

India, China and Pakistan: The Estranged Neighbours Of South Asia?

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Abstract: *India and China have a lot in common, yet they are as different as chalk and cheese. For one, both have a history that dates back thousands of centuries. In fact these countries have had the longest uninterrupted history as a nation. Both China and India wield considerable influence on world economy thanks to their sheer size and population. They achieved independence in the same century, yet the manner in which freedom was won speaks volumes about their policies. Chinese independence was a result of a never seen before military backed aggression. India on the other hand, won freedom after a prolonged non violent struggle.*

Keywords: *China, India, ,neighbourhood, Pakistan*

I. Introduction

Factual analysis of Sino Indian bilateral relation also determines the policies adopted by the respective countries in terms of dealing with international order. Traditionally China has used a confrontationist approach. For instance, its actions in the South China Sea, its conflicts with Korea, Taiwan, its role in the Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos conflict, etc. India and China have never had common political doctrines or organizational concepts; right from ancient times.

India on the other hand, has never been pro-active in declaring war with any of its neighbours. Even in the case of China, India (Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru to be specific) tried his best to assuage Chinese apprehensions. As a nation that was struggling to grapple with the task of nation building, India saw in China an ally thanks to its socialist ideologies. Pt. Nehru also believed in socialist policies, much to the angst of his political contemporaries. China's breaking of the Panchsheel policies was a setback from which India unfortunately never recovered.

However, relations weren't always this cold. Buddhism was a major influence in Chinese culture; so much so that almost the entire country embraced the religion. There have been references of China and its people in many of India's ancient literature. For instance, the Mahabharata makes a mention of China. Buddhism also saw the migration of Buddhist monks from India to China.

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As has been previously explained, India's mistrust of China began when the latter chose to discard the Panchsheel philosophy, which sadly continues even today. This seems to be a cooperation effort that does not have its basis on trust, but rather emerging out of economic necessities.

Relations started to deteriorate soon after independence when India chose to provide asylum to Dalai Lama and countless other Buddhist followers in Tibet. When China decided to seize Tibet, Nehru (who although recognized Tibet to be a part of the People's Republic of China), chose to provide shelter to Tibetans. This led to the Chinese aggression of 1962 where the MacMahon Line was openly rejected by China.

The humiliating defeat in the hands of the Chinese led India to increase its military presence in the north east regions of India. In fact, it is observed that China had deployed almost 400,000 troops in the area so as to keep its borders safe from Chinese aggression.

China's recent problems with India have its roots in the British demarcation of the Indo-China border. China refuses to acknowledge the MacMahon Line that demarcates Arunachal Pradesh to be a part of India. Any activity that takes place in this area is viewed skeptically by Chinese soldiers.

Visits from Indian diplomats and government authorities have always caused the issue to flare up. For instance, Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang to address his followers irritated China to no end. And any person with even a little knowledge of the Indo-Chinese-Tibetan problem knows that Beijing has always had a love-to-hate relationship with the Dalai Lama.

Another issue that irked the Chinese was the huge voter turnout of the local people in the state elections. It was reported that the voter turnout was almost 72% in the Assembly elections of 2009.

China had opposed to the Defense Minister Mr. A. K. Anthony's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. They even went on to openly question the Prime Minister's visit to the state. Although Mr. Singh was not named, he was the subject of a veiled criticism. The Chinese mouthpiece called his visit as an 'audacious and reckless move'.

China even went on to block a loan worth \$60 million sponsored by the Asian Developed Bank, because parts of the proceeds were earmarked for the development of Arunachal Pradesh. China also opposed the trade waiver granted to India by the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Thankfully, it changed its stance in the last moment.

Vis-à-vis the Indian Chinese diplomatic relations, it has always been a case of tit for tat. Thus if India allowed the Dalai Lama to visit Tawang, China supported various projects in PoK or Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. If the External Affairs Minister Mr. S. M. Krishna stated that Arunachal Pradesh was an integral part of India, the President Hu Jintao reiterated that China will continue to engage in projects with PoK. China is also said to be wary of India's development, especially the endorsement of its economic prowess by successive governments in the US.

Pakistan is famously referred to as China's 'all weather friend'. The Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang even went on to say that '...good neighbours are a blessing...' He was obviously referring to Pakistan (and not India). The Premier also made it a point to include Pakistan in his itinerary during his four nation overseas trip. This friendship has stood its test of time irrespective of the political ideology that took center stage in Pakistan. No wonder that the current Prime Minister chose to visit China instead of India for his first official tour.

But therein lies a catch! Although China has provided military and diplomatic support to Pakistan, it has never guaranteed protection. This is amply proved during the Indo-Pak war of 1965 and 1971. In fact, during the 1971 war, when Indian forces literally tore Pakistan apart to create an independent state called Bangladesh, the Chinese government criticized Indian aggression, but refused direct military assistance. This incident sort of set the tone for future Sino-Pakistani relations that continue till date.

