



Five Fingers Policy of China: Its Relevance in 21st century

¹*SUTAPA DAS*, ²*PANKAJ DAS*

¹Independent Scholar

Village and Post – Bara Atia Bari

Police Station– Dinhata, Pin- 736135

District – Cooch Behar, State – West Bengal

Country – India

Phone No. – 7477329721

Email ID – mailsutapadas85@gmail.com

²Independent Scholar

Village and Post Khapaidanga ,

P.S – Pundibari , Pin - 736133

District – Cooch Behar , State- West Bengal

Country- India

Phone No- 9732973508

Email ID – dasp55652@gmail.com

ABSTRACT :

The five fingers policy is a Chinese foreign policy attributed to Mao Zedong's speeches in 1940. As per the policy, Tibet is the right palm of China and Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and northeast frontiers of Arunachal Pradesh are the five fingers of palm. The Policy consider that it is China's responsibility to 'liberate' this areas. In 1954, government of China published a school book called "A Brief History of Modern China", where it emphasized that these areas were portion of China and that must be reclaimed. The strategic objective of the five finger policy is to encircle India from various border by implementing Chinese expansionist policies. Xi, Jinping the modern day 'incarnation' of Mao Zedong, has taken up himself the task of fulfilling the Mao's goals of 'liberating' the five fingers. The objective of this paper is to examine the relevance of five fingers policy in 21st century. Again, it tries to find out some necessary measures for India to counter this policy of China.

Keywords: Liberate, neighbours, expansionist, geopolitical , 21st century, relationship.

Introduction :

China is known as the leading country in the development of human civilization. A long way in hiistory, China was born as a socialist state through the 1949 socialist revolution, under the leadership of Mao Zedong. China has always been expansionist by nature. During the 20th century, China claimed that numerous neighbouring countries in Asia were under the rule of imperial Chinese dynasty. These territories were lost due to forceful occupation, unequal treaties, annexation and foreign interference. In this context, China talked about the palm and five fingers policy. In 1939 Mao Zedong said, "After having inflicted military defeats on China, the imperialist countries forcibly took from her a large number of states tributary to China, as well as a part of her own territory. Japan appropriated Korea, Taiwan, the Ryukyu Island, the Pescadores, and Port Arthur, England took Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, and Hongkong; France seized Annam ; even a miserable little country like Portugal took Macao from us . At the same time that they took away part of her territory, the imperialist obliged China to pay enormous indemnities. Thus heavy blows were struck against the vast feudal empire of China."¹ China's first paramount leader and founder of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, has thought that Tibet and its surrounding region had formally been a part of the larger Chinese empire . It has to be achieved at any cost.

Literature review :

Gupta (2021), in his work "Five Fingers Dream of Mao Zedong", has stated that, China's communist leader Mao Zedong considered India's Ladakh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh as well as Nepal and Bhutan as integral part of Tibet cum China. In order to implement Mao's dream project, in 2020 Xi Jinping took over 11% of Bhutan's territory. China has never recognized Arunachal Pradesh as part of India. They claim Arunachal Pradesh as part of Tibet. This paper also mentioned that, this geopolitics of China can have serious implications for Indian security. In case, India has face Chinese might, India's internal unity is mandatory.²

Dorji (2020), his research work “ A Geo Strategic Importance Of Tibet: China’s Palm And Five Fingers Strategy” , has explained that, China’s military aggression in India, Bhutan and Nepal is a practical manifestation of the five fingers policy strategically planned by Chinese communist leaders. In the early 20th century British-India adopted its forward policy toward Tibet for expanding her market and at the same time, the British use Tibet as a buffer to save India from Czarist Russian threat. In 1950 China invaded and occupied Tibet. By invading Tibet, China advanced China’s expansionist policy towards the Himalayan countries and beyond. China’s militarization of the Tibetan plateau has created geopolitical tensions in South Asia. A believer in Tsun Tzu’s strategic doctrine the ‘art of war’ , Mao Zedong adopted the five fingers policy to expand his sphere of influence in South Asia. By using five fingers policy, China is trying to implement “ China’s strategy of encirclement India” policy.³

