zhongnanhai and other leadership compounds.

So, the argument is that China needs to now retaliate, forego the NFU, no first use, and then

retaliate instead of giving space for the adversary to damage the strategic hubs in China. China should be able to retaliate quickly which also puts a lot of stress on the early warning systems. China needs to have these space-based systems which it already has. 24 BeiDou series of medium earth orbit satellites and other satellites have been launched by China. So, it does have the space capabilities as we recently saw in the Iran conflict, in Venezuelan conflict, in Gaza conflict, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. But China also needs to have the THAAD system which it doesn't have currently. And so, it indicates that China has to forego the no first use and transit into a first use in order to deter the United States on the nuclear issue. A lot of churning process is happening within China, but what is missing is India in all of this, even though the PLA Rocket Forces mention about medium-to-long-range strikes. Medium is where India comes in in terms of the Asian portion, Japan, other countries as well, Australia.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Let me close where the series always returns – to the long view. So, I have one final question for you. You have been watching China very carefully for last three decades. You have seen the transition taking place from Deng Xiaoping, from the four-character dictum, in brief, described as hide and bite approach, to Xi Jinping's more assertive policy stance. The nature of China challenge for India has changed. I would love to go into that, but not in today's conversation. We'll have another conversation about that. Therefore, I wanted your comments on whether there is an India problem in dealing with the China challenge.

In terms of our preparedness, in terms of our response, whether it be in the area of the economy, where we have China shock 2.0 unfolding. Are we prepared to deal with that? Or in terms of defense, defense indigenization, our ability to do things on our own rather than depending on others. In terms of putting our act together in our neighborhood. Rather than remaining obsessed with China, upping our own game in the neighborhood. In all these dimensions, if you must could give three recommendations to India over next 10 years. All these deficiencies plus a basic problem we had in reading China right. Investing in China studies, having more people like you who can go to original Chinese language material and make sense of what's happening in that country. What will be briefly three recommendations you want to make to be executed over the next decade.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: I want to come back to asymmetry and because this is what is the overhanging factor. North Korea has a GDP of \$52 billion or so. They don't declare this. And United States has a \$33 trillion GDP. Yet Kim Jong-un forced Trump to go to Singapore and Hanoi. And a \$19 trillion GDP like China also forced Trump to announce a G2 and the strategic stability related matters. I think there is something at the political leadership level both in North Korea and in China on how to address this asymmetry. What we generally call in IR, international relations, the hard power and the hard stance that the leadership can take.

I'm not suggesting here "wolf warrior diplomacy". I'm not suggesting anything new, but against this background of asymmetry with China, there is something that we need to learn from China and North Korea on how the leadership can assert itself given the asymmetries. I mean, there is so much of asymmetry between China and the United States. Technology, military, economy, structural power as Susan Strange mentions, soft power and many other areas. Yet, the Chinese were able to force the Trump administration to climb down even if temporarily. That is something that our diplomacy, our leadership, needs to learn from this



aspect and try to experiment with that portion. In terms of the possible three, obviously, there is no other alternative other than building up our own comprehensive national power. We are currently at around sixth position in these global CNP rankings. So, we need to focus on the CNP, comprehensive national power. This includes economy, military, infrastructure, energy consumption, technological prowess, and so on. The PLI scheme, the semiconductor industry policy recently, would all add up to those aspects including Skill India, Digital India, and other things. There is no other shortcut other than the CNP increase, CNP focus. Which in itself acts as a deterrence. Once we have those things in place, the second, of course, is the analysis of China, as Dr. Jaishankar mentions, in the India Way, not in an emotional way, but to view India China relations in a realist perspective. I think that is a good suggestion made by the EAM in his book.

In the last 3 days of the conference on India–Centric foreign policy posture, I learned to look at the indigenous knowledge that we have. We may not have applied these more concertedly, but there is something that we can learn from the Kautilya's Arthashastra and other texts like Vidura Niti to find our own indigenous ways to address the China issue. I think we need to go back to our texts to read them more carefully because China is doing the same. Yan Xuetong began in Tsinghua University, simulation exercises, and he has thousands of students attending these courses. Secondly, he has been reviving the idea of the Middle Kingdom, and he is going back to the Warring States period, to Sun Tzu.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: And Yan Xuetong is leading IR scholar of China based in Tsinghua University.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: Yeah, so I think we need to be more concerted in that direction.

Prof. Ashok Kantha: Well, thank you, Srikanth. This is a conversation we can carry on for a long time, but I believe you have given us a lot of food for thought as to how to look at the China challenge and also how to prepare for it, including through building our own scholarship on that country. So, thank you very much. So, we'll conclude the seventh episode of the Long View here with one request – that the viewers and listeners should pass the word around for this platform, which is available because we have substantive conversations with experts like Professor Srikanth Kondapalli. Thank you very much.

Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli: Thank you very much.

Summary

In this episode of The Long View, Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli joins Chair Prof. Ashok Kantha to examine India– China ties post Galwan, which Prof. Kondapalli calls a ‘positive stalemate’. The conversation explores shifting US–China dynamics under Trump and its implications for India. It also highlights how India is quietly building “asymmetric deterrence” through missiles, strike corps, even as its nuclear posture shifts to avoid future strategic surprises. Prof. Kondapalli also recommends strategies such as growing India’s comprehensive national power, viewing China realistically, and reviving indigenous strategic scholarship.

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About the Guest

Srikanth Kondapalli is a Professor of Chinese Studies at the School of International Studies (SIS), Jawaharlal Nehru University, and former Dean of SIS. He has studied China closely for three decades and is noted for his ability to work directly with original Chinese-language sources, having trained in China for an extended period, including for a post-doctoral fellowship. He is considered one of India's leading Sinologists, with landmark publications including his first book PLA in Transition and a subsequent monograph on the PLA Navy. He is a widely followed commentator on China across various platforms and is also known as a highly regarded teacher of Chinese studies.

About the Host

Prof. Ashok Kantha is a former Indian diplomat and holds the Subhash Chandra Bose Chair at Chanakya University, where he created and hosts The Long View — a platform for evidence-based, India-centric discussions on global trends. He served as India's Ambassador to China, giving him direct diplomatic experience with the relationship he discusses. Throughout the conversation, he draws on this background to probe deeper into the strategic and geopolitical dimensions of India-China ties, referencing his own writings on the subject.

Transcription Note: Audio transcribed using Tactiq and edited by Gauri Chaturvedi, Subhas Chandra Bose Chair of International Relations, Chanakya University, Bengaluru.

About the Chair

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