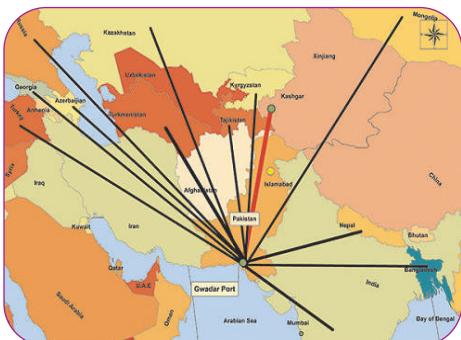




IMPACT OF SINO-INDIA CONFLICT ON INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA



Dr. Ran Vijay Singh

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science,
D.A.V.P.G. College, Lucknow.

ABSTRACT :

India and China, two eminent powers of Asia present unique chemistry of conflictual and cooperative relationship. The war of 1962, which led to 15 years of diplomatic stalemate and the longstanding territorial conflict on the Himalayan border, is the hallmark of Sino-Indian bilateral relations. Nevertheless, since the revival of political relations by 1978, till the present state of affairs, frequent high-level exchange of visits, and steadfastness in all areas of cooperation show that both countries are focusing more on commonality and less on dissonance at bilateral level. However, at the regional level particularly in strategic calculus of South Asia, the proclamation of Sino-Indian relations —despite their commitments to cooperate and bring mutual consensus—are different from actions. Looking at Sino-Indian relations under the realm of "Greater South Asia" and Indian Ocean, the intentions and statements of China and India are also poles apart. The global economic downturn, by confirming the eastward shift in the world's productive and economic capacity, will inadvertently make the rivalry more significant. Indeed, the crisis will provide China and India with more resources to compete with each other while projecting their regional rivalry onto the world stage. China has finally moved beyond Deng Xiaoping's mantra of "hide your strength, bide your time" in order to adopt a more proactive role in global affairs. India, having escaped the lethargy of the "Hindu rate of growth" and nonaligned foreign policy, is also adopting a bolder stance. Rising levels of nationalism accompany the growing international clout of both countries. This situation is exacerbated by unresolved core grievances including long-standing territorial disputes, trade imbalances, both countries' growing naval power projection capabilities and the role of third parties—for example, China's growing presence in South Asia and India's deepening relations with the United States.

KEYWORDS : India, China, Conflict, South Asia.

INTRODUCTION:

Implications of China's Economic Power

China's economic growth and liberalization has affected India in significant ways. China set a positive example for India in the 1980s by liberalizing its economic system and transforming China into an economic success story. However, the lessons of China's modernizations were implemented by its neighbor a decade later, after an economic crisis forced India to reform its bureaucratic economic system. China's economic growth and wealth has also decreased the incentives for it to engage in conflict with its neighbors, increasing its initiatives to make peace with India. Similarly, India's liberalization and growth has led its leaders to accept the same conclusion.

China and India are currently addressing their challenges with very similar programs that are meant to propel their economies and strengthen their militaries. Both countries face the threat of growing income

disparity, ethnic unrest, and separatism and both China and India are focused on modernizing and developing their economies to integrate more closely with the rest of the world. Minor disputes over territory do not further this agenda well. For China, high tensions with Taiwan provide a good reason to resolve old quarrels with India. In addition, China has concerns with internal security. Separatist movements in Xinjiang and Tibet continue to absorb much of its attention, and reflect problems that China is facing regarding its ethnic composition. Rising unrest from unemployment and gaping inequalities in income distribution between regions are exacerbating these ethnic divides. Securing its external borders and relations with neighboring countries allows China to focus on these growing internal problems.

Indian policy makers are more confident than their Chinese counterparts regarding their ability to deal effectively with domestic ethnic and economic forces. In fact, they overwhelmingly state in interviews that the unity of the Indian state does not hinge upon keeping Kashmir, whereas in the view of most Chinese policy makers, a separation from Taiwan could mean the end of China as we know it.

Rather than worrying about the country disintegrating, India is trying to refocus its national efforts on economic growth in order to match China's success. Indian growth rates have averaged 6% in the past decade, but growth needs to be even faster to eradicate poverty and raise living standards. Conflict and tensions with neighboring China and Pakistan have posed a large economic hurdle for India in the past, impeding foreign investment and absorbing critical budgetary resources. Moves by Vajpayee's government to foster ties with Pakistan complement the recent initiatives in China, and could eventually lead to a significant demilitarization of India's northern borders.

A breakthrough in relations with China is also likely to mean a tremendous growth in trade between the two countries in coming years. Whereas a decade ago, trade volume was a paltry \$300 million per year, it has now increased to \$5 billion, and growing. Trade estimates for 2004-2005 are closer to \$7 billion, and trade is expected to reach \$10 billion by 2005-2006. These changes mean a boost to the Indian economy, and greater interdependence between the two economies.

