

# THE DAULAT BEG OLDI CRISIS: MYTHS, MISTAKES AND LESSONS IN DEALING WITH CHINA

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## **INTRODUCTION**

China and India enjoy relative peace between them and have avoided another war after the one fought in 1962. However, at times, there have been clashes and crises along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that have put to test the conflict management skills of political and military leadership of both the countries. On each occasion, it shook India's public opinion. The summer crisis in 2013 was no different. As the Chinese PLA seized the opportunity and lay tents almost 19 km inside the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Daulti Beg Oldi (DBO) sector during April 15-May 5, 2013, the Indian public opinion was up in arms. The persistent refusal on the part of the Chinese troops to withdraw only raised the stakes in the crisis. Concurrently, the Government of India faced unprecedented strong domestic criticism over handling of relations with China in general and the border intrusion in particular. It is, however, apparent that India's domestic debate about handling relations with China suffers from many myths and mistakes as was evident during the recent crisis.

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This paper will, therefore, study the myths that were in propagation during the crisis. It will also study and analyse the mistakes that induced panic and urgency in the crisis. Finally, the paper will attempt to design the approach basket in handling such issues with China.

### **NATURE OF THE DBO CRISIS**

The DBO crisis is no match to other crises that India has faced in its relatively peaceful but chequered relations with China. The Nathula crisis (1967) was the most intense in which the two sides waged a mini war over six days resulting in more Chinese deaths than Indian loss of lives. Similarly, the Sumdorong Chu crisis (1987) was another moment, perhaps most intense since 1962, when the two countries were on the verge of a war. In both the cases, the Chinese intrusion was on a very large scale that was matched by an equal and opposite response from India. On the other hand, the 2013 crisis was quite localised, small in number and less intense. The Chinese came, pitched their tents and stayed put, much to the chagrin of Indian troops patrolling the area and in blatant violation of all the confidence-building measures (CBMs) meant to avoid such intrusions on LAC. The Chinese foreign ministry and media downplayed and denied the intrusion theory. When the intrusion was noticed, the Government of India was confident of handling it and so was the army. India's diplomatic corps did not press the panic button; rather started working on it. It took three weeks of diplomatic parleys to resolve the crisis. However, an impatient media sensationalised the developments through inflated reporting and some politicians and strategic experts joined them in belittling the Government by identifying the DBO crisis as symbolic of India's capitulation before the Chinese might.

It is doubtful and debatable if the crisis ended because China cared for domestic public opinion in India. Rather, the Chinese media chose to chastise its Indian counterpart for working on trivial issues. Similarly, the proposition that neighbourhood concerns prompted China's Ladakh withdrawal<sup>1</sup> is again not sustainable since China has an aggressive strategic

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1. Ananth Krishnan, "Neighbourhood Concerns may have Prompted China's Ladakh Withdrawal," *The Hindu* (New Delhi), July 20, 2013.

posture with its neighbours. The real motivations behind China's entry in DBO will remain a mystery with various theories doing the rounds, some of them discussed later in this paper. But China withdrew because of certain ground factors. First, the Chinese bluff was increasingly being exposed, even if the number of Chinese troops was small. China was simply not in a position to deny its camps! Second, apparently, the Chinese troops were there in DBO since Indian troops had camped in the unpopulated areas that the Chinese wanted to discourage. Third, there was some deft posturing by Indian armed forces like erecting tents opposite Chinese ones and an imbued sense of confidence in dealing with Chinese PLA. Fourth, the diplomatic engagement on behalf of India provided an escape route for both sides while addressing their mutual concerns.

