

# SINO-INDIA RELATIONS AND PAKISTAN FACTOR

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is focussed on the Sino-India relations with reference to two factors: US-India alliance and Sino-Pakistan cooperation. It also argues that the China and India have experienced stresses and strains in their relationship mainly due to their border disputes. Sino-India relations have gone through different phases; from border clash in 1962 to rapprochement in 1980s to a wider economic cooperation in the contemporary era with more focus on trade rather than political and strategic differences. However, China's military assistance for Pakistan and Sino-Pak cooperation on defence and strategic issues forces India to maintain strategic and security policy priorities in its relations with China. Similarly, China has been spotlighting and observing carefully 'India-US civilian nuclear cooperation' in the context of possible regional threats for China. Pakistan and China friendship and US-India ties have great impact on the way China and India interact with each other. This is clearly reflected in their policies and perceptions.*

**Keywords:** Sino-India Relations, South Asian Security, Nuclearisation in South Asia

## **Introduction**

India-China relations have gone through several phases over the last five decades oscillating from being warm in 1950s, the great tension in 1960s and 1970s to reconciliation in the 1980s and reformation in

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1990s. It might sound quite strange that despite several commonalities in relation to historical perspectives, societal structures, cultural values and the commercial circumstances, their symmetrical relations, both countries have gone through different course of turmoil and tensions throughout the history. Thus, the scholars who believe in a “rivalry theory” argue that Beijing-Delhi relations will remain stymied to important security issues (Kanwal, 1999).

The fast changing economic and strategic situation in the post-Cold War period has created new challenges as well as enormous prospects for both nations (India & China) to overcome their traditional passions and prejudices and move towards a prolific relationship. Both countries have now realised and recognised the need to co-operate with each other in various fields, so as to achieve the objective of peace and prosperity in the region and to contribute to world peace. For Example, Beijing’s accession to World Trade Organization (WTO) is the historic opportunity for Beijing and Delhi to establish the productive and profitable partnership that could help both nations. This will not only spur economic development and prosperity at home but also help establish an equitable global economic order for developing countries (Rumley, 1996).

### **Brief History of China- India Relations**

In order to understand the current debate on the relations between India and China one has to look back into the past for causes of conflict between these two big Asian nations who almost have 1/3 of population of the world. The first rift between these two countries was created on the issue of legality of McMahon Line, which is treated as de-facto border between these two nations. Originally the McMahon Line was established by the British government during their Colonial rule in Indian Sub-continent and was named after Henry McMahon (British negotiator during Simla Conference in 1914). The Line divided Tibet and Assam Valley. The Chinese

delegation refused to sign the agreement because they believed that Tibet was the part of China and was not authorised to make treaty at its own and refused to accept the terms of agreement. The Beijing has maintained her position and claimed that her territory ranges Southwards to Himalayan foothills. Later, when India became independent in 1947, the border issue became the bone of contention between two nations (Ambekar & Divekar, 1964).

In the 1950s, the process of arguments and counter-arguments continued between the two governments but to no avail. However, frequent border clashes starting in early March 1959, culminated in a final showdown in October 1962. India's military campaign against China signalled the end of an era of flowering relations between New Delhi and Beijing. Chinese forces captured large parts of Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. After the intervention by the international community China withdrew its forces to pre-war positions.

### **Sino-Indian Policies**

In the year 1964, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi introduced a concept of "hard realism" to country's policies. She believed that the harsh measures adopted by her government would enable India to dominate the South Asian region. In order to achieve this aim, Gandhi government began to project its military strength and power. A clear example of this policy was India's intervention in East Pakistan where it began to support Mukhti Bahmini (an anti-Pakistan organisation in East Pakistan) in order to create conflict with Pakistan. Later, when result seemed to be unclear (whether Mukhti Bahimi would be successful or not), India attacked Pakistan and separated Eastern part from the Western part of the country on December 16, 1971.

India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 in order to demonstrate that it was militarily strong country. In addition, the merger of

Sikkim in 1975 was also one of the power tactics used by India to keep its enemies down. However, these tactics couldn't bring fruitful result for New Delhi. Nevertheless, Beijing was annoyed by these Indian actions. Under the new leadership of Chao Enlai (prime minister) and the death of Mao (China's founding father and the ideological leader) in 1976, country experienced a shift in its foreign policy and thus, process of rapprochement started. The new Chinese premier Deng Xiaoping was much concerned about the economic development of China. Under his leadership a new phase of cordial relations started between the China and India.

