

China Talk Series

Topic: How China Fights? - Military Strategies Through History

Speaker: Lt Gen (Dr) Prakash Menon

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Key Takeaways

Centre for East Asian Studies (CEAS) in collaboration with China Studies, Science, Technology and International programmes, NIAS organized a talk by Lt Gen (DR) Prakash Menon PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd.). The topic of the China Talk Series was - “How China fights? Military strategy throughout history.”

Dr Menon briefly discussed aspects of Chinese military strategy in the different regions, such as China's relationship with its immediate neighbors, its role as a superpower, China's relations with India, and its domestic policy.

While mentioning the United Nations and rising Chinese power, he emphasized the crucial role of American companies flourishing in China. He also explicitly talked about Beijing's growing economy and the role of foreign investment in the Chinese economy.

Regarding China's military strategy, Dr Menon discussed the growing military modernization in China and the maritime strategy to increase its sphere of influence. He emphasized how increasing military activity and geographical expansion have created more enemies than friends for China. While arriving at the topic of the one-child policy, Dr Menon mentioned how China is in a hurry due to its aging population. He also talked about the crucial aspect of the eastern seaboard chain while saying, "Who controls the eastern seaboard chain can only stop China." He mentioned how China is grabbing the South and the East China Sea areas. Dr Menon additionally mentioned Spratly Island, Senkaku Island, and China's dispute with Japan and Vietnam. He raised interesting questions about the ongoing debate in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. He raised a question: If everybody depends on maritime, why does China restrict and stop other countries?

He talked about China and its relationship with India apart from Asia's south-eastern and eastern regions. Dr Menon highlighted the recent Galwan clash in Ladakh. He pointed out various aspects of the event and raised a strategic question: why is China doing what it is doing in the northern boundary?

Dr Menon explained the whole event chronologically, starting with the historical facts, good relations between Delhi and Beijing, and Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China to build good relations. Moreover, he gave the whole picture of the US-India-China relations. China, which wants to become a superpower, has a rivalry with the US-India growing ties as New Delhi shares a direct border with China. India also maintains good relations with the US.

Thus, Quad and relations with the US have become the bone of contention, resulting in conflict with India. Dr Menon also discussed military development and disputes between China and India. He also cited examples such as 2010 in Depsang, 2013 in Chumar, and 2020 in Ladakh. More importantly, he emphasized how maritime development for a country is very costly and challenging to maintain.

Dr Menon further discussed salami-slicing and highlighted China's strategy to fight psychologically. Coming to India's stand, he said India does not pick sides, and India will not start the fight first as her priority is to tackle poverty and invest in education. Again, while mentioning the China-India relations, he said using force is crucial. The enemy must be psychologically defeated; China is adopting the same strategy, such as economic development in various parts of the world, BRI project, etc., targeting a more significant population using cognitive/intelligent warfare.

In the end, Dr Menon emphasized how Chinese soldiers perform their duty for only 2-3 years, and leadership is highly centralized, which leads to China not being capable enough to fight long wars. He concluded that China wanted to win a war without even fighting it. This was followed by a Q&A session where the students engaged Dr Menon with inquisitive questions on topics ranging from India's stand on maritime security to China's role in the Indo-Pacific to the response of India to tackle the various threats.