### **DBO CRISIS: MYTHS**

Perhaps the most important myth that the Indian media, politicians and strategic experts portrayed was to describe the Chinese intrusion as a serious incident! For the record, the strength of Chinese troops that entered the Indian side was not more than a platoon. As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh himself explained, the intrusion was essentially a "localised" one and was confident that the issue would be resolved.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the alacrity of alarm could have been measured, more so, since the Chinese troops had made similar intrusions across the LAC in the past (albeit for shorter durations). The frequency of such intrusions, however, has increased in recent years.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the Chinese also allege forays by Indian Army into their side. Such intrusions take place because of certain factors. First, the LAC has not been actually demarcated on the ground leading to differential perceptions by both sides in many sectors. Both sides are presently engaged in demarcating the LAC on the ground but the process may take considerable time. As India's Defence Minister himself said on one occasion in Parliament:

There is no commonly delineated LAC between India and China. There are a few areas along the border where India and China have differing

2. "Chinese incursion a localised problem, can be resolved': PM," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), April 28, 2013.

3. "Chinese troops crossed LAC 150 times this year," [www.dnaindia.com](http://www.dnaindia.com), July 23, 2013.

perceptions of the LAC. Both sides undertake patrols up to their respective perceptions of the LAC. The Indian security forces continue to patrol up to all areas that fall within the Indian perception of the LAC.<sup>4</sup>

Second, China seems to be resorting to intrusions as a mechanism for testing the ground situation, while regretting the same at times as “accidental intrusions.”<sup>5</sup> China has invested heavily in the development of border areas in Tibet through road and rail networks that have enhanced its troop mobility and offensive capability. India, on the other hand, is way behind.<sup>6</sup> China could be using intrusions to prick India in vulnerable areas and test the response in force mobilisation and defensive capabilities. Third, China could be using these intrusions as a psychological game to have an edge in the ongoing border negotiations and enhance its bargaining power. While China has hardened its claim on India’s Arunachal Pradesh (particularly the Tawang tract), it is frequenting the unpopulated areas in Ladakh to reassert its sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> India’s lack of infrastructure in the region has only abetted Chinese adventures.

Another myth propagated that the Indian government or its diplomatic corps were not doing enough to manage the crisis with China. While some accused the Government of falling into a “new trap” laid by China,<sup>8</sup> others alleged the Government of having a flawed foreign policy (with particular reference to China).<sup>9</sup> The opposition used the parliamentary forum to allege that Government was doing nothing about the Chinese incursion.<sup>10</sup> The protagonists of this viewpoint forget that it was Late Rajiv Gandhi who took the initiative to

4. Government of India, Ministry of Defence, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 4388, answered on May 16, 2012.
5. “Depsang bulge incursion accidental, Chinese military think tank says,” *The Economic Times* (New Delhi), July 15, 2013.
6. Out of the 73 roads identified as strategic border roads, 15 have been completed, 39 are scheduled for completion by 2013 and the remaining 19 by 2016. Source: Government of India, Ministry of Defence, Rajya Sabha Starred Question No. 21, answered on November 23, 2011.
7. B. Raman, “Chinese intrusions,” *The Outlook*, April 23, 2013, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?285042>
8. “M. M. Joshi slams Centre over border row with China,” <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=799022> May 25, 2013.
9. “PM should clear confusion over UPA’s China policy: BJP,” <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=797928> May 12, 2013.
10. “UPA Government doing nothing about Chinese incursion, says Mulayam,” *The Hindu* (New Delhi), April 29, 2013.

reach out to the Chinese leadership in the wake of Sumdurong Chu incident in 1987 and set up the basis for institutionalised communication with the top Chinese leadership. Successive prime ministers, since then, have built upon this edifice and have engaged Chinese leadership in numerous manners. At the same time, India has always placed its best diplomats in housing the Indian Embassy in Beijing or the East Asia Division in New Delhi, who have engaged China in a series of formal, informal and backyard negotiations. This has led to relative peace on the LAC between the two countries. The Government as well as its diplomats need not always speak in public as was demanded by some opposition leaders in the recent crisis. Relations with China remain very sensitive and being vocal may not serve India's national interest in the long term. At the end of the day, the Chinese withdrawal of troops from Indian side of LAC was because of diplomatic parleys.<sup>11</sup>

