Sino-Indian Relations in the Context of South Asia: Pakistan as a Factor

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Abstract

India and China are world's oldest civilizations and have co-existed in peace for millennia. Both countries have effectively tried to reignite cultural, diplomatic and economic ties. Both are world's most populous countries and fastest growing major economics. The far-reaching growth in China and India's global diplomatic and economic influence has also enhanced the significance of their bilateral relationship and, more particularly, in the South Asian context.China has emerged as the largest trading partner of India and two countries have tried to expand their strategic and military relations.

Beijing's South Asia policy is tied to China's military security concerns vis-a-vis that of India and territorial disputes. Chinese leaders regularly visit Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to demonstrate a continuing determination to remain involved in South Asia andto reassure China's friends that improvement in Sino–Indian relations would not be at their cost.

However, Pakistan has occupied a prominent place in the geo-strategic milieu with regard to the South Asian region. Beijing's entente cordiale with Pakistan continues to flourish, prominently underpinned by nuclear and missile co-operation. India continues to keep a close eye on the political and strategic relations between China and India's neighbours. Current strategic and economic trends indicate that South Asia's importance in China'snational security calculus is likely to increase in the 21st century.

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Introduction

India and China have some striking similarities. Both are ancient civilizations, reincarnated as modern republics in the mid twentieth century, and are now rising powers. Both have nuclear weapons, burgeoning economies, expanding military budgets and large reservoirs of manpower, and seem to be vying for influence in the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, Africa, Central Asia and East Asia. The Sino- Indian relationship is more often seen in terms of the countries' interactions with India, Pakistan and other South Asian nations. It is also defined by contrasting polities and models of development, with the parties silently competing for capital, resources and markets.

Sincethe first century A.D,with the spread of Buddhism from India to China,both the nations had wide ranging cultural contact. However, they had conflict of interests in Tibet. At the end of its civil war in 1949, China wanted to reassert control over Tibet and to set free the Tibetan people from Lamaism and Feudalism by the use of arms in 1950. Nehru communicated Chinese leaders that India had not any political, territorial interests or to seek special principles in Tibet. With Indian support, Tibetan delegates signed an agreement in May 1951 recognizing Chinese sovereignty assuming that the existing political and social system in Tibet would carry on. In 1954, India China signed an eight years agreement in Tibet that lay out the foundation of their relationship in the form of *Panchasheela*. The slogan in 1950s was *'Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai'*.

South Asia ranks third in importance after the Northeast and Southeast Asian regions inChina's Asia policy. China shares common borders with four (Bhutan, India, Nepal andPakistan) out of seven South Asian states (the other three are Bangladesh, Sri Lanka andthe Maldives), making it an integral part of South Asia. China's military security concerns*vis-a-vis*South Asia's largest and most powerful state, India, coupled with territorialdisputes and the need to protect its 'soft strategic underbelly', i.e. Tibet, provide a key tounderstanding Beijing's South Asia policy.**1**

The boundary disputesamong South Asian have shaped China's relations with South Asia. Whilst Beijing has resolved its disputed boundaries with Nepal and Pakistan, territorial disputes with India and Bhutan are yet to be resolved. Much like China, the states of South Asia are multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. All South Asian states have historic, cultural, linguistic, and religious ethnic links with India and they all share borders with India rather than with each other. The postcolonial geopolitical landscape has created a number of overlapping ethno-religious and linguistic problems in South Asia. For example, Bengalis live in

Bangladesh as well as in India; Kashmiris, Sindhis and Punjabis live in both India and Pakistan; more Tamils live in India than in Sri Lanka; Nepalese live in Nepalas well in India and Bhutan; and Tibetans live in China as well as in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Internal security issues in one state inevitably have external security ramifications.

China's relations with India, during the last decade,have gone through a rollercoaster from the highs of the early and mid 1990s to the lowsof the late 1990s. Sino–Indian relations remain poor, with or without a risk of confrontation,despite a dramatic increase in bilateral exchanges at the political, economic, military, andcultural levels including some high-level visits. Beijing's entente cordiale**2** with Pakistancontinues to flourish, underpinned by nuclear and missile co-operation. Chinese leadersregularly visit Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to demonstrate a continuing determinationto remain involved in South Asia and a desire to reassure China's friends in the region thatimprovement in Sino–Indian relations would not be at their cost. New Delhi keeps a closeeye on the political and strategic relations between China and India's neighbours.

Main features of China's South Asia Policy :

A prominent feature of Beijing's South Asia policy has been its 'India-centric' approach, which,in turn, has seen military links with India's neighbours dominating the policy agenda. Themajor objective of China's Asia policy has been to prevent the rise of a peer competitor,a real Asian rival to challenge China's status as the Asia–Pacific's sole 'Middle Kingdom'.Beijing hasalways known that India, if it ever gets its economic and strategic acts together, alone hasthe size, might, numbers and, above all, the intention to match China. In the meantime,perceiving India as weak, indecisive and on the verge of collapse, Beijing took the view thatall that was needed was to keep New Delhi under pressure by arming its neighbours andsupporting insurgency movements in India's minority regions. All of India's neighbourshave obtained much of their military arsenal from China—indeed 90 per cent of China'sarms sales go to countries that border India. For its part, Beijing has justified militaryrelations between itself and South Asian countries as legitimate and normal state-to-staterelations well within the purview of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.**3**