Not until a few years ago, the South Asian region was relegated as an exotic place with little or no significance to world politics. But thanks to Islamic extremism, the region has become a hot bed for political activity. Afghanistan, for instance has become very important country to ensure regional stability. China has economic interests in Afghanistan- it has signed a contract to exploit the copper mines to the east of Kabul. The country's relationship with Pakistan is well established and hence China would not want Afghanistan to disturb the stability that exists here. Besides, China is also concerned about possible problems from the Sunni Muslims living in the West of China. A lot depends on the government that continues after the US withdraws its troops from Afghanistan next year. Its relationship with Afghanistan would largely depend on the stability of the Afghanistan government.¹

China's relations with other South Asian countries viz. Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma etc. has more or less remained cordial.

The Karzai government meanwhile seeks intervention from India wherein they wish to "...talk about more substantive issues beyond training and other soft issues." This intervention is considered vital to discourage Pakistan from its traditional interventionist policies towards Afghanistan.

China's friendship with Pakistan has been described to be "higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the Indian Ocean, and sweeter than honey." An example of this can be seen from the fact that the Pakistani Prime Minister himself visited China, two weeks after the gunning down of Osama Bin Laden. He invited China to build a naval base at Gwadar. But does China continue to warm up towards Pakistan? That remains doubtful!

China's policy towards Pakistan is largely determinant on three factors; arming Pakistan so that it remains a military competent to face India, using the country as a trade partner and finally, seeking help from Pakistan to prevent Islamist extremists from creating trouble in Western China. But all of these issues are gradually declining in significance. Chinese relations vis-à-vis India is more secure than ever. Until a few years ago, China's GDP was almost the same as India, but now it is almost four times as that of India. The country's military budget was a little more than what India had once upon a time. But today the budget is more than double than that of India.

But perhaps the most important of all is the growing threat to China from Islamist extremists and Pakistan's perceived role in harboring such terrorist groups. Pakistan as we all know has been consistent in its refusal to completely and wholeheartedly take action against Islamic terror groups. China is home to more than 8 million Muslim Uighurs who have constantly agitated for an independent state of East Turkmenistan. These terrorists are known to obtain support from Pakistan's tribal areas. Pakistan has continuously refused to restrict militants based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas or FATA as it is commonly known.

The Turkestani Islamists Party that boasts of receiving military training in FATA was responsible for a bomb explosion in Xinjiang. Demands include declaration of Xinjiang as an independent Islamic state. These bombings angered China to no end which issued harsh statements threatening direct military action in Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. TIP's growing dominance is also concerning because of its close ties to Al Qaeda. The outfit has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Xinjiang, besides threatening to kidnap key Chinese officials.

Interestingly, although both countries go a long way in establishing military relations, there has been very little activity on the economic front. For a friendship that dates back to almost 7 decades, Chinese investment in Pakistan is not more than \$1.83 billion (as on 2010). Official estimates from Pakistan however pitch it to around \$25 billion! Even if one were to accept the figures offered by the Pakistani side, this is comparatively low when compared to Chinese investment in other countries like Indonesia, where total investment amounted to around \$250 billion. The same can be seen in the area of humanitarian aid; Chinese aid to Pakistan in the wake of the 2010 floods has been just \$250 million. This is a meager amount when compared to US contribution that was around \$700 million.

India was once upon a time considered to be a formidable opponent of China. Both countries, by their sheer size and demographics constitute a large part of the world economy. This probably led China to build up its prowess against India. But this stance has considerably shifted in the recent years. India is now considered to be a 'third-tier security priority at best- far behind internal security and challenges in the East Asian Littoral'. There are several reasons for this change of heart. Some of them include;

1.1 China has massively scaled its military presence

In the 90's China's military budget was slightly lower than that of India. However, today its budget is almost four times bigger than India's. Even though India started filling its nuclear arsenals, it is miniscule when compared to China's arsenal. In fact, when India launched nuclear tests in 1998, China was more concerned about India's anti-China justification than the testing itself. This goes the same with deployment of military personnel. For instance, India deployed armed 100, 000 troops around the north eastern border of Arunachal Pradesh. But China deployed around 400,000 troops around the same area. It even went ahead and constructed a rail link between Beijing and Tibet to allow moving additional units.

1.2 Border Secured

China has meticulously worked to encircle India. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is comfortably ensconced between China in the north and Myanmar in the south. If a war were to break open between India and Myanmar, the latter wouldn't support China directly but shall directly offer its territory as a base camp for Chinese forces. This is the same in the instance of Pakistan. Despite its checkered help China knows that it has a loyal friend in Pakistan.

1.3 Trade with India Makes More Economic Sense

Indo-China trade is far more favourable than trade relations with Pakistan. Almost 70% of imports from India constitute raw materials, while China exports manufactured goods to India.