The protests championed a third myth, i.e., the Indian Army was not being reasonably involved in matters related to the LAC or China. Several factors debunk this allegation. First, the Indian Army is tasked with the primary role of management of "peace and tranquillity" on the LAC through coordination with Chinese counterparts. The broad contours were provided by the landmark treaties on "Maintenance of peace along the LAC" (1993), "Confidence-building measures in military field along the LAC" (1996), and "Memorandum of Understanding for exchanges and cooperation in the field of defence" (2006). The Indian Army has done its job with perfection and the nation owes it for managing peace with China. Second, the Indian Army is also involved in the ongoing border talks at various levels. If and when the border negotiations succeed, the Indian Army should get due amount of credit for that. Third, the Indian Army has also been reaching out to their Chinese counterparts through various mechanisms of military diplomacy such as joint military exercises, defence dialogues (five rounds so far) and other CBMs. In the instant crisis, when the Chinese made the incursion and erected tents in DBO sector, Indian security forces put up tents opposite the Chinese ones in six hours, a speed which was unimaginable a decade back.<sup>12</sup>

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11. John Cherian, "Defused by diplomacy," [www.frontline.in/world-affairs/defused-by-diplomacy/article4705449.ece](http://www.frontline.in/world-affairs/defused-by-diplomacy/article4705449.ece). May 15, 2013.

12. "India responded in six hours flat," *The Hindu* (New Delhi), May 10, 2013.

While the stand-off with China was going on, the Army did not make any public comments since the task of informing people is usually done by the Government and foreign office. Eventually, no compromise was made to end the stand-off with China, as explained by Army's then General Officer Commanding-in-Chief K. T. Parnaik.<sup>13</sup>

The last myth proposed was that such incursions may ultimately lead to war.<sup>14</sup> It was alleged that China was actually preparing for war and these incursions were a precursor to a larger crisis. Apart from denials at top level,<sup>15</sup> a war is unlikely between the two countries for several reasons. First, there are a reasonable number of CBMs and crisis management tools institutionalised between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> That is supplemented by healthy political communication channel at the political leadership level; quite a good development since the frozen 1960s and 1970s. Second, China seems to be happy with the status quo since it occupies the Aksai-Chin tract being claimed by India. It may not resort to an outright war unless it would like to force a border settlement upon India. The increased frequency of intrusions could only be aimed at enhancing its bargaining position in the ongoing border talks. Third, both China and India are not simply rising powers; they are "preoccupied" powers. The leadership in each country is preoccupied with serious domestic challenges: ensuring domestic economic and social development, buttressing social stability, and fending off internal challenges to their respective political systems. These domestic challenges are long-term issues that will take decades to address.<sup>17</sup> The on and off debate on warmongering, therefore, is without any logic.

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13. "Didn't compromise to end stand off with China: Army," <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=800963> June 17, 2013.

14. "China can attack India, should not trust that betraying country: Mulayam," [www.firstpost.com](http://www.firstpost.com) May 6, 2013. Also see, Bharat Verma, a long time champion of this view, in "incursions in Ladakh a prelude to coming war with China," [www.idrw.org](http://www.idrw.org), July 22, 2013. Bharat Verma has also edited a book to substantiate his hypothesis based on the DBO crisis. See, Bharat Verma (ed.), *Chinese are Coming: India-China Stand Off* (New Delhi: Lancer, 2013).

15. "Chances of India, China war 'very, very little,'" says NSA Shivshankar Menon, *The Indian Express* (New Delhi) March 11, 2013.

16. See, Dipankar Banerjee and Jabin T. Jacob (eds.), *Military Confidence-Building and India-China Relations: Fighting Distrust* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2013).

17. George G. Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, *Chinese and Indian Strategic Behaviour: Growing Power and Alarm* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 44.