Broadly speaking, India's relations with South Asian states have been guided by two majorconcerns: (1) geostrategic concerns, that is, a desire to insulate the Subcontinent fromadverse external forces that might 'fish in troubled waters' and thus destabilize India'ssecurity environment; and (2) geopolitical concerns, that is, a desire to ensure thatgeographical proximity and ethno-religious affinities do not lead to instability on or near itsborders, particularly as they inevitably affect India's domestic,

ethnic, religious and politicalrelationships, and could give rise to secessionist demands within India. India has since independence resorted to a combination of diplomatic,economic and military means to establish cordial atmosphere in South Asia. For instance, in 1949–1950, India signed treaties with Bhutan, Nepal and the small protectorate of Sikkim tostrengthen its close links with the Himalayan kingdoms, and it took on the responsibilityof securing their northern frontiers with China. However, South Asian states have alwaysresented India's hegemonic ambitions in the region and have tried to resist the impositionof the Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine by seeking to build security links withextra-regional powers, mainly China and the United States, as a counterweight to India'sdomineering role. This has led to ongoing conflict between South Asia's largest state andits smaller neighbours.

Beijing's perspective, 'whether China and Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, or Pakistan wishany particular relations is exclusively for them to decide. For India to attempt to dictate orlimit those relations is unacceptable.' In their meetings with these countries, the Chinesecontinue to bemoan India's 'big brotherly' and 'hegemonic attitude'. Emphasising that 'allcountries, big or small, should be treated equally', Beijing has long been critical of the useof coercive strategies aimed at ensuring New Delhi's security interests are not compromisedby their ties with China.**4**Because of the asymmetry in size and might, India is invariablydrawn into the big-brother syndrome or 'small state versus big state syndrome' in relation to its smaller neighbours. Whenever South Asian countries have triedto play 'the China card' in their relations with India, problems have arisen between Indiaand China as well as between India and its South Asian neighbours.

Further, China remains a major economic aid donor to Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan andSri Lanka. China's use of economic means in its rivalry with India for influence in Nepal and Bangladesh is a case in point. Beijing's economic ties with South Asian states supplement and reinforce itsmilitary security objectives and goals. Despite some improvementin Sino–Indian ties since the early 1990s, Beijing has not lost its motivations to prop upthese smaller states against India. However, in contrast with Southeast and Northeast Asia,the interplay between economics and security is rather weak in South Asia, sincegeostrategic considerations predominantly shape China's policy towards the region.Beijing's rhetoric aboutthe Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence notwithstanding, classic Chinese statecraftdictates that there is no such thing as friendly foreign powers: 'All states are either hostileor subordinate'. **5**

Subordinate states areallies/dependents which need to be protected and

provided with economic and militarysupport whereas hostile states are enemies which need to be subdued by involving them in troublesomeembroilments. Recognising India as one of its major strategic rivals, China has since 1963firmly aligned itself with Pakistan to contain the common enemy. Critics argue thatBeijing's policy towards the sub-continental rivals has been based on the classic strategicprinciple of 'make the barbarians fight while you watch from the mountain top'**.6**

Despite Chinese efforts to justify military links with Pakistan as part of 'normal state-to-state relations', India has remaineduncon vinced, seeing them as 'hostile' and 'threatening' in both intent and character so asto tie India down south of the Himalayas. The 1990s saw the issue of Beijing's nuclear andmissile assistance to Pakistan overshadow the thorny territorial dispute between India andChina. For India, Pakistan is not and cannot be a threat without China's military support.Independent India since Nehru's days has entertained hopes of joint Sino–Indianleadership of Asia to counter Western influence, but the Chinese have shown no enthusiasmfor sharing leadership of Asia with anyone, least of all India. From New Delhi's perspective, Beijing's gradual but subtle penetrationdeep into southern Asia in the second half of the 20th century has been primarily at India'sexpense. Here it is worth recalling that, historically and civilisationally, India, as the pivotalpower in South Asia, perceives itself much as China has traditionally perceived itself inrelation to East Asia.

India's strategic analysts have always emphasised the need to keep up militarilywith China. India's defence policy has long been based on the principle of 'keeping onestep ahead of Pakistan and at par with China'. Initially, India's nuclear capability was aimedsolely at deterring China, not Pakistan. It is the adversarial nature of the Sino–Indianrelationship which has driven India's and, in turn, Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.Thestrategic space in which India traditionally operated had become increasinglyconstricted due to Chinese penetration, became further evident from Beijing's forays intoBurma and the Bay of Bengal in the 1990s.**7**

The 1998 Indian nuclear tests were precededby the then Indian Defence Minister statements calling China a 'bigger potentialthreat' than Pakistan and describing how his country was being 'encircled' by Chinesemilitary activities in Tibet and military alliances with Pakistan and Burma. Chinese analysts have accused India, particularly since India's nuclear tests in May 1998,of pursuing a policy of military expansion since attaining independence, in order to becomea global military power, contain China, and dominate and control South Asia and the IndianOcean. While major Western powers have, however grudgingly, accepted the reality ofIndia's

nuclear capability, there is no sign of Beijing softening its demand that New Delhiinitiate a complete rollback of its nuclear weapons program and unconditionally sign theComprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)as per UN Security Council resolution 1172.**8**

Despite the existence of some asymmetry: China is a more fraught subject in Indian national debates than India is for China. China does not appear to feel threatened in any serious way by India, while India at times displays tremendous insecurity in the face of Chinese economic success and military expansion. Not much has changed in the rhetoric of Sino-Indian relations since Mao Zedong, speaking in 1951 in honour of the first anniversary of India's constitution, declared that 'excellent friendship' had existed between the two countries 'for thousands of years'. **9**