1.4 India doesn't Really Feature Prominently in US's Strategic Initiatives:

China's aggression towards India was largely a result of a fear that the latter has the blessings of the US in blocking China's efforts to become a regional super power. This was true during the Bush administration when India was pitted against China to counter its aggression. But the Obama administration isn't too keen on a partnership with India. In the words of Lalit Mansingh, "there is a feeling that in Obama's international calculations, India is not that important. The suspicion is building up that Obama is not as keen on the strategic partnership with India as George W. Bush was. There is, underneath the surface, a suspicion that the Americans are scared or too dependent on the Chinese

1.5 Chinese Change of Mind Regarding Terrorism in India and Kashmir

The Xinjiang bombings along with increased threats of kidnapping of Chinese workers in Pakistan made China realize on the true impact of Islamic terrorism. This was seen several times, more prominently when Beijing dropped its objection to the Jamaat-ud-Dawa being labeled as a terrorist organization. It had previously objected to this. China also developed a neutral approach towards the Kashmir issue after considering that this could have serious implications on peace in the region.

II. Economic Ties between India and China

As the old saying goes, 'Money makes the whole world go round'. It can also forge strange bonds of friendship between foes. The Indo-China war of 1962 can never be forgotten and shall dictate every little perception that both countries have about each other. But beyond this mistrust and suspicion lies a keen interest to explore the huge economic opportunities that has the potential to supercharge the global economy.

Border skirmishes aren't uncommon between India and China; they are a repeated exercise with each side trying to test waters. But thankfully both countries have had the sense to think beyond these differences and recognize the huge potential that lies in bilateral trade between these countries.

In the words of the Chinese Premier, Li Keqiang, "...we are the two most important emerging markets. However, our bilateral trade volume was less than \$70 billion last year..." Accordingly, when he visited India this year, diplomats across both sides of the table worked out agreements on issues ranging from hydrology, irrigation, sewage treatment, etc. Plans also included setting up a bilateral trade target of \$100 billion to be met by 2015. The \$100 billion target seems to be an ambitious goal, considering the fact that the Chinese economy is almost 5 times larger than India's. The value of India's exports such as ore, chemicals, cotton, plastics, fish, etc. doesn't even match Chinese exports of electronic goods, machinery, silk etc. Areas where India has a potential advantage includes outsourcing and pharmaceuticals. But Indian exporters need a gargantuan push in terms of friendlier export policies. Indian manufacturers are considered to be weak exporters.

Several Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) were signed this year with an aim to increase the trade deficit between both countries. Prominent among them were an MoU for the export of buffalo meat signed between the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine and India's Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority. Export of marine produce and fishery products was also assured through an MoU between the Marine Products Export Development Authority and the AQSIQ. Another important MoU that could prove beneficial to India is on the export of pharmaceuticals. This was signed by the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India and the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Medicine and Health Products. A tripartite agreement between Essar Energy Plc. China Development Bank and PetroChina International Co. Ltd. was also signed to guarantee \$1 billion financial cooperation. Essar would be supplying refined fuel to PetroChina as a means to backup on its debt.

The Chinese government has repeatedly called for more exports from the Indian side. In the words of the Chinese Premier, "There will not be a strong Asia without co-operation between India and China..." He also cited the example of TCS which has provided the core software on which most banks in China are managed. But despite all of these, both countries seem to have intentions that tend to move beyond trade and finance. For instance, one observer noted how Tibet could offer a huge potential through hydropower. Back here in India, environmentalists are concerned about the impact of such a move on the Brahmaputra.

III. Conclusion

On his recent trip to India, the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang never missed an opportunity to wax eloquent about the importance of stronger Sino Indian ties. India's ties with China date back to thousands of centuries. Unlike the US they are not a nation state; they are a civilization state. Both of them have pride in their rich cultural heritage and history. It is not the similarities but the difference that make the countries they are. These basic differences in culture and approach towards other countries do in fact shape India and China.

For instance, Indians have always followed a policy of defence, whereas China has always followed a policy of aggression. It does not hesitate to use military force to meet political gains. In fact, the then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai went on to say that the only reason why China went on to war with India was to 'teach India a lesson'. In the same manner, they attacked Vietnam to 'teach it a lesson, just like India'. In fact it is this aggressionist policy that has managed to instill fear among China's neighbours. India on the other hand has never used force; the principle of non violence is deeply ingrained in our ideologies and forms a cornerstone of its foreign policy.

India and China are two emerging super powers in Asia. The world however seems to see their relations only under one light- they see them as adversaries constantly waiting for an opportunity to get back at each other. But truth be told none would like to take a confrontationist approach. For the simple reason that none can afford. Right now, Beijing cannot afford to be seen as an aggressive (doesn't matter that the truth is completely different) nation. Neither can India.

Yes, a war between these two countries is not inevitable, but is also not impossible. Rising nationalism, lack of natural resources, internal pressures are some of the factors that could force both countries to go for a war.

Increased bilateral trade between both countries is the only long term solution. Right now it remains at just \$70 billion. Although the aim is to increase it to more than \$100 billion, it is important that concrete steps have to be taken to ensure that this is achieved. China's relationship with India is not only important for both countries, but also for the sake of regional stability in South Asia.

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