### **DBO CRISIS: MISTAKES IN HANDLING RELATIONS WITH CHINA**

The DBO crisis brought to the fore the mistakes being made about handling relations with China, both in the short term and the long term. In the present case, at least four developments went kaput and rather induced a sense of panic and urgency in the crisis. First, the crisis became a subject of sensational journalism wherein it was accorded wide coverage in the Indian print and electronic media. The vernacular media, hitherto little interested in foreign policy issues but having a strong outreach amongst the people, played the main spoilsport with ignorant reporting on a sensitive subject. In the run-up to expose the Chinese incursion, the harp was more on Chinese betrayal than on the unresolved border or for that matter the un-demarcated LAC. Second, the crisis also saw undue pressure being exerted on the Indian government and its foreign policy machinery. Little credit was accorded to them for deft handling of such incursions in the past. Mainstream opposition parties, along with some regional parties, openly criticised the Government for soft-peddalling the incursion issue. This despite the Prime Minister's categorical assurance that the Ladakh incursion was a localised problem and would be resolved soon! The third mistake was the advocacy of a military solution, which is a fallacious suggestion, both in the short term as well as in the long term. The gap between Chinese and Indian military is just too much even to consider this approach. India has just "reasonable defensive capability" to stand guard on its territory. It does not have and it will never have an "offensive capability" against China that has established lead in military power and is logistically well supported in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The fourth mistake was missing the holistic perspective on relations with China during the crisis period. As the crisis was unfolding, China and India had just concluded their dialogue on Afghanistan and the Indian External Affairs Minister had visited Beijing to facilitate preparations for the maiden visit of the new Chinese premier to India.

The DBO crisis also exposed some long-term mistakes in handling relations with China. First, as was evident in 1962,<sup>18</sup> misperceptions still

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18. See, Yacov Y. I. Vertzberger, *Misperceptions in Foreign Policymaking: the Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984).

cloud the entire gamut of Sino–Indian relations and India’s political parties and media have invested little in overcoming this gap. Most regional political parties and even a few mainstream political parties do not have lead inputs on key developments on Chinese military and foreign policy developments. The consensus politics on foreign policy issues having taken a back seat, these political parties often seek to cash on nationalistic feelings even if it means going in the wrong direction from what the policymakers intend! It rather sells to portray China as an aggressive country bent on imposing another war on India. Little consideration is given to the fact that the LAC between China and India has been relatively peaceful due to a cobweb of engagement politics between the two countries. Second, many Indians still suffer from an inferiority complex in dealing with China. The rise of China as a military, economic and political power has only aggravated this situation. They nurse a lurking fear that India might lose once again if 1962 is repeated. The absence of another full-fledged war between the two sides or, for that matter, lack of military simulation exercises between the two countries adds to this fear. However, every government in India, since 1962, has worked to reduce the power gap with China. Should there actually be a war, India can afford to hold ground and create a stalemate position for the other side. Third, those who blamed the Government, the diplomats (and even the military) for the Ladakh crisis are also responsible for failing to engender a public opinion about the core concerns in Sino–Indian relations. The Indian electorate is largely confused and ignorant on these core concerns and often fall victim to emotive nationalism and avoidable politicisation. At the same time, the Government is deprived of vital inputs required for taking bold decisions in relations with China. The result is a stasis in key areas like border talks that have been in vogue since the early 1980s in different forms.

### **DBO CRISIS: KEY DERIVATIVES**

The DBO crisis and repeated intrusions before and after the crisis by China are indicators of some core issues that have been hurdles in handling DBO type crises. First, there is an unresolved border dispute on which the two



sides have been engaged in probably the longest negotiation in post-World War II history. The border dispute forms the centrepiece of Sino-Indian relations and the entire gamut of a bilateral relationship in future would be determined by the ability of the two countries to resolve the issue. While there has been no visible progress on a possible contour of an agreement, the sixteen rounds of Special Representatives (SRs) talks have been delineating the guiding factors, albeit in an incremental manner. The intrusions do not reflect the pangs of frustration, but a calculated move by a stronger China to consolidate its position in disputed areas and bargain for them on the negotiating table. Perhaps for this reason, the intrusions are largely in two sectors: the Tawang tract in the eastern sector and the Ladakh tract in the western sector. Hence, the intrusions are going to continue in future till the border dispute is resolved.