The modern Sino-Indian relationship has been marked by four distinctphases. Purported friendship and ideological congruence around anti-imperialist foreign-policy objectives from 1950 deteriorated into a bitter yetbrief border conflict in 1962, followed by a Sino-Indian 'Cold War'**.10**In 1998, India pointed to China asthe justification for its second round of nuclear tests (the first had occurredin 1974). Although this might have been expected to create significant tensionsbetween the two nations, economic relations have since intensified.Nonetheless, the period from 1998 onward remains one of uncertainty andoccasional antagonism, marked by China's full emergence as a global powerand the courting of India by other powers, not least the United States, as animportant nation not just in its own right but also as a potential counterweightto Chinese power and regional influence.**11**

One important wild card could be domestic sub-nationalism, which afflicts both China and India, but with different characteristics and consequences. India has survived as a nation by cobbling together a sometimes conciliatory and often weak political and security response to various insurgencies and separatist movements. China, on the other hand, still very much relies on the heavy hand of the state to suppress such uprisings, as seen in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009. Ethnic unrest in China's peripheral territories – Xinjiang, Tibet, Taiwan, Manchuria, Mongolia – has historically been a major vulnerability for the Chinese state, as such episodes could possibly invite foreign involvement.**12**

On land, the ring of states that the British once used as buffers for the Raj—Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Myanmar—has fallen under increasing Chinese influence, with Beijing buoyed by the fastest-growing major economy in the world and a willingness to cut deals with regimes of all stripes. Even when India held a 30

percent stake in Myanmar's Shwe gas field, Myanmar's junta chose to sell gas from that field to China instead. In Nepal, where Indian security agencies long held sway and often dictated the political process, the ascendance of Maoists along with Chinese reconstruction activities shattered the illusion that the country was, like the Himalayas, a bulwark for the subcontinent.

China's primary strategic objectives :

The primary objectives of the Chinese Policyare to maintain an external environment conducive to the pursuit of economic reform, expand its strategic independence and leverage in a multi-polar environment, and continue strengthening itself.The Chinese view is slowly turning to accommodate the facts that India is already a dominant power in South Asia and is rapidly becoming a major world player. Therefore, India has to be engaged in a positive manner, even if it is at some cost to China's relationship with Pakistan.Major contentious bilateral issues like the border problem and China's support to Pakistan presently continue to evade mutually acceptable solutions. However, pragmatic policy analysts believe that despite divergent security perceptions, both countries can seize the opportunity to forge mutually beneficial bilateral trade and more importantly, a durable strategic partnership.

China has been redefining its national identity and has beenreconstructing its strategic culture. Chinese diplomacy has undergone an important evolution over the last decade. Beijing's foreign policy reflects a more confident, less confrontational and more proactive approach towards regional and global affairs. These trends are reflected in China's increased engagement with multilateral and regional security organizations and Beijing's growing attention to non-traditional security challenges. By following a cooperative policy, China is showing that it is now a stabilizing rather than a destabilising factor.

China's Strategic ObjectivesandThreat Perceptions :

China's desire to gain "great power" status on the world stage is reflected in its greater economic leverage over countries in the region and elsewhere, as well as its steps to strengthen its military. East Asian states are adapting to the advent of a more powerful China by forging closer economic and political ties with Beijing, potentially accommodating themselves to its preferences, particularly on sensitive issues like Taiwan. China is continuing to strengthen its military through developing and acquiring modern weapons, including advanced fighter aircraft, sophisticated submarines and increasing numbers of ballistic missiles. China will overtake Russia and others as the second largest defence spender after the United States over the next two decades and will be, by any measure, a first-rate military power. If China's

economy takes a downward turn, regional security would weaken, resulting in heightened prospects for political instability, crime, narcotics trafficking, and illegal migration.

Like China, India is also becoming an economic magnet for the region, and its rise is impacting not only South Asia but also the North, Central and West Asia, and other countries of Southeast Asia. India seeks to bolster regional cooperation both for strategic reasons and because of its desire to increase its leverage with the West, including in such organizations as the WTO. As India's economy grows governments in Southeast Asia, that is, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and others would move closer to India to help build a potential geopolitical counterweight to China. At the same time, India seeks to strengthen its ties with countries in the region without excluding China.

China seeks to acquire and establish a favourable security environment that is conducive to continued economic growth and its military modernization. However, the key notion behind China's overall national objectives can be found in its "Comprehensive National Power" concept, which asserts that military modernization is the key in protecting China's security and unity, as well as building a prosperous society. In short, China's primary strategic objectives in the international arena are driven by the following requirements:**13**

(a) Maintaining an external environment conducive to the pursuit of economic reform, opening to the outside world, and economic construction.

(b) Preserving or expanding China's strategic independence and leverage in a complex multi-polar environment.

(c) Furthering its efforts to reunify Taiwan with the nation.

(d) Strengthening its ability to defend against external pressures or attacks, emerging from highly complex and uncertain, yet arguably less immediately threatening security environment.

There are three major tasks of historic significance for China: to propel the modernization drive; to achieve national reunification; and to safeguard world peace and promote common development.**14**To accomplish these tasks, China has developed some new concepts for its national strategy:

First, it seeks to work with the international community to maintain regional stability. China will continue to improve and cultivate relations with both developing and developed countries. Proceeding from the fundamental interests of all countries concerned, China will broaden the converging points of common interests and properly settle differences on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence,

notwithstanding the differences in social systems and ideologies. China will increasingly cooperate with the United States and other countries in dealing with regional security problems.