Kumar and Vishal (2021), in research paper “India – China relations in 21st century” has described the India-China relations in 21st century in neo-realism perspective. China asserted its position through militant nationalism with the rise of Xi Jinping since 2008. In 2017, Chinese troops sought to build a road in the doklam area, which has led to a stand-off between India and China. Later, the Chinese opposed the Indian construction of air strips and roads in the Galwan Valley. In 21st century where globalization occurred over the world, but India and China relations are going on through security dilemma.⁴

Objectives of Research

- To find out the relevance of China’s five fingers policy in 21st century.
- To find out some necessary steps for India to save from China’s this policy.

Methodology :

Descriptive and analytical methods of study has been used for the present study . The paper has been written with the help of secondary sources like as article, journal, book, news paper report etc.

Five Fingers Policy

The five fingers policy is a foreign policy of China that is credited to its former leader Maozedong, who considered Tibet as China’s right hand palm, with Ladakh, Nepal ,Sikkim ,Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh comprising its five fingers. The policy also takes into account that it is China’s duty to ‘liberate’ this areas. This policy was never mentioned in any Chinese official remarks. The five fingers policy has been widely emerged to Mao's speeches in 1940, but has never been described in any Chinese official statement. India and China became independent nation-state around the same time . India got independence in 1947. The Communist Party of China built up the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, with Mao as the chairman of China. Mao Zedong was a firm believer of Tsun Tzu’s strategic doctrine ‘the art of war’ and strategized Tibet as the palm of China to expand it is sphere influence in South Asia.⁵ In 1950 China invaded and captured it as a part of its liberation strategy. Until 1949, Tibet was an independent and peaceful Buddhist nation in the Himalayas. Worldwide outcry against Tibet’s affiliation forced Mao to distance himself temporarily from the goal.

(Title – Five Fingers and palm of China)



(Source – <https://www.reddit.com> , July 2022.)

In 1954, Chinese officers in Tibet claimed that they would ‘liberate’ Sikkim, Bhutan, Ladakh and NEFA (North-East Frontier of Arunachal Pradesh), which were wrongfully being held by the Indian imperialist. In the same year, the Chinese government published a school book called “ A Brief History of Modern China” which included a map showing the territories allegedly taken by, “imperialist powers” between 1840 and 1919, and included Ladakh Nepal Bhutan Sikkim and entire North East India.⁶ In the book, it was emphasized that these places were part of China that needed to be regained . Before communist China asserted claims over Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim, its monarchy had done the same in the early 1900s, claiming that these areas were part of Tibet’s expansion. Territorial expansionism has become key element of China’s policy since the Communist Party of China occupied Tiananmen Square (Gate of Heavenly Peace) following the Chinese Civil War in 1949. The claims over the five fingers were asserted emphatically and frequently from 1958 to 1961 over the Peking Lhasa radio systems. During a mass meeting in Lhasa in July 1959 Chinese lieutenant General, Zhang Guohua, said, “Bhutanese Sikkimese and Ladakhis form a United family in Tibet. They have always been subject to Tibet and to the great motherland of China. They must once again be united and taught the communist doctrine.”⁷ Such voice grew louder and frequent in Chou Enlai’s throat. After the annexed Tibet, China capture a part of Ladakh, known as Aksai Chin. In 1962 war, China grabbed more territory in Ladakh. In 1967 Chinese troops invaded Nathula and Chola in Sikkim and claim the pass.⁸ India, then clashed with China to protect Sikkim and expelled the Chinese. In 1950, India signed a treaty with Sikkim that made it a ‘protectorate’.⁹ By the 1975 the Indira Gandhi government had annexed Sikkim and made it the 22nd state of India.