Second, the Chinese media may have downplayed the “intrusion” issue as part of their oft-stated line that India does not figure in their threat calculations, but the DBO intrusion was also indicative of new assertions in Chinese foreign and military policy that is already a hotly discussed theme in international relations.<sup>19</sup> Powered by a strong economy and military modernisation programme thriving on a huge defence budget, Chinese assertion is visible all along its periphery: from Japan to South China Sea to India. In recent times, China has been picking up fights with many countries on its periphery over disputed territories. The intensity and frequency have an established pattern, despite a cobweb of dialogue platforms and CBMs. While this may not be akin to a Sino-centric regional order, India along with other countries who are at the receiving end, are grappling with brazen show of Chinese realpolitik. India will have to take a call, sooner than later, about having a grand strategy on handling relations with China on its own since it does not choose bandwagoning or balance of power tactics as standard foreign policy options.

Third, both the countries are undergoing a power transition process. There is a dangerous combination here: China and India are great power

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19. Alastair Iain Johnston, “How New and Assertive is China’s New Assertiveness?” *International Security*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 7-48.

candidates and neighbours too! The experiences of continental Europe during much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries point to perpetual acrimonious and conflictual relations where rising powers like Germany, Austria, France and the UK were often at war with each other. While wars have become an exception in the new international order and China and India have managed to grow in “relative peace,” this does not guarantee a peaceful bilateral future. China will have little comfort in having new great powers like Japan and India counterbalancing its influence either in isolation or in tandem with other regional powers. Further, even if the border issue is resolved, both countries would like to carve out “spheres of influence” despite the proclaimed charm offensive that there is enough geopolitical space for both to grow. Therefore, China would still prick India, both on continental platforms (like through the Sino–Pak axis) and, may be, on oceanic platforms too. This hypothesis has already been substantiated and elaborated in recent books.<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, the DBO crisis was reflective of a larger crisis in Indian foreign policy: lack of consensus. On sensitive issues like China, consensus should be the hallmark. Instead, the Indian media hijacked the platform during the crisis and what we had, therefore, was a media-driven foreign policy. The Indian media is broadly ignorant on China; does not have adequate sensitivities on the issue; and is not interested in beyond “symbolic agendas” on China.<sup>21</sup> The proliferation of media (both print and visual) in the last two decades has further diluted the consensus politics of foreign policy and replaced it with a game of one-upmanship and competitive reporting. Very few of them have primary reporting mechanism on China and, therefore, resort to perception based journalism. Similarly, the political class, like in the present case, is interested in cashing in on the crisis for electoral dividends rather than forging a consensus with the Government. Earlier, it was only a section of the Indian Left that was critical of the Government

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20. See. Vijay Sakhuja, *Asian Maritime Power in the 21st Century: Strategic Transactions—China, India and Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011); C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino–Indian Rivalry in the Indo–Pacific* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

21. Shruti Pandalai, “Who sets the agenda? Does ‘prime time’ really pace policy? The Indian experience,” *IDSIA Monograph Series*, no. 13 (January 2013), pp. 1-86.

on China policy; today, the basket has expanded to cover most opposition parties, including some mainstream parties which played a pivotal role in building ties with China when they were in power. The irony is that most political parties do not have established mechanisms to develop a primary perspective on foreign policy and countries like China. It is further not known if they demand regular feedback on foreign policy matters from the Government. The result is, therefore, casual statements on foreign policy that defies Government line.