Second, it stresses new concepts of security, primarily mutual trust, mutual benefit,equality, and coordination. Since the end of the Cold War, China has changed its security concepts according to the evolving international situation and interests of the Chinese people as well as the necessity for world peace and development. China believes that to obtain lasting peace, it is imperative to abandon the Cold War mentality, cultivate a new concept of security, and seek new ways to safeguard peace. It has to be kept in mind that the new concepts of security are in keeping with the trend of the era and have greater relevance.China holds that the core of this new security concept should be mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and coordination.**15**

The new security concept should be the guideline to resolve regional disputes as well as improve international security.**16** Third, China seeks to resolve the disputes in the South China Sea and improve its relations with neighboring countries. China's existing guideline is to advance development, peace, and stability in Asia. It is an important part of China's development strategy to maintain good relationships with its neighbors, make them secure, and help them prosper.**17**

Sharing a common border with China of around 7,000 kilometers, Southern Asia is critical to Beijing's interests. In terms of security, this region is particularly significant to the stability of China's three frontier provinces, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Yunnan, especially after the violent riots in Tibet in March 2008 and in Xinjiang in July 2009. Tibet is a significant security concern. Indian parliamentarian and author ArunShourie argues that 'India's security is inextricably intertwined with the existence and survival of Tibet as a buffer state and to the survival and strengthening of Tibetan culture and religion'. **18**

With about 120,000 exiled Tibetans living in India and Nepal (including the Dalai Lama and the so-called Tibetan Government in Exile in India) and some Uighur militants based in the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the willingness and capability of these countries to cooperate are critical to China's efforts to counter secessionism in Tibet and Xinjiang. In 2008, the Indian government took great pains to ensure that Tibetan protestors did not cause any embarrassment to Beijing during the passage of the Olympic Torch through New Delhi**.19**

The greatest threat to the Indo-Chinese relationship arises from widely differing views of the history and ultimate destiny of Tibet. For China, India's recognition of Tibet as part of China seems grudging and conditional. And its role as

host of the Dalai Lama and his 'splittist clique', to use Beijing's colourful phrase, could appear to some Chinese as a threat to their country's cohesion. For India, Chinese repression in Tibet is painful, and many Indians hope it will ultimately prove futile. Careful management by both capitals will be required to prevent developments relating to Tibet from undermining the wider China–India relationship.

Economically speaking, Southern Asia has a significant bearing on the development of China's western region, Chinese enterprises' "go global" strategy, and China's energy security. The subcontinent is a gateway to the Indian Ocean for China's western region.Southern Asia is already a major destination of China's overseas projects contracting, and with nearly a quarter of the world's population, the region holds great potential as a market for China's commodities and investments. With its geographical advantage in the Indian Ocean, the subcontinent plays an important role in safeguarding the sea lines of communication, on which China's energy importing and foreign trade are heavily dependent.Politically speaking, China views countries in Southern Asia as important partners in restructuring the regional and global institutions and fending off Western pressure on such issues as human rights and climate change. Countries in the region are committed to the one-China policy and have firmly supported China on the issue of Taiwan.

Against the backdrop of these multifaceted interests, China's strategic objectives in the region are to reinforce a friendly Southern Asia that is willing to extend support for China's efforts to safeguard its national unity and integrity; to promote a stable Southern Asia that is capable of ensuring the safety of Chinese citizens and investments in the region; and to build a prosperous Southern Asia that is likely to create more opportunities for China's sustainable development.Together, these objectives serve the fundamental task of China's foreign policy that is, "securing a long-term and favorable external environment for China's development."

Since the end of the Cold War and the normalization of Sino-Indian relations, China has not perceived any serious strategic threats from Southern Asia. Indirect threats, however, abound. One that China is monitoring is the Indo-Pakistani rivalry. Because China shares borders with both India and Pakistan, any conflict between the two nuclear powers would force China to take sides and also have direct implications for the security of China's western frontier region. China is also keeping tabs on drug trafficking that originates in Afghanistan and Myanmar. Because of instability and poor governance in those countries, drug trafficking and organized crime have increasingly threatened to spill over into Xinjiang and Yunnan.

China and the South Asian States :

The U.S.-led war on terror in Afghanistan has forced China to look southwest. After China started its economic reforms in 1978, it gradually strengthened its ties with South Asia in general, and neighboring countries now are given "first priority" over major powers in China's foreign policy. China has officially outlined four pillars in its foreign policy platform: major powers are the key, surrounding areas are the first priority, developing countries are the foundation, and multilateral forums are the important stage.

China has also improved its relations with the rising global power India, long viewed as hostile, going back to the 1962 border war, but now acknowledged to be rising into a global power. And China's strategy on the large-scale development of its western region has triggered the enthusiasm of local governments in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan to establish closer economic links with South Asia.

