

## Sino-Indian Relations in Present Scenario: An Overview

**Dr. Hitendra Yadav**

*Associate Professor*

*Dept. of History*

*Lajpat Rai College,*

*Sahibabad, Ghaziabad*

*Email: dr.hitendra2011@gmail.com*

**Abstract:**

*India and China make a formal alliance which is unrealistic in the current international political climate. Tension has slowly been building up between the two Asian giants after the Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama went ahead with plans to visit a heavily militarized Tibetan Buddhist area in northeast India in November 2009. The academic and media commentators have been further inciting the divergence of opinions. "Is China itching to wage war on India?" was an immediate response of Professor Brahma Chellaney<sup>3</sup> of the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, India. Reports have also appeared in Chinese state media alleging that India was moving troops and fighter aircraft to the northeast, specifically into Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Close to 400 incidents of border intrusion have occurred in the last three years, according to the Indian Defence Yearbook published in February 2009 with over 140 in 2007 and many more in 2008. Is there a possibility of both India and China competing against each other to improve their respective strategic positions and grab the 'pivot' position in the strategic triangle? The course of evolution of the triangular relationship involving India, China and the United States of America has a significant impact on the current global configuration of power and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.*

**Keywords:**

*Sino, Indian, Border dispute*

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**Dr. Hitendra Yadav**

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India and China are the two dominant players in the Asian region and share a common, though still disputed border along the Himalayan range. The Chinese questioning legitimacy of the Mc-Mohan Line was one of the main cause of the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962. The aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian war and China's reluctance to vacate territories brought relations between the two countries to their lowest ebb. In the past 25 years the two Nations have exchange numerous visit to improve relationship keeping the irritant on the back burner but the boundary still remain intractable.

As we know on June 15, 2020, Indian and Chinese troops engaged in a brawl that left twenty Indian soldiers dead while causing an unspecified number of Chinese casualties. The clash is a part of a broader border standoff along the Galwan River between the two forces on the Line of Actual Control that is yet to be resolved. The Indian strategic community is broadly in agreement that this border dispute marks an implacable decline in India-China ties. They argue that the very basis of relations that emerged after former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in 1988 has been shaken, if not destroyed.

In present scenario politics of Asia has become increasingly complicated as there are constant changes in the variables of a triangular relationship between India, China and the America. As the confrontational atmosphere of the Cold War has largely receded, the strategic interactions between these three countries have become the subject of intense analysis by interested observers. There are two defining characteristics of the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region after the end of Cold War:

First, the United States has become the single superpower in the world and not only the most important external power in Asia as well as plays a key role in Asian security.

Secondly, old rivals, China and India have emerged as strong regional powers, as evidenced by impressive economic growth, the development of nuclear arsenals, and demonstrated ambitions for influence in the Pacific and South Asian regions.

While China's role as an economic and geo-strategic player is more widely recognized, India is slowly emerging as a regional competitor to be taken seriously. The events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath have further succeeded in providing new incentive to bring these two countries together to share common security concerns. Further with the unprecedented American military presence in South Asia due to the war against terrorism, a third player—the world's remaining superpower—is now more closely involved in the historic India-China rivalry.

The concept of a strategic triangle is now familiar to analysts of international affairs. It refers to a situation in which three major powers are sufficiently important to each other that a change in the relationship between any two of them has a significant impact on the interests of the third. The greater that impact, actual or potential, the greater is the significance of the triangular relationship.<sup>1</sup>

With the rise of the Indian and the Chinese power in the twenty-first century, it is unclear what pattern the triangle will evolve into; some speculate about a U.S.-India alignment against a rising China; others emphasize about an India-China cooperative framework against the uni-polar world order led by the U.S. So far, there has been no consistent identifiable pattern. As the Cold War ended and the former Soviet Union collapsed, India has restructured its own international relationships, attempting to reduce tensions with China and build concrete ties with the United States, but intension of China was different.