This policy reflects the China’s geopolitics and strategic objectives. According to China, Tibet is the strategic pass that will help it to strengthen its geopolitical intentions and ambitions in South Asia. Tibet is the starting point of Asia’s 10 primary river systems.¹⁰ This will facilitate China’s rise as hydro-hegemony by building mega dams along the Tibetan plateau. This will allow it to have taking advantage over the downstream nations. After capturing Tibet, China decided to implement the five finger policy to cross the Himalayas and expand its influence in the Indian subcontinent. Every fingers is very important to China. Control over the Ladakh will offer China complete access to Pakistan and then the Arabian sea, connecting China to the West and Arabia. China will have access to the heartland of India if it gains control of Nepal. Control over Arunachal Pradesh will help China to capture entire North East India. Control over the Sikkim will brings China closer to India’s chicken’s neck. This will help China to isolated the northeast from the Indian mainland.

Control over Bhutan will enable China closer to Bangladesh, whence China can easily access Bay of Bengal. The objective of five fingers policy is to encircle India from various borders by implementing Chinese expansionist policies. Maoism was a revolutionary approach with army played a central role. It is a strategy for capturing State power that combines violent rebellion, mass mobilization and tactical alliance.

Relevance of Five Fingers Policy in 21st century :

The goal of ‘liberating’ five fingers has been taken on by Xi Jinping, the modern times incarnation of Mao Zedong. Out of five fingers three are integral , whereas two are sovereign countries that bordering with India. Though this policy is not official but Chinese diplomats do have this strategy in the mind. In 21st century China is trying to implement its five fingers policy strategically rather than entering directly. Nepal constituted one of the five fingers in Mao Zedong’s five fingers policy. Since the advent of communist rule in Nepal by uniting opposing factions and supporting their election campaign, China contributed to the communist win in Nepal. Since then China has actively interfered in the nation’s fractious politics to maintain the ruling party. Thus China is trying to expand its influence by interfering in Nepal’s internal affairs. China things entering political decision-making is the only way to protects it interest. China invests heavily in Nepal which claims that it will boost its economy but China’s aims to assert its influence in the State. China has expanded its borders with massive road development projects in Northern Nepal. According to the survey document, issued by the ministry of agriculture of Nepal, China encroached on 36 hectors of Nepal’s land at 10 places on the northern border through its Salami - Slice Strategy.¹¹

In 2017, China as a source of entry into Bhutan claims the doklam plateau as its own and started road construction in doklam. With the help of India, the Chinese were expelled from the territory of Bhutan. China seeks to expand its territory by occupying Bhutan’s Doklam, Pasamlung and Jakarlung plateaus . China, by building villages in disputed Bhutanese territories, is paving the way for access to Bhutanese territory. ¹² In 2020, China laying claim to another 11 percentage of the tiny kingdom’s territory, in an area that can be accessed only through Arunachal Pradesh. The move, thus, advances Xi’s efforts against two of the five fingers simultaneously.¹³ Arunachal Pradesh is one finger of China’s proposed five fingers policy. China claims some 90.000 sq. km of Arunachal Pradesh as its own. In Chinese language this area is called Zangnan and repeatedly referred to as part of Southern Tibet.

The Chinese ambassador to India asserted in 2006 that entire territory of Arunachal Pradesh originally belongs to China. Chinese maps show Arunachal Pradesh as part of it. It is a part of the Chinese strategy to assert its territorial claims over Indian territory. China has repeatedly hitting at Arunachal Pradesh over its claims, notable among them Tawang attack in 2022. Tawang district is bordering northeast India, hence China has significant interest in controlling and occupying the Tawang district. In 2017, China renames 6 location , in 2021 again renames 15 more location and in 2023 renames 11 location in Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁴ China is constantly changing the names of various parts of Arunachal Pradesh to expand its influence there and implement her fingers policy. To accelerate the urge for territorial plunder, China is seeking to reinforce its hold by settling in the claimed territories. By 2020, China has constructed a new village, consisting of 101 homes, approximately 4.5 Km within the Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh. ¹⁵ China don’t accept NEFA as part of Indian territory and claim it as one of the finger of Tibet. To maintain pressure on India , China is building military infrastructure and villages across the LAC of Arunachal Pradesh.

