

Opinion

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THE WORLD IS nowhere close to embracing Pope John's impassioned declaration "No more war, never again war".

Since the end of World War II, the world has witnessed hot wars, cold wars, civil wars, secessionist wars, jihadi wars, invasion, annexation and many other kinds of violent conflict. Not a day has passed without loss of lives in armed conflicts.

India and China fought a war in 1962. After the war ended, there was a fragile peace. In 1988 Rajiv Gandhi was invited to China. It was a historic visit. Remember the famous I-o-n-g handshake with Deng Xiaoping! The two countries agreed to talk to each other and resolve all differences about the border/boundary through negotiations. Shortly afterwards, special representatives were appointed.

India, China gained time

From time to time, there were incidents. Talks followed. Issues were resolved. More recently, armed conflict was avoided in Depsang (2013) and Demchok and Chumar (2014). 'Understandings' were arrived at. In 2012, an agreement was reached that the tri-junction issue between India and China will be resolved in consultation with the third party, Bhutan, in whose territory the tri-junction was located (and because of the special relationship of India with Bhutan).

Both countries, by avoiding armed conflict, gained valuable time to focus on economic development. China is well on its way to be described as a middle-income country; it has lifted all but 5% of its vast population of 1,380 million from poverty. It has become the world's factory and its exports have helped it build a foreign exchange reserve of over \$3,000 billion. It is a nuclear power, it has the largest active standing army in the world, it has the capacity to venture deep into the South China Seas and the Indian Ocean, and it is believed to have the capacity to strike at distant targets.

India has also made considerable progress notwithstanding loud noises that nothing happened in the years up to 2014 (including, presumably, the Vajpayee years 1998-2004), but India is a few steps behind China. Since 1991, India has lifted over 250 million people out of poverty. Its foreign exchange reserves stand at \$380 billion. It is a nuclear power, it has the second largest active standing Army in the world, and it has the capacity to defend itself against any aggression by a foreign power.

For these very reasons, India and China should guard against being drawn into a shooting war. Every time — and I mean, every time — diplomacy must succeed and the sabres must remain sheathed. Word-fare (if I may coin a word) should not become warfare.

Is it different now?

The development near the tri-junction of India-Bhutan-China in the Dolam plateau (that lies in the Doklam region) on June 16, 2017, should remain an 'incident' that can be resolved through talks. But, I am afraid, indications are to the contrary. The 'incident' has acquired sinister proportions. No one can deny that there is a marked difference between the 2017 incident and the incidents of 2013 and 2014.

Just look at the public statements of India and China. On the Indian side, statements have been made by the army chief

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Ping pong of words, or worse?



(From left) Brazilian institutional security minister Sergio Etchegoyen, Indian national security adviser Ajit Doval, South African state security minister David Mahlobo and Russian security council secretary Nikolai Patrushev at their meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) in Beijing, China, earlier this week

(June 8, 2017), ministry of external affairs (June 30), finance minister (June 30), foreign secretary (July 11), MoS, PMO (July 12), and external affairs minister (July 20). The responders on the side of China have been only 'spokespersons' of the Foreign Ministry or the Army — until Mr Wang Yi, the foreign minister, spoke on July 25, 2017, at Bangkok. Besides, the true intent of China was reflected in stinging write-ups that appeared in *Global Times* and *Xinhua*. The language of the Chinese side's responses was, to put it mildly, un дипломatic.

What has changed? If there is a change in China's attitude to India, what are the circumstances that led to the change? I believe the Government of India when it articulated its position in the following words: "India is deeply concerned at the recent Chinese actions and has conveyed to the Chinese government that such construction would represent a significant

change of status quo with serious security implications for India." However, that is not enough. The government owes a duty to the people of India to explain what has changed and why it has changed. Such a statement can come only from the Prime Minister.

Will it stop with words?

The rhetoric on the Chinese side is getting shriller by the day. Every overture by India has been spurned. The NSA's visit to China was first belittled, then a perfunctory reference was made to talks among NSAs during which China set forth its position on "bilateral issues and major problems". Contrary to the usual rules of diplomacy, China seems to have left no negotiating room for itself. It has laid down a non-negotiable avenue and, at the same time, closed every avenue for negotiation. *Xinhua* wrote on July 15, 2017, "China has made it clear that there is no room for ne-

gotiations on this incident and India must withdraw its border-crossing troops from Doklam."

Discerning observers in India are naturally concerned but there is no such concern expressed by any one in China. The United States was the first country to openly advise restraint and urge talks. Many other countries which had been briefed by both India and China have strangely remained silent.