Thanks to the globalized economy of China and its heavy dependence on Middle East oil, the significance of the smaller South Asian countries—Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives—have dramatically increased. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have become two of the major destinations for China's overseas contracted projects and investments, while, because of their specific geographical locations, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bangladesh are relevant to China's energy security. With nearly 200,000 Chinese tourists visiting Maldiveseach year, Beijing can no longer neglect the small island country in the Indian Ocean.The fact that the subcontinent is part of China's neighborhood as well is usually overlooked, while some strategic elites in India construe China's closer links with the smaller countries as China's encirclement of India, the so-called string of pearls strategy. Despite sharing borders with six South Asian countries, the People's Republic of China has long attached insufficient importance to South Asia. Since entering the new century, however, the significance of Southern Asia to China has been upgraded and the Chinese government is paying more attention to its relationship with the region. After China started its economic reforms in 1978, it gradually strengthened its ties with South Asia in general, and neighboring countries now are given "first priority" over major powers in China's foreign policy. China has also improved its relations with the rising global power India, long viewed as hostile, going back to the 1962 border war, but now acknowledged to be rising into a global power. And China's strategy on the large-scale development of its western region has triggered the enthusiasm of local governments in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan to establish closer economic links with South Asia.

Afghanistan adds a layer of complexity to relations in Southern Asia. Besides being relevant to China's Xinjiang region in terms of countering secessionism and counter-narcotics efforts, Afghanistan's stability is directly related to the stability of Pakistan, another important neighbor of China in the region. Therefore, China expects an independent, stable, and friendly Afghanistan. The latest China-Afghanistan strategic partnership indicates China's long-term commitment to Afghan reconstruction and reconciliation. As for India's role in Afghanistan, China views its development assistance as impressive and positive. Its only concern is about an ongoing rivalry between India and Pakistan mainly on the Kashmir issue and their confrontation in Afghanistan. Many Chinese scholars believe that unless this rivalry is eased, Pakistan will continue to see Afghanistan as a vital strategic bulwark against India, while India views Afghanistan as another strategic front against Pakistan. If India tries to create an anti-Pakistan Afghanistan and Pakistan tries to create an anti-India Afghanistan, reconciliation in Afghanistan would be far harder to achieve.

Myanmar, which shares a border of nearly 2,200 kilometers with China, has a great deal of strategic significance for China. Beyond the stability of the border areas that are affected by drug trafficking and ethnic insurgency in Myanmar, China is concerned about the security of its enormous investments in Myanmar's infrastructure and power plants. The country's geographical location also provides China shorter and more convenient access to the Indian Ocean, which well serves both the development of the poor economies in southwestern China and China's energy security by providing an alternate route for energy supplies to travel. It is against this backdrop that China is building an oil and gas pipeline across Myanmar into southwestern China. Standard realist accounts argue China is unwilling to permit the emergence of India as a power beyond South Asia. In the past China has built alliances and partnerships with countries in the Indian periphery, most notably Pakistan, but also Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and, more recently, Afghanistan.**20**

China-Pakistan-India Triangle :

The future of Pakistan remains a key factor in the Sino-Indian relationship, and the future of Kashmir remains critical to the Indo-Pakistani relationship. Therefore any move by China that either intentionally or inadvertently secured gains for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue would invite much concern in India. For example, a recent decision by China to issue separate visas to residents of Indian-administered Kashmir led to a minor diplomatic stand-off. Such moves are, to be sure, contrary to the overall thrust of Chinese policy since the 1990s.Territorial integrity has occupied the minds of India's leaders ever since the country gained independence in 1947, when

more than 500 princely states had to be incorporated into the Indian Union – a considerable task for any post-colonial state. Given this mindset, the Sino-Indian border conflict could prove particularly intractable. Since its formation, the People's Republic has settled its borders with a number of neighbours, often making concessions to the other party. The Indian border, however, remains contentious and a continuing source of ill will between the two nations.65 Initial formulations by Zhou Enlai in the 1950s had envisaged a quid pro quo settlement whereby India would drop its claims in the western sector in exchange for China's concession of the eastern sector.

Since the end of the Cold War, a fundamental shift of China's South Asia policy has been to take a more evenhanded approach in its relations with Pakistan and India and to make Sino-Pakistani and Sino-Indian relations independent of each other. It has been observed that of all China's relations with South Asian states, those with Pakistan outweigh and overlay any other bilateral relationship. No other Asian country has armed another in such a consistent manner over such a long period of time as China has armed Pakistan. The China–Pakistan type of nuclear/ missile cooperation, in particular, is unprecedented in the history of post-1945 international relations. Even the United States and Britain did not share such a relationship. At Bandung, China is reported to have reached a 'strategic understanding with Pakistan founded on their convergent interests vis-à-vis India'.**21**

After Bandung, the emerging competition between India and China contributed to an increasingly strained bilateral relationship that was soon put to the test in addressing a serious irritant: the Sino-Indian border.While some have traced the roots of the Indo-Chinese border dispute to a much earlier period, **22** its immediate antecedents lay in the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950. This created significant tensions in India, which had strategic interests in Tibet and 'spiritual bonds' with Tibetan civilisation stretching back almost two millennia.**23** Writing at the height of the Sino-Indian border conflict, P.C. Chakravarti expressed apprehensions: 'Any strong expansionist power, entrenched in Tibet, holds in its hands a loaded pistol pointed at the heart of India'.**24**

During his 1991 visit to New Delhi, Li Peng, the Chinese premier at the time, told reporters that "China is willing to maintain and develop friendly relations with India, Pakistan, and all countries in South Asia on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence." The real message was that better ties between China and India should not affect China's links with Pakistan and that China's existing friendship and cooperation with Pakistan should not block improvement of Sino-Indian relations.

Since then, China has established an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership with Pakistan and a strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity with India.