In spite of having world – wide recognition of Sikkim is merger with India in 2003, under Chinese five fingers policy, in an effort to reaffirm its claim and forward its expansionist goals, China has been constantly making incursions into the region.

China occupied Aksai Chin in 1950 and the Indo-China war of 1962 strengthened its position. China has completely unilaterally established the LAC boundary of Ladakh, yet China continuous to make multiple incursion attempts in to Ladakh in the 21st century. In 2010 multiple small incursions. Galwan valley conflict between India and China occurred in 2020 around this intrusion. This type of incursion a clear manifestation of China’s five fingers policy

China is always trying to enter into Ladakh. If Chinese control over the Ladakh will offer China complete access to Pakistan and then the Arabian sea and West. If China can enter Ladakh it will be able to embody its objective i.e. Mao's dream policy. In an event organized by the Centre of Democracy, Pluralism and Human rights (CDPHR), Lobsang Sangay, the president of the central Tibetan administration, opined that "after occupying Tibet, China is now trying hard to take five fingers of Tibet".¹⁶ He further stated that China's future objective is to capturing the five fingers of Tibet. Because the world didn't intervene to stop the Chinese when they invaded Tibet, as a result they have grown more confident and are moving towards the five fingers.

Some necessary steps for India :

The goal of China's sophisticated statecraft and the five fingers strategy in the 21st century is to impose Chinese hegemony throughout all of South Asia. Xi Jinping is working to complete Mao's expansionist vision. By pursuing expansionist strategy, China seeks to encroach on all of its South Asian neighbours. China's expansionist policies are a threat to the worldwide and everyone must need together to counter it. China's five fingers policy has given rise to various border disputed between India and China. It is a part of the Chinese strategy to assert its territorial claim over Indian territory. Not only with India but also with Nepal and Bhutan, China is expanding its border by implementing its expansion policy through raising various border issues. China is trying to use this policy to expand its influence in the entire South Asian region.

Aim of this policy is to keeping India under pressure. Although both India and China are neighbouring countries but positive relationship between them is still controversial. For India, it is crucial to make sure that non of fingers fall under Chinese control. By capturing one finger, China will be motivated to capture the remaining fingers. Development, security and globalization are closely related in this century. No country in the world, including India, could become strong and secure without robust security. Military sector needs to be improved through infrastructural development along the border. China is trying to expand its influence by creating a trap, by providing economic support to neighbouring countries. India need to develop an interest in its neighbor's growth and development to counter China's depth trap policy. India must increase its relations with neighbouring countries and ensure that India will get their support at any situation. Since China is threat to the security of India, it is necessary for India to established a good relationship with China's enemies countries to counter Chinese expansionist policy. Vietnam, South Korea, Philippines, Japan, Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia are some of the important countries in this regards. India needs to develop a long term plan to weaken the expansionist desire of China. China continuously seeks to expand its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. To counter this objective, India needs to improvement in geopolitical, military and cultural relationship with BIMSTEC countries and other countries in Indian ocean region. This expansionist and supremacist behaviour of China has caused global concern. Because such a hegemonic attitude has the potential to destabilized the economy of not only the affected countries but also the geopolitical structure of the Indian Ocean region.

Conclusion :

It is true that China is currently one of the powerful leading countries in the world. China is charged of dominating small and weak neighbouring States. In terms of relations with India, it appears that China, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, continuous trying to catch the proposed fingers. As China is increasing its presence around India, the sing of the overall plan are clear. China is trying everything to weaken India. Recent repeatedly border clauses clearly show that China does not value cooperation or good bilateral relations with India. No one of China's neighbours specially South Asian will be secure as long as the Jinping continue to hold monopoly on power. Domestic unity is essential for India to counter Chinese power. Without stability in domestic affairs, stability in international affairs becomes impossible. After all it is can be said that, solving the standoff through negotiation and diplomatically is an ideal way to counter China's this hegemonic policies.

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