### **DBO CRISIS: MANAGERIAL LESSONS IN HANDLING RELATIONS WITH CHINA**

The DBO crisis and its aftermath bring home many lessons for better management of such crises in future. First, while the Indian opposition and media had taken up the Chinese intrusion in DBO, this was not a stand-alone intrusion. As stated earlier in this paper, Chinese intrusions across LAC have been quite regular in the past and there has been an established pattern of such intrusions over the years. This pattern is likely to continue in future. Emotional nationalism, therefore, is not the solution to such issues since the Chinese would not take cognizance of that. It would be more appropriate if the lead role of the Government and its foreign policy machinery in agenda setting on foreign policy issues is recognised and supported. On the ground, however, New Delhi needs to move towards responsible management of the LAC. As Prof. C. Raja Mohan elaborates, “the DBO intrusion underlined the importance of moving beyond the general statements on peace and tranquillity to specific procedures and practices to prevent military confrontation and escalation.”<sup>22</sup>

Second, as evident from the DBO crisis that was ultimately brought to an end through diplomatic efforts, it is diplomacy that would be instrumental in averting or handling such crisis situations in future. Diplomatic efforts, therefore, need to be supported across the political spectrum without subjecting it to political prejudices. If China and India enjoy a “relative peace,” a large amount of credit goes to the diplomatic machinery that has

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22. C. Raja Mohan, “Unquiet on the Front,” *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), August 12, 2013.

engaged the Chinese side on a series of issues through institutionalised dialogues and interactive mechanisms. Soaring bilateral trade and China's recognition of Sikkim as part of India are some representative samples of diplomatic success. However, it is also true that on the core issues with China including the border talks at SR level, the progress has been quite slow, primarily because the issues are simply "too sensitive." Therefore, if the diplomatic engagement on China has to succeed and the SR level talks on border issue have to reach towards any logical outcome, it must have political support and guidance, again across the spectrum, to enable some bold decisions.

Third, a strong defence preparation is vital in preventing such crises bludgeoning into a full-fledged war. While India's defence preparedness against China is still questionable, the relative gains since 1962 have deterred China against any adventurous venture across the LAC. A stronger defence preparation by India will only perpetuate the relative peace between the two countries. As a veteran diplomat puts it, "India should have enough capabilities deployed to convince the other side (read, China) that aggressive norms would invite counter norms. This is the reason why it is so important for (India) to speed up the upgradation of border infrastructure."<sup>23</sup> Over the years, India's quantum jump in missile defence through development of Agni series has given it a vital deterrence system against China. India has also been planning to upgrade the development of border infrastructure, though it will take ages to match the Chinese progress across the LAC. The recent decision by the Indian Government to raise a 50,000 strong mountain strike corps is another welcome step that would further add to the defence capabilities of India against any military adventurism by China.

Fourth, since deception is an integral part of Chinese strategic culture, its awareness should certainly be part of India's confronting the China challenge in future.<sup>24</sup> A focused study of Chinese military modernisation, grand strategy and foreign policy behaviour can help India in adequate

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23. Shyam Saran, "China in the Twenty-first Century: What India Needs to Know about China's World View?" *Second Annual K. Subrahmanyam Memorial Lecture* (New Delhi: IIC), August 29, 2013.

24. *Ibid.*

preparation and minimise the risks of attacks by China. India, regretfully, still does not have a primary mechanism to monitor China's military and strategic developments and imports its key conclusions from western sources. Needless to say, they may not cater to India's national interests. To give one example, the annual report on Chinese military developments by the US Department of Defence focuses heavily on Chinese military build-up against Taiwan and Japan and the strategic trends developing between them. Little can be found in this report (or, for that matter, other reports emerging from western sources) about China's deceptive presence in Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal (where the Chinese are present in Terai area and snooping on India). To carry the argument further, while India is relatively prepared to face a Chinese attack in Eastern or Western sector, what if the attack were to come through the Terai in Nepal and aims at capturing Gangetic plains? There is an urgent need to consider such issues through an Indian perspective.