Of course, the field for competition has also shifted to economic interests. India eyes with envy China's rapid growth rates and competitiveness in the consumer goods sector. For years, Indians were worried that cheap Chinese goods were flooding the Indian market and threatening domestic manufacturing. In the past few years, however, businesses are looking to China more as a model for attracting foreign investment. The difference in FDI to the two countries is stark, China drew an estimated \$52.7 billion in FDI in 2002, whereas India attracted only \$5.5 billion. Indian businesses realize that much effort is needed to match China's performance in this arena, including added attention to education, infrastructure, and less bureaucratic entry and exit procedures for businesses.

China, for its part, is hoping to emulate India's success in the information technology arena. In China, recent media reports indicate that concerns are rising regarding India's increasing competitiveness in microchip manufacturing. Chinese analysts argue that because India's salaries are lower, costs are cheaper, thereby making Indian products more competitive. Language is also a factor in China's concerns. Businesses in China fear that U.S. businesses will prefer Indian products because of the Indian facility with English relative to their Chinese counterparts. In a strange turn of events, the Chinese population is now asking whether their market is likely to be flooded with cheap Indian goods. With common strengths and export markets, trade competition is inevitable. But competition on economic terms is beneficial for both countries.

An additional dimension of dispute is the issue of water flows. Most of India's river systems originate in China and the lack of trust stemming from the border dispute has deterred transparency and cooperation between the two countries in sharing information on hydrology, dam construction plans and water diversion projects. China's recently-revealed plans to build dams along the Yarlung Tsangpo River potentially threaten the water supply that feeds India's Siang River. These projects, which form part of China's grand South-to-North Water Diversion scheme, could undermine India's own water security initiatives. Given both countries' growing water shortages and their still significantly agrarian economies, the river flow issue threatens to further exacerbate border tensions.

CONTEST FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE

On the military front, China's development of the Qinghai-Tibet railway, its proposed extension to prefectures bordering India, and the deployment of additional border defense regiments and mountain brigades have strengthened the PLA's position. Expanding border deployment has been matched by increasingly bold action: in 2007, reported Chinese border violations along the Line of Actual Control were 778; in 2008, they grew to 2,258. Disturbingly, these violations concerned regions along the Sino-Indian border that have traditionally not been prone to instabilities, such as the Sikkim-Tibet boundary and the Indian state of Uttarakhand.

In response to China's increased military presence along the border, India has also adopted a bolder military posture by shifting from a doctrine of "dissuasive deterrence" to one of "active deterrence" supplemented by a strengthened military presence. This has included the 2009 deployment of a squadron of Sukhoi-30 MKI multi-role combat aircraft at the Tezpur airbase in the Northeast and two additional mountain divisions at China's border with Arunachal Pradesh. Though still lagging behind China, India has also increased infrastructure projects along the boundary that will enhance the Indian military's response time to hostilities. More than 60 roads are planned for completion by 2012, while the Home Office has proposed the construction of over 100 helipads across the northeastern states. Airstrips near the boundary were also assigned a medium-lift transport aircraft in eastern Ladakh in September 2009, which demonstrated India's enhanced ability to deploy troops in forward areas along the border. While none of these actions has been justified by either country as a means to target the other—India has explained its increased military presence in the Northeast as a means to target separatist insurgents, while China has attributed its initiatives as a response to Tibetan and Uyghur unrest, and both countries identify infrastructure projects with development needs—these initiatives have undoubtable spill-over effects on the ongoing standoff.

Beyond the movement of militaries along the border, the territorial dispute has also acquired global significance. Just as the rivalry between China and Taiwan moved beyond the Taiwan Strait as both sides competed for diplomatic recognition through "checkbox diplomacy", the Sino-Indian border dispute has also moved onto the world stage amid both countries' growing economic clout. This was most evident in the dispute over a US\$2.9 billion Asian Development Bank (ADB) loan to India that China attempted to block in March 2009, as it included funding for a \$60 million flood management program in Arunachal Pradesh. Such incidents will become more common as both countries acquire a greater voice in international forums.

Nonetheless, India's continued engagement with the Asia Pacific region as part of its "Look East" policy combined with less confrontational bilateral and more inclusive multilateral mechanisms ensures that engagement will continue, albeit at a quieter pace. US-Indian relations have matured to an extent that the trajectory is unlikely to change despite the pace and profile of the relationship being toned down. This was highlighted in the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2010, which notes that India's "growing influence, combined with democratic values it shares with the United States, an open political system, and a commitment to global stability, will present many opportunities for cooperation." This contrasts with the US assessment of China's rise, which is subject to less optimism as the "lack of transparency and the nature of China's military development and decision-making processes raise legitimate questions about its future conduct and intentions within Asia and beyond." The first cabinet-level India-US Strategic Dialogue in June 2010 reaffirms the unchanged trajectory of the deepening bilateral relationship.