However, strong inertia persists, both inside and outside all three countries, in viewing the China-Pakistan-India triangle through the old-fashioned prism of confrontation, with China and Pakistan on one side and India on the other. Pakistan still hinders China-India relations, with India complaining of China's support for Pakistan in areas such as defense ties, civilian nuclear cooperation, and counter-terrorism. It is true that China is much closer strategically to Pakistan than to India, despite its much tighter economic links with India. China and Pakistan portray each other as brothers, while the China-India strategic partnership is still a work in progress. Also, a weaker Pakistan—suffering from economic difficulties, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, tensions with the United States, and increasedstrength inferiority to India—expects more support from China. The respective distrust between China and India and between China and the United States, and the strengthened Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has upgraded the significance to China of the China-Pakistan all-weather friendship.Therefore, before the final settlement of the protracted, unresolved China-India border dispute, China's friendship with Pakistan will remain an irritant to India's dealing with China. However, since China and India have agreed to look at their relationship in a broader context and perceive a stable and cooperative partnership as a guarantee to their simultaneous rise.

Pakistan as a Factor in India-China Relations :

Themost contentious issue for India isChina's strategic relationship with Pakistan. India has always viewed theSino-Pakistani relationship, particularly China's nuclear and missileassistance to Pakistan, as part of China's strategy to contain India's influencein South Asia. Over the years China and Pakistan have developed close tiesin the political and military spheres, including significant arms transfer aswell as nuclear and missile assistance. Traditionally, this assistance has beenmotivated by a number of considerations, the key elements being to promotea militarily capable Pakistan that would serve as a counterweight to apredominant India in the region, and Chinese military and trade access to theArabian Sea. Chinese military help would also lessen the pressure on Chinato intervene on Pakistan's behalf should India and Pakistan get involved in amilitary conflict.

However, since the end of cold war, China's position has shifted fromunequivocal support for Pakistan in the Kashmir dispute to theencouragement of India–Pakistan rapprochement. Though China's policy towards Pakistan has

shifted towards neutralityto allow the improvement of India-China relations and avoid unnecessaryentanglements, it is still willing to do the minimum necessary to preservePakistani security from a distance. Certainly China has no intentions todesert its long time ally and indeed substantial Chinese defence assistance toPakistan continues. Contradictions between India-China-Pakistanrelationships will continue to exist, but what matters is, whether thecontradictions are "antagonistic" or non-antagonistic." The Beijing–Islamabad 'special relationship' is part of China's grand strategy that moulds the South Asian security environment. It provides a good example of using China as a counterweight to what smaller South Asian regimes perceive as India's attempts at bullying them. It demonstrates that much like Pakistan, other South Asian countries can follow an 'independent' policy and need not allow India to influence their decision making. Combined with the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean region, this has created some concern among Indian policymakers of strategic encirclement.**25** China is investing heavily in Pakistan-held northern areas as well, with unconfirmed reports of troop presences. Also, the defense establishment in India, given the successive upgrade of the dual-use infrastructure projects and military deployments in Tibet, had elevated Indian threat perceptions from low to medium levels vis-a-vis China, although there is not yet a clear and present danger.

India and the Region :

Southern Asia is India's closest and most vital sphere of strategic action. India's relations with many of its SouthAsian neighbors remain fraught, if not hostile. Political problems aside, there is a structuralreason for such a state of affairs.India is by far the largest, most populous, and most powerful country in the region,where it accounts for 70 percent of population, nearly 80 percent of GDP, and about75 percent of trade. Its conventional forces are the largest in the region. Moreover, Indiashares a boundary with every country in the neighborhood, but most of them do not sharea border with another South Asian country. India's abilityto play a more engaged role on the global stage is contingent on its capacity for ensuring amodicum of stability in its relationships with sub-continental neighbors. Stability in its tieswith its Southern Asian neighbors remains a key geopolitical objective for India because "India will not be able to realize its own destinywithout the partnership of its South Asian neighbours."

Further, India's economic ties with its sub-continental neighbors remain weak. SouthAsia is among the least integrated regions of the world. Official intra-regional trade, to takeone indicator, hovers around 5 percent of total trade of the countries of the region. This isabysmally low not just in comparison to other regions of Asia (the

corresponding figure forEast Asia exceeds 50 percent), but also when contrasted with its own potential for growththrough trade. South Asia has three attributes that make it extremely well-suited for integrationby trade: the highest population density in the world; linguistic and ethnic overlapacross borders; and the presence of a large number of cities close to the borders.This potential has not been adequately tapped for at least two reasons. One of the legaciesof colonialism has been ambivalence about free trade in most South Asian countries. This problem was compounded by the economicand political consequences of partition, which not only set the stage for many protracteddisputes but also overturned the political economy of the region. Before 1947, the regionhad an almost unimpeded flow of goods, money, people, and ideas. An integrated Southern Asian market wouldmake eminent economic sense as well as help take the sting out of uneasy political relationships.

Finally, South Asia confronts a series of non-traditional security challenges, rangingfrom public health to migration to water. Environmental issues, in particular, pose seriousproblems for the region as a whole. The mountain and deltaic ecosystems of Southern Asiaare closely integrated and cut across state boundaries. The region is unique in the sheer sizeof population, scarcity of rainfall, reliance on agriculture,scope for mega-dam projects, and vulnerability to climatechange. Environmental and natural resource managementwill perhaps be the biggest and most potent challenge for thecountries of Southern Asia. Climate change and changes inpatterns of resource use are also imposing strains on existingbilateral arrangements between India and its neighbors.