India and China make a formal alliance which is unrealistic in the current international political climate. Tension has slowly been building up between the two Asian giants after the Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama went ahead with plans to visit a heavily militarized Tibetan Buddhist area in northeast India in November 2009. The academic and media commentators have been further inciting the divergence of opinions. “Is China itching to wage war on India?” was an immediate response of Professor Brahma Chellaney<sup>2</sup> of the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, India. Reports have also appeared in Chinese state media alleging that India was moving troops and fighter aircraft to the northeast, specifically into Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Close to 400 incidents of border intrusion have occurred in the last three years, according to the Indian Defence Yearbook published in February 2009 with over 140 in 2007 and many more in 2008.<sup>3</sup> Is there a possibility of both India and China competing against each other to improve their respective strategic positions and grab the ‘pivot’ position in the strategic triangle? The course of evolution of the triangular relationship involving India, China and the United States of America has a significant impact on the current global configuration of power and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

In 2011 United States National Intelligence Council was given a report on emerging global trends, by 2015, international community will have to confront the military, political and economic dimensions of the rise of China and India. How these two countries manage their relationship will have a tremendous impact on peace and stability in the regional and, increasingly, global context.<sup>4</sup>

Against the backdrop of an international environment in constant flux, the two Asian powers find themselves locked into what Barry Buzan has called the ‘security complex’ within which they are expected to manage their rivalry and develop ties of cooperation. The principal factor defining a complex, according to Buzan, is usually a high level of threat/fear which is felt mutually among two or more major states. Historical evidence shows that although China has been a major security concern for India, the Chinese were less wary of India and concentrated more on the pattern of superpower rivalry existing between the United States and the former Soviet Union during the Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

A stable India-China relationship requires the effective management of the delicate China-India-Pakistan triangle. But, New Delhi remains suspicious of the China-Pakistan relationship and their resilient security ties, because of the Chinese decision to continue supplies of military equipment to Pakistan reinforcing the possibility of strategic encirclement of India.<sup>6</sup> While China's continuing support of Pakistan is partly motivated to contain India, it is also aimed at maintaining a stable relationship with an important Islamic country and a nuclear weapons state. By this, China would be able to retain its influence over the Islamic unrest in its own territory, especially in Xinjiang.<sup>7</sup> India continues to regard Pakistan as the principal external factor in its relations with China. While, China is attentive to the India-US strategic partnership and its implications for its relations with India on the other hand. Despite the remarkable improvements in bilateral economic relations between 2005 to 2014 serious differences remain. These include the unresolved boundary issue, Tibet, and the China-Pakistan nexus. The boundary issue involves more than 125,000 square kilometers in disputed territories. Many seem to believe that Obama's visit to India was the indicator of the forging of a strong alliance against China.

Both, India and America should find out way for cooperation in areas of common international concern where China has a significant role to play given its economic and military prowess. Ensuring international peace and security has been the common major objective of the three countries. Cooperation among the three countries is the key to achieving this very objective. It should be in the interests of India, America and China that they avoid getting involved in the strategy of containment of each other country that would have negative implications.<sup>8</sup> For India, China negative response to the growing relationship with America should not back-out India from moving further ahead when it is in the national interest of India.

On other hand China is closely watching the prospering India-America relations with suspicion because it is against the interest of it. China perceives that the expanding multifaceted relationship between India and United States is finally aimed at the containment of China. Beijing perception arises owing to the fact that both India and United States have clash of interests with the former. This is further accentuated by the fact that both India and United States have a close convergence of interests. China doesn't want to see India become a major great power in the world and the relationship with United States is the key to India achieving this objective. It also believes that the relationship would alter the regional balance of power. Chinese apprehension is fuelled by the growing defence and security relations between India and America. Also the military-to-military ties since the last one decade has improved significantly. Both countries have conducted a series number

of unprecedented and increasingly substantive combined exercises involving all the three branches of the armed forces. Beijing concerns over a regular India-America joint naval Malabar exercise off the Indian coast is owing to China's growing dependence on oil imports transiting the Indian Ocean.<sup>9</sup>