China has simultaneously continued to make inroads into South Asia fuelled by growing strategic influence, resource needs and concerns over instabilities along its periphery. There is no longer a question of whether China will encroach on South Asia: China is now firmly embedded in the South Asian economic and security architecture. China's "all-weather relationship" with Pakistan has deepened despite concerns over the country's precarious political and security situation. Beyond military-to-military cooperation, around 60 Chinese companies and 10,000 Chinese nationals work in the country on 122 major development projects, including the Gwadar port and Saindak copper mine project in Baluchistan province, and the GomalZam Dam project in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). China is now Pakistan's second-largest trading partner and economic integration has continued to gain momentum facilitated by their free trade agreement, the establishment of the Pakistan and China Joint Investment Company (JIC) and an agreement to settle trade across the Xinjiang Uyghur

Autonomous Region border using the Chinese Yuan as the base currency (replacing the US dollar), which is a precursor for a currency swap agreement between both countries. China's ongoing support for Pakistan's civilian and military nuclear power program has also served as a veiled criticism of the civilian nuclear cooperation agreement between India and the United States.

INDIAN OCEAN DILEMMA

Military modernization underlies both countries' growing overseas interests. India's arms acquisitions in 2005-2009 totaled \$35 billion—more than double its spending in the previous five years (1999-2004) and accounting for seven percent of the world's arms exports, second only to those of the Chinese. While in 2010 China's annual increase in military spending dipped below double-digit levels for the first time in almost two decades, concerns remain over the transparency of China's military modernization. The fact that China's defense budget is more than twice that of India and second only to that of the United States also ensures that the trajectory of its initiatives to improve power projection, logistics, interoperability and informationization remains unchanged.

The most likely stage for a Sino-Indian military rivalry is the maritime theatre. Given both countries' growing strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, through which 80 percent of Chinese and over 60 percent of Indian oil imports transit, each is likely to perceive the other's naval modernization initiatives as inherently threatening. Notably, the January 2009 deployment of a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) naval taskforce in the Indian Ocean has turned hypothetical debate over China's blue water naval ambitions into a reality.

Meanwhile, India has continued to pursue its own aggressive naval power modernization strategy. The Indian Navy currently has 34 warships and six submarines on order to ensure that its force does not fall below 140 vessels. Despite delays in procuring some platforms, such as the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov (INS Vikramaditya), India has stepped up the indigenous development of its naval capabilities, including air defense ships (indigenous aircraft carriers), (Advanced Technology Vessel) nuclear-powered submarines and "stealth" Shivalik-class frigates, as well as developing a submarine-launched supersonic missile that modifies its BrahMos cruise missile.

India has also established a listening post in northern Madagascar in addition to strengthening its four naval commands, including the Andaman and Nicobar Joint Command located at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca, and deploying coastal radars in the Maldives. The Indian Navy has demonstrated its role in ensuring regional maritime security through high-profile operations, including participation in the multi-nation anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia since 2008, and humanitarian assistance to Myanmar following Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 as well as to countries devastated by the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004. The 2010 US Quadrennial Defense Review has noted that, "as its military capabilities grow, India will contribute to Asia as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond."

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS IN SOUTH ASIA

The implications of closer Sino-Indian relations for U.S. foreign policy are far reaching. Although India's close relations with the U.S. will remain a priority, maintaining positive ties with its large neighbor will probably be increasingly important to ensure future security. A warming of ties between these two countries also means that the U.S. needs to understand that China, India, and Japan could work cooperatively in the future, and attempts to play off India against China may be unlikely to bear fruit. At the same time, a more secure India will mean a more stable partner for the U.S. in South Asia, a less dangerous Asian dynamic, and a more attractive destination for U.S. investment in the future.

CONCLUSION

However, the rhetoric of economic integration should not be assigned exaggerated importance and the likelihood of irrational jingoism should not be underestimated. The Sino-Indian relationship will assume greater significance in the international system as the rise of both countries makes the rivalry more complex and multidimensional. Localized issues will assume greater regional and global significance given both countries'

growing clout. As such, a soft “Cold War” is the most likely scenario; growing economic interaction and political cooperation on international issues of mutual interest (like climate change) will coexist with mutual mistrust on regional issues (like the territorial dispute).

Finally, the emergence of a so-called “Asian Century” will be contingent to the emergence of a stable regional order. With the relative decline of the United States and relative rise of China in the Asia Pacific in the aftermath of the global economic downturn and the US preoccupation with conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, a new regional architecture will be necessary to contain longstanding adversarial relationships. With respect to India and China this will require both countries to move beyond the extreme rhetoric that has traditionally plagued their relationship, ranging from the idealistic cordiality of “Hindi-Chin bhaibhai” (India and China are brothers) to China’s belligerent claims that India is an “appendage of Western imperialism.” Both countries must instead recognize the need to forge a more robust relationship by embedding strengthened people-to-people contacts and deepened functional co-operation in areas of mutual interest.

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Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, D.A.V.P.G. College, Lucknow.