

China's proposition of BRICS 5G Innovation Base- A tricky conundrum for India

China's global tech giant Huawei is on a bumpy ride. It is facing a global backlash amidst the global health crisis unleashed out of China. China's mishandling of the pandemic shook the entire world and brought it to a near standstill. As if it was not enough, China continued to rattle with its neighbours upon territorial scuffles. It is not only being aggressive towards India on the LAC, instead, it is on a territory claiming spree, whether it is Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Tajikistan, SCS, Japan, Taiwan and it didn't even spare Russia for that matter. This pandemic has turned the tables; the momentum is now against China. The world has begun to react. Leaders across the globe have shown doors to the world's largest telecommunication company, Huawei which is suspected of playing shady business practices. Country after country, America, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan has dumped Huawei into a heap of trouble. The forbearer of this campaign was the United States, who put this company under fire, almost two years ago, on the accounts of Huawei being operating in close proximity with the People's Liberation Army. The US has warned to withdraw investment in countries with Huawei's presence. The world needs an alternative to Huawei.



India is expected to follow the suit. After the border clashes, it became clear that India has underestimated China's threat to a large extent. China is a potential threat to India. We have virtually shut our doors for Huawei. But not taken any official, firm and fearless position as of yet. In 2017, China announced its ambition to become the world leader in artificial intelligence by 2030 with its artificial development plan. Technology is one of

China's most potent weapon. Amid the failure of china's efforts to push Huawei internationally concerning the development of 5g infrastructure, China wants to strengthen its technological footholds through the BRICS nations because it fears losing India, the world's second-biggest mobile market with more than 850 million users. Huawei has a big presence in India, it's been here for 20 years making up 30% of Bharti Airtel Network and 40% of Vodafone ideas network. So, to pressurize India, China recently proposed this BRICS 5G innovation base. China urged BRICS countries to strengthen cooperation on digital confirmation in 5G, Artificial Intelligence, and the digital economy. China's Minister of Industry and IT Xiao Yaqing in a virtual BRICS conference, 'urged fellow nations including India to boost cooperation in areas including 5G and AI to promote the digital transformation of enterprises and their innovative capabilities and to promote sustainable economic and social development.'

Calling it the BRICS innovation, it wants the five nations to have practical cooperation in the areas of 5G and AI. This poses a question towards India which has excluded China's involvement in its 5G network. A high-level committee on 5G is opposed to including Chinses vendors including Huawei and 5G trails. Indian intelligence also had reservations on the possible direct or indirect links of several Chinese companies including Huawei, with the Chinese military. India has banned 59 Chinese apps citing national security concerns and it is also tightening Chinese investments following the border skirmish at LAC. Russia said that it is working with a Chinese telecommunications firm in Huawei. Huawei is already giving services to 3 telecom operators who are rolling out 5G networks in South Africa. In Brazil, the company is working on a trial basis and may even permit for 5G but yet to take a final call. More than a third of Brazil's network operators use Huawei equipment.

The move is posing a tricky conundrum before India, as other BRICS nations are willing to allow china's participation in their 5G networks. But the ongoing tensions in Indo-China relations threaten to paralyze India's position at BRICS. India has made clear that return to normalcy in relations will not be possible amidst border skirmishes at LAC by china and other security threats. Contemporary geopolitical order represents a tug of war and India hangs in the middle of it. There is a dilemma before India to find out a midway to balance its interests between the US and the Russia China axis. BRICS India's policy has not been very clear regarding its foreign policy on China. On the one hand, it faces the risk of escalation near LAC and at the same time, it is a party to many trades and diplomatic engagements with China like RCEP, RIC grouping, BRICS and SCO. The ongoing trade war between China and the USA has also created a dilemma for India. It also cannot afford to cut off ties with the US.

India has recently joined GPAI (Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence), a multi-stakeholder initiative to support responsible and human-oriented development and usage of AI.



Amongst these global approaches towards China, one is building a great wall of democracy, to confront, contain, and restrain China from its expansionist misadventures. After banning Huawei, UK has recently proposed an anti-china, D 10 5G alliance to hunt alternatives to cut Huawei's monopoly in the international telecom sector. It proposed a 5G club of 10 Democracies including G7 countries along with Australia, South Korea, and India to create alternative suppliers of 5G Equipment and technologies to reduce reliance over china. As of now, Nokia and Ericsson are the only potential companies providing 5G infrastructure but none was capable of providing as quickly and cheaply as Huawei. But for democracies to get together on technology, the west has to be more sharing and giving to the developing world. The is a period of decoupling order of international technology.

Lately, India has started taking steps in this direction like the National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence, it is yet to acknowledge the superiority in critical technologies like AI, cyber, and space technologies. Through 'Make in India' and *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan*, India can try to replace Chinese technological invasion with the domestic tech blocks similar to the endeavours carried out in the security and defence sector. In April this year, a new incentive was put in place called the 'Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI) for large

scale electronic manufacturing in India. India needs to incentivize its telecom operators dependent on Huawei to maintain stable and consumer-friendly markets. It will also have to work to avoid monopoly in its domestic markets. This technology sits at the centre of the fourth industrial revolution. India should use techno nationalism. The spirit of cooperation is path-breaking and pioneering the Indian state makes concerning questions of data sovereignty and the transparency around it is the example of how it will deal with threats, not just in its neighbourhood but to its critical allies and partners in the world.

Even if China is not, democracies are free nations, economic actors are free to do what they want under the confines of a rule of law jurisdiction. This journey started as economic but in no time, it embraced national security. It, therefore, becomes crucial to investigate, should India allow its critical infrastructure to be managed by an openly hostile nation like china? The govt in India is yet to decide Huawei's fate in the country but all and all, India needs to ban this security nightmare. Huawei should be the next. Chinese tech is not in India's national interest.

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