Further, new challenges are likely to arise from China'sapproach to dealing with environmental issues, especiallywater, in the Tibetan plateau. Until now, India has dealtwith its neighbors over water issues as the upper riparian.But today, with China emerging as the key factor in thisdomain, India will have to work from a rather different vantage point. The challenge forIndia (and other South Asian states) is to move toward creating cooperative mechanisms fordealing with these common challenges.

Chinese Impact :

The Sino-Indian war is often cited as a watershed moment in Indian foreign policy, after which Nehruvian idealism began to give way to the pragmatic impulses of subsequent administrations. After the war, India began to align itself more closely with the Soviet Union, which had begun to split from China within the international Communist movement; meanwhile, China and Pakistan developed closer ties. In 1964, China conducted its first nuclear test, at Lop Nor, which provided impetus for

India's own successful 'peaceful' nuclear test at Pokhran ten years later. The 1965 India–Pakistan war was a litmus test of the already established US–Pakistan relationship as well as the new Sino-Pakistani relationship. When the United States declared neutrality and blocked military transfers to both India and Pakistan, Islamabad turned to Beijing for assistance, which it provided in generous quantities. When war broke out, China came down heavily on Pakistan's side and threatened to open a front with India on the Sikkim border. US diplomatic intervention and a United Nations resolution calling for a ceasefire were ultimately necessary to discourage Chinese intervention.

Indeed, over the past five decades China has regarded Pakistan as a useful counterweight toIndia in South Asia. The relationship with Pakistan has enabled Beijing to pursue an Indiastrategy on the cheap, while maintaining its own focus on other areas of more immediateinterest. There is little reason to believe that China will abandon this approach anytimesoon, and there is some reason to believe that the strategic relationship with Pakistan mightactually be tightening. China is, of course, concerned about instability and extremism inPakistan. Terrorism is on the agenda of the strategic dialogue between China and India.

On the economic front, though, China could potentially play a positive role. There is someevidence to suggest that the recent moves by Pakistan toward granting most-favored-nationstatus to India may have been quietly encouraged by China. Two factors seem to be at workhere. The strains in Pakistan's relations with the United States and the impending U.S. troopdrawdown in Afghanistan are likely to result in a gradual erosion of American aid to Pakistan.China, however, seems unwilling to fill the breach all by itself and would like to see Pakistan'seconomy standing on its own feet. Further, China's advice to Pakistan is consonant with themanner in which its own relationship with India has evolved over the past two decades.

India's relations with China are a complex amalgam of elements of competition andcooperation. Economic ties between India and China have burgeoned in recent years. Yetthis relationship remains asymmetric, with a mounting trade surplus in China's favor. Politically,the two countries have found it easier to work together on global issues such as climatechange, and in areas such as the BRICS (the developing economies of Brazil, Russia, andSouth Africa in addition to India and China). Yet, the core bilateral dispute on the boundariesremains unresolved. On the security front, the peace and tranquility agreements havehelped avoid military standoffs along the disputed borders. Yet, the gap between the overallmilitary capabilities has

widened in China's favor, as to a lesser extent have the local militarybalances along the borders.

Thus New Delhi is attempting to gain greater market access in China for Indian firms, whileencouraging Chinese firms to invest in India, especially in infrastructure; to try to workwith China on areas of mutual interest on multilateral and global forums, while pursuing apolitical dialogue to settle the boundary dispute; to enhance military confidence-buildingmeasures, while working toward upgrading its military capabilitiesalong the borders and developing a maritime strategythat will play to India's strengths in the Indian Ocean regionand beyond. In a nutshell, India aims for the normalizationof its ties with China while trying to curb China's ability toimpinge on its geopolitical space and interests.If India's relationship with Pakistan has complicated itsties with China, it is mainly due to the manner in whichChina has sought to use Pakistan vis-a-vis India. China's supportfor Pakistan, especially in the military and nuclear domains,remains a matter of serious concern for India. Ideally,India would like to de-link its relationship with China andwith Pakistan. But this does not seem a realistic prospect in the foreseeable future. Indeed,if Pakistan's dependence on China increases in the years ahead, New Delhi may have to startthinking about Pakistan as a subset of the larger challenges posed by China.Perhaps the biggest challenge to Sino-Indian rapprochement, and a source of impetus, is the rapidly improving US–Indian relationship. While a much-improved relationship with Washington has helped India counter the traditional pro-Pakistan tilt in US foreign policy, it has also made Sino- Indian rapprochement a greater priority for Beijing.**26**

Ultimately, neither China nor India stands to gain from sparking a regional conflict. Both nations are deeply engaged in the domestic sphere, including generating economic reform, maintaining state legitimacy and juggling ethno-nationalism. Even the ostensible machinations of the United States have done little to hamper the current upswing in Sino-Indian relations. In some key international forums, including those addressing climate changes, trade, labour laws, arms control and human rights, China and India have found common ground in countering Western positions, though their tactical alliances have often proved unstable in the heat of negotiation.The unconnected nature of China's and India's rise is striking. Bilateraltrade, while growing fast, is a small share of overall trade for both countries.Major strategic partnerships have been made with third parties, includingPakistan and the United States. Societal interaction between the two nationsis still negligible, though tourism is growing and interpersonal connectionsrelated to trade between the two countries are also increasing. Direct flights between India

and China, however, only began in 2002,and in 2007, thetwo nations, with a combined population of over 2 billion, exchanged apaltry 570,000 visitors.**27**

In the absence of single and inclusivesecurity architecture in Asia, many security challenges in Asia remain unresolved or evenunattended.In this background, India's security challenges are no different from those of many Asiancountries. Three pressing security challenges that India faces today are included in the traditionaland nontraditional security domains: unresolved sovereignty and territorial disputes;terrorism; and maintaining economic growth in light of the global financial crisis andeuro-zone crisis on the one hand and the rising cost of energy, food, and other commoditieson the other hand.