Indira Gandhi did achieve the normalisation of relations between Beijing and Delhi. The diplomatic relations started between China and India in 1976 after the long period of fourteen years (since Sino-India war in 1962) (Sali, 1998). The normalisation of relations between both nations was in their own interests. India's economic development was completely dependent on the peaceful and cordial relations with China. The process of reconciliation continued even after the defeat of Indira Gandhi's Congress party in 1977. The new government in India was formed under the leadership of Desai who continued with the same legacy left by Indira Gandhi. He initiated number of measures to establish cordial relations with Beijing. The visit of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then foreign minister (who later became prime minister of India in 1990's) to China in 1979 was attributed to this cause. In response to Vajpayee visit Deng, the Chinese premier remarked that "both countries should put their differences on one side and develop their relations so as to move forward. Neither country poses threat to each other so why not both countries be friends" (Islam, 2009:4). The statement seemed to be much powerful (than ever) and was believed that this visit will bring some fruitful results for the common interests of both countries. The talks between the two countries, however, ended in stalemate due to their staunch stances over the places mainly on the border area. Both countries were not willing to compromise on the

border issue and thus it was the main hurdle in the establishment of friendly relations. Mrs Indra Gandhi when returned to power (again) in 1980, did resume talks with her Chinese counterpart. Five rounds of talks took place between the two governments but ended with no fruitful result. The relations further deteriorated when New Delhi announced to award full statehood to Arunachal Pradesh- the area Beijing claimed as her territory and Beijing forces moved into the Somdurang Chu Valley in 1987, as to control the situation but the tension was not converted into war (Liu, 1994) due to various factors.

India and China relations started getting better in 1980s, during the era of prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. There were several high level meetings between the leaders of both countries. The leaderships on both sides were keen to bring both countries on one table and start the process of peace. The leaderships on both sides decided to start cooperation in the areas beneficial for both countries by side-lining the border issue. To this end many scientific and technological agreements were signed by both countries. Several educational agreements were signed to enhance the field of education. In order to boost the process of cooperation between the two countries started cultural exchange programmes (Mehta, 1998). The process continued throughout the 1990s. During that period both countries premiers paid several visits which further strengthened the bond of relations between the two countries. The notable visit in 1991 was of China's premier Li Peng to India where he met his Indian counterpart Narsima Rao. Both premiers were on the terms that their territorial dispute should not hinder the cooperation in other fields of interests. They signed the Trade Protocol which benefited both countries in the field of trade and commerce. Later in 1993 prime minister Narsima Rao visited China. The visit proved to be the landmark in the history of relations of both countries by signing an agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the border line (Actual Line of Control- ALC) between India and China.

The agreement clarified the troubled areas and initiated Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to solve the border dispute between the two countries.

The cooperation further strengthened when Chinese President Jiang Zemin paid a first state visit to India in November 1996. The visit proved to be fruitful for the both countries as they agreed on four agreements of which the most important was the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). Both countries agreed to share geographical maps of the border and agreed to downsize the military on the troubled area. These agreements were the landmark for Sino-India relations and cooperation continued (Ranganathan, 1998).

The process of warming up in Sino-Indian ties got a sudden setback when New Delhi carried out her second nuclear test in May 1998. Beijing wasn't annoyed by India's great five explosions. Nevertheless, its sudden reaction came when New Delhi justified its explosion by highlighting Beijing as the threat to India. What shocked Beijing so deeply were not India's nuclear weapon tests but her premier (A. B. Vajpayee's) letter to American president Clinton, published in New York Times on 13 May, where he accused Beijing of being great threat to his country's security. The Beijing responded accusation as utterly groundless (New York Times, 1998). As a result, the process of rapprochement came to halt. The Beijing refused to participate in the joint working group for further CBMs to be held in each country. From a realistic perspective, it was unnecessary diplomatic provocation on Delhi's part that caused confusion (Garver, 2001).

The New Delhi did little to convince China to resume talks in order to clear the confusion. To remove China's concerns Jaswant Singh, Indian Foreign Minister paid a visit to China in June, 1999. He assured that Delhi didn't perceive threat from Beijing. Later New Delhi participated in security talks held in Beijing in March and

April 2000. Thus, the Joint Working Group of CBMs meetings restarted. Gradually with the exchange of official visits the bilateral relationship began to get momentum. The Chinese premier Rongji's visit to New Delhi in January, 2002, further strengthened the bond between two countries. Mr. Rongji clearly highlighted the issues between India and China. However, he identified three main areas in which India and China could cooperate. These areas included economic development, counter-terrorism and Pakistan-India talks (Garver, 2001).

### **Sino-India Relations and Sino -Pakistan Cooperation**

The catastrophic events of 9/11 brought new dimensions to these warming relations. The terrorist attack on the United States led America to invade Afghanistan. It also increased co-operation between India and America regarding terrorism and energy deals, which were viewed as problematic developments in Beijing. China began to see this new relationship between India and USA as an American effort to contain china. Chinese policy makers also saw these efforts as an American attempt to change the balance of power in Asia (Strategic Digest, 2002).