The gathering clouds are ominous. I am clear in my mind that under no circumstances should there be a shooting war between India and China. I am sure that is also the view of the Government of India, but I doubt if it is the view of the Government of China. Only time will tell what and when misjudgments were made.

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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Notable omission

In his farewell address to Parliament, President Pranab Mukherjee nostalgically recalled his 37 years as a member. He mentioned the names of many former colleagues, some not so well known, and praised them for their contributions. He waxed eloquent on Indira Gandhi, praised the wisdom of PV Narasimha Rao, the oratory of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the calming presence of Dr Manmohan Singh, the mature advice of L.K. Advani and Sonia Gandhi's passionate support for social issues. But, according to a minister, who was given an advance copy of the speech, Sonia's name was missing from the original text. It seems to have been added as an afterthought, when the President saw the Congress president sitting in Central Hall. A noteworthy omission from the speech was late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. Rajiv had sidelined Mukherjee, the senior-most minister in his mother's Cabinet, suspecting that he had prime ministerial ambitions. As a result, Mukherjee spent some years in political wilderness.

Falling in line

Two BJP women leaders who were in the bad books of party president Amit Shah are back in favour. When Shah first took over as chief, Vasundhara Raje and Smriti Irani did not feel it necessary to pay obeisance. They soon learnt the hard way that it does not pay to cross his path. Irani was riding high as HRD minister and believed she could do as she pleased. On a trip to Goa, she created headlines alleging that there were hidden cameras in the changing room of a well-known chain of stores. The news overshadowed coverage of a meeting of the BJP National Executive, of which Irani had not been made a member by Shah. Irani woke up to reality when she was abruptly transferred from the HRD Ministry to the relatively low-key Textile Ministry. She got back into Shah's good books by working hard for the party — touring Uttar Pradesh frequently, particularly Amethi. Recently, she was rewarded with the high-profile I&B Ministry. In case of Raje, the Centre did not come to her rescue when the Lalit Modi issue blew up yet again. Many believed that Raje would not get the party's nomination for the 2018 Assembly elections. So when the party president visited Rajasthan last week, Raje pulled out all the stops, according to Shah a maharaja's welcome. Uncharacteristically, she and her entire cabinet were at the airport when he landed and she accompanied him wherever he went. The former royal even squatted on the floor and ate a meal with him at a

Dalit worker's residence.

Too personal

Indian ministers and officials were somewhat taken aback by the backgrounder on Australian foreign minister Julie Bishop, who was in India recently. The CV, handed out by the ministry of external affairs, included Bishop's status on the personal front. It noted that she was once married, had three live-in partners at different times, and that her current status was unknown.

Sporting attitude

TV correspondents who visited the homes of Indian women cricket players reported a gloomy atmosphere, with most of the parents in tears over the team's loss to the English. The exception was the home of allrounder Harmanpreet Kaur, in Moga, Punjab. Her father Harmander Singh Bhullar, a former basketball and volleyball player, beamed with joy. He offered sweets to all, saying, "Victories and defeats are part of sports." Since the team's spectacular show in the World Cup, politicians too have taken notice of the players. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi were quick to tweet their best wishes to the team, Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh appointed Kaur to the Punjab Police. Her application had been ignored in the past.

Governing biases

Former president Pranab Mukherjee was concerned that a number of governors did not get on with chief ministers of their respective states. He felt that tension between constitutional authorities was not healthy. West Bengal Governor Keshari Nath Tripathi recently wrote a letter complaining against chief minister Mamata Banerjee. In Puducherry, chief minister V. Narayanaswamy's stand-offs with Lt governor Kiran Bedi are frequently in the news. In Tripura, governor Tathagata Roy often publicly expresses his partisan views. Mukherjee, however, appreciated that his successor, Ram Nath Kovind, had set a good example with his cordial relations with Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar, when he was governor of the state. Another such amicable relationship is between Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh and governor VP Singh Badnore. Though they both have different political allegiances, they share a common bond — both belong to royal houses.

Champion golfer of the year

Jordan Spieth's scintillating win at The Open cements the American's place in the legion of the game's greatest players. And he's just getting started

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah



THE GREATEST MOMENTS in golf have come, as they have in every sport, when the human story has trumped everything else. When the sport and its technicalities; the player's skill and imagination; have been superseded by the spectacle of an individual's courage, self-belief and, occasionally, madness. Occasions like these, rare as they are, transcend the sport, and become lore—remembered as stories of human endeavour and triumph against all odds. Jack Nicklaus' come-from-behind win at the 1986 Masters at the ripe age of 46—11 years after his last win on the PGA Tour—will probably always rank as the most inspired achievement in the annals of astonishing golfing achievements. More recently, Tiger Woods' 18-hole playoff win at the 2002 US Open on an injured knee and in brutal conditions is the last such instance of a career-defining performance.