China and India have already attained regional power status. Bothare unable to reassert their traditional suzerainty over their smaller neighbours, as anyattempt to do so encounter resistance from regional and extra-regional powers. Both claimthat their attitude towards their neighbours is essentially benevolent while making it clearthese neighbours must not make policies or take actions, or allow other nations to takemeasures in their territory, which they deem to be against their own interestand security. Both accuse each other ofpursuing hegemony and entertaining imperial ambitions.

The root cause of the volatile and strained Sino–Indian relationship, therefore, lies in Beijing'sdetermination to prevent India from playing a role it once played as a civilisation andempire from Central Asia to Southeast Asia, and in New Delhi's counter-containmentstrategies. If China can justify nuclear/missile assistance toPakistan as part of 'normal state-to-state relations', so could India to its 'all-weatherfriends', Vietnam and Mongolia. After all, China has not taken out an exclusive patent ontrade in nuclear/missile technologies**. 28**

Despite steadily improving relations with India since the late 1980s, China has not becomeless friendly to Pakistan, primarily because the combined strategic and political advantagesChina receives from its relationship with Pakistan (and, through Pakistan, other Islamiccountries) easily outweigh any advantages China might receive from a closer relationshipwith India. Above all, Pakistan is the only country that stands up to India and therebyprevents Indian hegemony over the region, thus fulfilling the key objective of China's SouthAsia policy. The Chinese believe that as long as India is preoccupied with Pakistan on itswestern frontier, it will not stir up trouble on the Tibetan border. A secure and stable Indiaat peace with Pakistan would, on the other hand, make New Delhi focus on China and East

Asia. Such a move would spell the virtual end to Chinese aspirations of being the leading Asianpower and would greatly weaken China's position against Indian power.It was the provision of the Chinese nuclear and missileshield to Pakistan during the late 1980s and 1990s (at the height of China–India rapprochement)that emboldened Islamabad to wage a proxy war in Kashmir. Because, by helping Pakistan to emerge as a nuclear power, China has created realisticlong-term security problem for India. The strategic parity with India that Pakistan has given ittremendous potential to emerge as a major factor in Southwest and Central Asia, if it couldset its economy in order.**29**

A staunch ally such as Pakistan also provides China with asecure access to naval bases (Karachi, Ormara and Gwader) close to the entrance of thePersian Gulf.Furthermore, Beijing's concerns about separatist Islamic influence in its far-westernregion of Xinjiang also explain China's indulgence towards Pakistan. China apparently feelsstrongly that engaging Pakistan's government, and even its fundamentalist religious parties,is an important part of keeping control in its own restive Muslim northwest.

Pakistan remains a major recipient of Chinese largesse. While Pakistan continues to be a useful instrument of Chinese foreign policy in South Asia and the Persian Gulf, one cannot rule out the possibility of the pragmatic Chinese evaluating their policy towards Pakistan, but this will happen only if Pakistan's slow descent into chaos and anarchy continues unabated.Talibanisationof Pakistani state and society during the 1990s has, however, created somefrictions between Beijing and Islamabad. Nor can Beijing turn a blind eye to the activitiesof *jihadi* parties based in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The experts in the subject admit that 'Chinahas some problems with Pakistan' over its deep involvement with the Taliban regime inAfghanistan and the 'export of fundamentalist Islamic political ideas'.**30**

Conclusion :

The analysis of the events indicates that security concerns and the state of Sino–Indianrelations impact heavily on China's relations with South Asian countries. The Chinese areat pains to emphasise that the improvement and development of Sino–Indian relations willby no means adversely affect the existing friendly relations between China and other SouthAsian countries. Current strategic and economictrends indicate that South Asia's importance in China's national security calculus is likelyto increase in the twenty-first century.

The relationship between India and China is at a crossroads at the beginning of the thirdmillennium. While there are many similarities in Chinese and Indian strategic

cultures,nothing illustrates differences better than the fact that China has emerged as a hardwaresuperpower while India has emerged as a software superpower in the new 'knowledgeeconomy'. Historic rivalries and their strategic cultures suggest that a fair amount of tensionbetween these continent-sized neighbours, which also happen to be the world's two most populous nations, is inevitable. In the international status stakes, it is China with whichIndia wants to achieve parity. India and China share similar aspirations towards status andinfluence, with China further advanced towards their achievement than India.

Although China and India are likely to remain long-term, if not permanent, adversaries,their aspirations appear to be manageable. India and Chinaneed not resort to use of force to neutralise each other's aspirations. The restoration ofTibet's autonomy, and a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute could be powerfulmitigating factors in Sino–Indian rivalry.The problem, for both the Chinese and their neighbours, is to find the balance point ofcommon interests where security can be achieved for all. Otherwise, China and India willremain locked in competition for political, economic and strategic supremacy with all thepotentially destabilising consequences for regional security in southern Asia. 31

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