Nevertheless, the Chinese policy makers did not oppose the co-operation between India and America in fighting against terrorism. China was also affected by international terrorism in Xingjian and Tibet. Thus, since 9/11 China has also been supporting the war on terrorism. Therefore, the US-India alliance against terrorism was not a big issue for China. The real worry for Beijing was the increase in defence co-operation between India and America which China believed, would upset the balance of power in South Asia. More precisely, Beijing perceived the New Delhi-Washington military cooperation as source of counterbalancing in the South Asia (Goldstein, 2005).

China used her traditional strategy to maintain balance of power in the South Asia and to counter the negative effects of increased Indo-American economic and military co-operation. China enhanced its defence and economic ties with India's geographical partner Pakistan. Beijing considered her closer links with Pakistan one of her key long-term strategic geo-political interests in the region. For these reasons Beijing has always been supporting Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's geographical location is also important for China. Pakistan can help China in many ways to counter India. The country could be supportive in holding India back in Kashmir and Beijing needs not to deploy more troops in Southern Himalaya's region. Moreover, Islamabad would not be tempted in American favour due to popular anti American sentiments in general public (Mathur, 2002).

China considers Pakistan her important friend. Owing to its geo-strategic importance, Pakistan has played vital role in serving as a bridge between China and the Middle East. It has also a role in Sino-US rapprochement. On the issue of Taiwan which is major source of difference between USA and China, Chinese view is fully supported by Pakistan. The country has greatly benefited from the Sino-India rivalry. Pakistan has benefited in the fields of military and defence and economic development. The country has completed a number of key economic projects with the help of China. In addition, both countries are cooperating in almost all key sectors of economy including agriculture, information technology, energy and education.

During the Wen Jiabo's visit to Pakistan a new treaty was signed which could reduce Pakistan's sense of insecurity. It could also help to strengthen further territorial integrity and safeguard sovereignty and independence of the country. About Sino-Pak ties, former Chinese premier once remarked: "The friendly exchanges between the two people date back to the dawn of history, and such friendly relations have stood the test of history".

However, this does not mean that China attaches less importance to its friendly relations with India. During the visit of Wen Jiabo both countries reached agreement on the number of issues including Sikkim. It was made clear that Sikkim would not be part of China. Further, China acknowledged the positive role of India in regional and international environment. China also clearly said that it would not object to India's aspiration for becoming permanent member of United Nations. Both countries were also agreed to establish strategic partnership which could upset policy-makers in Pakistan.

### **China's Aspirations**

On economic issues, the war on terror served as blessing in disguise for China to further its future ambitions as regional and world power. As the American policy-makers concentrated on war on terror, it gave China an opportunity to increase its influence in South East Asia as well as in whole world. To counter the American-Indian alliance, China started ambitious plans to enhance its relations with the South East Asian and African countries. Due to increase in the America presence in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, China is building several strategic ports in South Asian countries. For example, China co-operated with Pakistan in building a deep sea port at Gawadar, a town in Baluchistan province of Pakistan just 150 miles from the mouth of strategic Strait of Hermez. China is also building a port in Bangladesh and another in Myanmar. The policy makers and strategic analysts call these ports as the "pearls of strings". China is trying to secure its energy supplies in future by maintaining its presence along the endangered oil supply route originating from Persian gulf and some African countries such as Sudan and Nigeria, through the Indian ocean to the South China sea. India views these developments as encirclement by China and threat to its national security and sovereignty. India is trying to turn situation into its favour by increased co-operation (military and economic) with America (Maass, 2009).

Apart from all other issues, another very important factor of Indo-China relations is Tibet. China sent its troops to seize Tibet in 1950; a considerable portion of Tibetans migrated to India and then created the Tibetan government in exile in India. The Tibetan leader, Dalai Lama, has been working for the separation of Tibet from China since forty years. He is trying to internationalise the issue so as to get support from the international community. It is believed that more than a hundred thousand Tibetan people are living in Indian cities of Dharamsala and are demanding full independence for Tibet. At many occasions Beijing has raised their concerns that separatist activities are being carried out from Indian soil. Though New Delhi has always denied the charges but Beijing has been urging India to do more to eradicate anti-China activities (Sautman, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

India-China relations would continue to be guided by their perception of national interests. For example, co-operation between Beijing and Islamabad in defence cannot be muted at the cost of their friendship. At best, the strategic alliance between Beijing and Islamabad can be managed in a manner that suits both Beijing and Delhi. Moreover, it is completely dependent on New Delhi's ties with Washington. Keeping in mind their old grudge both Beijing and New Delhi are still gripped to a certain degree (of 1962 war). Still much more from both sides is to be done to overcome the past reservations. However, it should not be believed that their attitudes towards each other are unchangeable. Change in their perception of security threats and the need to identify new economic and political interests would create significant improvement in Sino-India relationship. However, the tension between India and China would rise again due to border issues and alleged incursions into Indian Territory by the Chinese forces. Thus, the border dispute needs to be resolved if both countries are looking for real friendship.

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