When PM Narendra Modi (BJP) came in to power (2014), some in China thought the new prime minister would “inject new vitality” into the relationship, given that he had made it clear in his previous avatar as a chief minister (the equivalent of a U.S. state governor) of Gujarat that he wanted to do business with Beijing.<sup>10</sup> There were expectations that Modi would be like Deng Xiaoping, focusing on internal strengthening and economic development, objectives which China — an infrastructure development and manufacturing powerhouse — could help him achieve. There was even hope that he would “steer...away from a tilt toward the U.S.” and limit deepening cooperation with China's neighbors like Japan. Some in China even expected that, as someone from the right, Modi could be India's Richard Nixon and achieve a breakthrough in resolving the border dispute. Foreign Minister Wang Yi publicly declared that the Sino-Indian relationship stood at “a new starting point.”<sup>11</sup> And Delhi reciprocated the optimism, with the Indian national security advisor speaking of the possibility of the relationship taking an “orbital jump.” It soon became clear, however, that the two sides could not leap over the obstacles that had dogged the relationship in the past. While Delhi and Beijing increased the frequency of their engagement, India looked askance at what it saw as a unilateral attempt to change the status quo at the disputed boundary in September 2014 (even as Modi was rolling out the red carpet for Xi in his home state), and at China's deepening relationship with Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that Xi endorsed in April 2015. China, for its part, was unhappy with the U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region in January 2015 and the incorporation of Japan as a regular participant in the annual America-India maritime exercise (revealed in July 2015). What followed were two years of strain in the China-India relationship, with various dialogues being put on hold, and the tone and temperature of the relationship heating up. It culminated in the Doklam crisis during which the two countries' militaries faced off in the Bhutan-China-India tri-border area (June-August 2017). The two years after that crisis have involved attempts by the two countries to turn the temperature down. The mantra of this period — one that has joined the lexicon of China-Indianisms — has been a phrase first mentioned when the two leaders met at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana in June 2017: that “it was important that differences should not become disputes and that in fact if they were handled well, they may even be opportunities.”<sup>12</sup>

There are multiple reasons why India has sought to engage China and seek stability. One, as mentioned above, keeping the China relationship stable is important

for domestic reasons. A peaceful periphery would allow India to focus on its socio-economic objectives at home, particularly economic growth, job creation, and social service provision. It could also mean India not having to divert expenditure from development to defence, and could buy time to build up Indian military capabilities. Second, PM Narendra Modi still hopes that India's economy can benefit from China's. India is very well known that China has the ability to affect India's interests and options — negatively or positively.<sup>13</sup> For instance, in the past Delhi has hoped that a positive relationship with China might persuade it to use its leverage with Islamabad to shape Pakistan's behavior in a way that might benefit India. India has sought to ensure a favorable balance of power in the region (and enhance its own capabilities) through a portfolio of partnerships not only with America but with Japan and Russia also. However, India does not like to be dependent on other countries and believes that its need for these countries vis-à-vis its China problem gives those powers leverage over India. Easing its China problem could reduce India's dependence on these partners.

One another reason that India does not like depending on other powers is that it is uncertain about their reliability. Moreover, India remains uncertain about American President's approach toward China and India. In last we can say that the diplomatic meetings between the leaders of India, China and the United States in recent years have drawn worldwide attention. In Indian context when we think more broadly, within and outside government, the debate in India involves questions like How much of a challenge is China? Can India incentivize China to be more accommodating? What is the right mix of engagement and competition? Is India doing enough to build its own capabilities? and Is India moving too fast or too slow in building partnerships?

But, overall, for the last decade at least, there has been a fairly consistent official Indian view of and approach toward China — one that has led to a deepening relationship not just with the America, but also with its allies and partners such as Australia, France, and Japan. How far those partnerships go will depend not just on Delhi, but also on the actions of Beijing. On other hand some Defence and Foreign Policy analyst in India recruitment always caution while dealing with China. They cite the reason that China has unsettled borders with India and she continues to occupy a part of Indian territories in Ladakh apart from strategic encirclement of India due to deepening relationship with India's neighbours.

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