The context is necessary to convey the magnitude of what young Jordan Spieth, all of 24-years-old, achieved at Royal Birkdale at The Open this month. Let you think I'm gushing and guilty of hyperbole, then you

have company in Spieth: "It feels good when you ask me a question like this," he said at the post-championship press conference responding to a scribe's question on the subject. "But I certainly don't think I can be compared to them yet (Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus)—those guys transcended the sport, I've got a long way to go before warranting such comparisons," he added.

By now it's nigh impossible that you've not read about, if not seen, the two-hour-long back-nine on the final day of The Open earlier this month. If by some freak chance you've missed all news about the most momentous climax in a major tournament since 2002, then here's the gist. Jordan Spieth began the final day of The Open in the lead with a three-shot cushion over playing partner Matt Kuchar, and proceeded to drop all three strokes by the turn. In all sort of trouble, and barely able to make a fairway off the tee, it looked like a re-run of the young Texan's horror back-nine at the 2016 Augusta Masters where he squandered a five-shot lead with nine holes to go on the final day. On the 13th hole, Spieth hit, possibly the worst drive of his professional career: a wild push that flared almost 100 yards to the right of the fairway. He spent 20 minutes figuring out where to drop the ball (after a penalty drop for an unplayable lie) and then hit a fantastic recovery shot from the driving range to just short of the greenside bunker.



Jordan Spieth after winning The Open Championship

REUTERS

Spieth got up and down for a miraculous bogey but relinquished the lead to Kuchar.

But with that bogey the momentum shifted firmly to Spieth. He nearly edged the par 3 14th, settling for birdie, and then in a moment of inspired greatness sank a 50-footer for eagle on the 15th hole and fol-

lowed that up with another bomb for a birdie on the 16th hole. Incredibly another birdie followed on the 17th hole before he closed out with a par on the last. In that last-gasp blitz Spieth went five-under on the last five holes. Understandably, the usually unflappable Kuchar, seemed almost on the verge of

tears by the sudden turn of events. It was an unprecedented display, as a hapless Kuchar mumbled later, "he just really turned it up..."

There's a delicious appropriateness of a classic performance—marked not by the modern 'power' game but by pure grit—taking place on a traditional century-old links-style course at the oldest golf tournament in existence. The Open is the only tournament that persists in crowning a 'champion golfer' and a 'runner-up' with the latter winning a silver salver while the former gets to host the 'claret jug'.

The only superlative element in Jordan Spieth's game, acknowledged by players and fans alike, is his skill with the putter. And typical of today's pre-occupation with the power game, no one titters in a breathless way about Spieth's skill with the flat stick like they do about Rory McIlroy's driving, or Henrik Stenson's ball-striking. In fact, Spieth has been at the receiving end, about how his ability to win tournaments relies overly on his putting. By implication it's been insinuated that there's something unfair about someone who has a funky swing, and can't hit the ball as purely as some of his peers, stealing victory because he can, on his day, put it in from anywhere. If you separate the prejudice, there's a flip side to that argument: how can someone—who on his best day, is still not as good, in any aspect of the game, as Tiger Woods was

at his best—win three Major Championships? Therein lies the genius of Jordan Spieth: the ability to dig deep and produce what is required when the situation calls for it what makes champions who they are.

With all due respect to Kuchar, he was not the primary adversary Spieth surmounted on the final day: the demons that got the better of Spieth at the 2016 Augusta Masters. They appeared to be in dominance when Spieth bogeyed the 13th hole. Even Kuchar allowed himself a smile after he hit a lovely approach on the hole while Spieth took a penalty drop and hit a blind third shot from what appeared to be another postal code. The rest, as we know, now, is history. It would be silly of me even to try and articulate those proceedings. You'll find that on YouTube—go watch if you haven't. Spieth wields the putter like a magic wand; but it's his mettle in the face of adversity that's truly superhuman.

If he wins the PGA Championship next month at Quail Hollow (or over the next three decades) Spieth will have the career grand slam, something achieved only by Gene Sarazen, Hogan, Gary Player, Nicklaus and Woods. All guys who've transcended the sport', Spieth certainly managed to do that one wet afternoon in July.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game