Fifth, India does need a crisis avoidance or management system, the more so with China, with which it had a war in 1962 due to a series of decision-making lapses at the political and military levels. An excellent study of such lapses in 1962 is already available.<sup>25</sup> There are reasonable numbers of CBMs on the LAC and some more are in offing<sup>26</sup> but their effect has been rather shallow as demonstrated from the series of intrusions. While the Indian Army may have macro-level plans to face a two-front war or a stand-alone war with China, no public document is available to establish its contingent plan to handle a DBO-type situation or a Kargil-type situation on LAC. India can take a cue from the US that has long made use of relatively detailed operational scenarios (i.e., scenarios of particular imagined wars) to help size and shape its defence forces<sup>27</sup> or from China where doctrines on military operations other than war (MOOTW) or local

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25. See, Steven A. Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

26. For example, China has submitted a draft CBM on Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) that is under active consideration by India.

27. Paul K. Davis, "Defense planning and risk management in the presence of deep uncertainty," in Paul Bracken, Ian Bremmer and David Gordon (eds.), *Managing Strategic Surprises: Lessons from Risk Management and Risk Assessment* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 184.

wars under conditions of informationisation elaborated in white papers on defence can be of some use.

Sixth, consolidation and expansion of network of relations is another area that deserves serious consideration. While China and India have a cobweb of state-to-state relations in many sectors, some of them are in crisis stage after a good start (like defence exchange programmes) while others are threatening India's long-term national interests (like increasing trade deficit in the bilateral trade). Worse, the societal aspect is grossly underdeveloped. There are very few instrumentalities and avenues for the two civilisations to interact with each other and develop the right perspective. Communication network is poor, visa regime is complicated and overall movement of people is small. Academic, sports and tourist exchanges are limited. Perhaps that explains why misperceptions still colour Sino-Indian relations. India must, therefore, make its own game plan for reaching out to the influential segments of Chinese society that could moderate perceptions about India in China and arrange for reciprocal treatment to China as well.

## CONCLUSION

The DBO crisis was not a stand-alone crisis; it was just one of the many intrusions. These intrusions will be iterated in future as well, with perhaps increased frequency. Making issue of such intrusions through emotional and reactive nationalism may not serve India's foreign policy interests. The media and political leaders erred in judging the intrusion. They also erred in criticising the Government and its foreign policy machinery. In doing so, they forgot what Anna Orton says in a recent book, "boundaries are manifestations of national identity. They can be trip-wires of war. This is all the more important if the involved parties are nuclear powered."<sup>28</sup> As things turned out, the DBO intrusion was sorted out by the Indian diplomatic corps through institutionalised dialogue mechanism with China. This only substantiated what the Government had been emphasising from the early days of the crisis that the issue would be resolved. India, therefore, needs

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28. Anna Orton, *India's Borderland Disputes: China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal* (New Delhi: Epitome Books, 2010), p. 3.

to reconstruct the consensus model in handling issues relating to foreign policy.

Apart from forging consensus on key foreign policy issues, the media and political leadership must also facilitate an informed public opinion that would provide vital inputs to the Government in decision-making. This is more so on issues related to China where misperceptions still cloud the bilateral relations and the challenge from China is not understood in the proper perspective. As China rises on all indices of power matrix, public opinion is vital for right political decisions on China. Also, India is right now in the midst of intensive border negotiations with China at the special representatives' (SRs) level. A public discourse on possible contours of agreement with China (with possible level of compromises) would be of great help to the Government. As and when any future Government negotiates any border agreement with China, it must have the media and the political segment leadership on its side.

Finally, there is only one long-term solution to the DBO crisis: more investments in border talks. While the present crisis may not induce a sense of urgency in South Block, there is a necessity to engage the new Chinese leadership that may not be averse to an early settlement of the "protracted talks." New Delhi must take away the only excuse for China to be overtly critical of India and its great power ambitions. While the SR-level talks have helped in working out the guiding parameters towards a border negotiation, there is a "stasis" in the talks since the focus is more on "supplements" and "camaraderie" than the core issue of early settlement. The political leadership must step in to guide the future course of action and lead them in taking some bold decisions. It was Rajiv Gandhi who brought a new dynamism into the paralysed state of Sino-Indian relations in the late 1980s; it is time for the present leadership to get involved in the border talks and delineate a just and honourable border for India.