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CLAWS Journal

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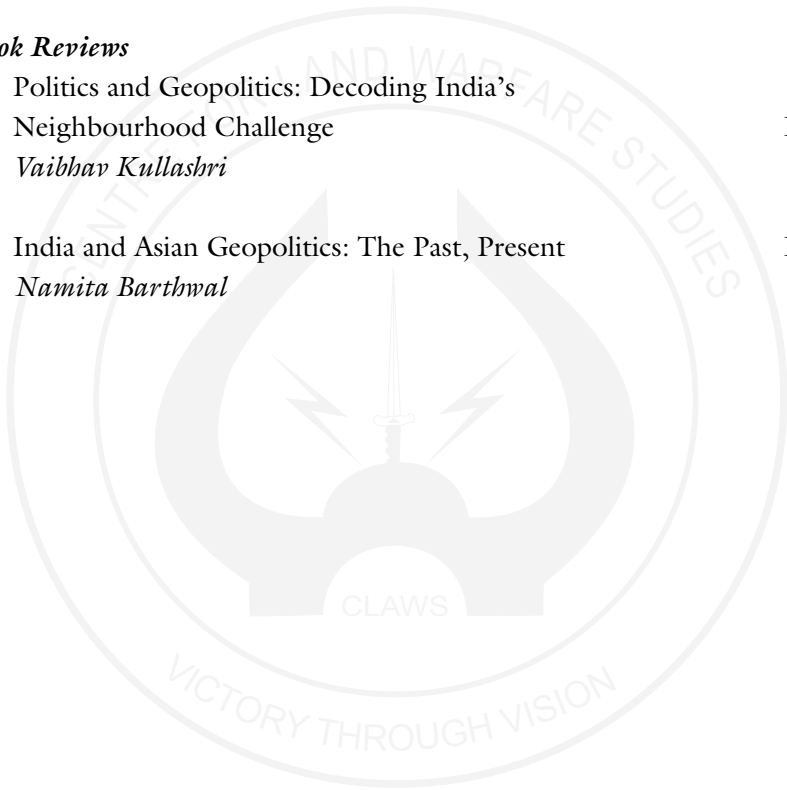
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Note from the Editor

India's geographical breadth and reach, has ensured an extensive and extended neighbourhood which has provided the policymakers with a complex range of difficulties that are almost a microcosm of the challenges confronting the global community as a whole. As a result, India's foreign policy toward its extended neighbourhood, like that of any other country, must embrace the goals of improving opportunities for its citizens to maintain and enrich their life by providing them a safe and secure environment.

Keeping this in the background, the CLAWS Journal 2022 Summer issue has selected the theme—"India's Strategic Neighbourhood". The phrase "strategic neighbourhood" can be defined in a variety of ways. Apart from Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, nations sharing land and maritime borders with India include China, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, and this goes beyond the geographical description of South Asia. Several countries outside of this list are also linked to India through close economic and diasporic ties, as well as developments perceived by Indian policymakers as having strategic implications; this category includes countries along the Indian Ocean, the East African coast, the Gulf region, Afghanistan, the Central Asian region, and countries in Southeast Asia.

India's immediate strategic neighbourhood remains in complicated security and foreign-policy dilemma in and of itself, having boundary disputes with China and Pakistan, both of which have significant military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, and a strong relationship, posing a challenge to Indian policymakers. Because these borders are not natural and there are overlapping ethnic communities on both sides, instability and uncertainty in relationships but also uncontrollable migration, cross-

border insurgent and criminal linkages, as well as domestic political pressures on the Indian leadership are sometimes related to developments across the border. This unrest feeds into India's strategic ties with neighbouring nations, complicating any efforts to address the looming 'non-traditional' challenges.

India's immediate as well as extended neighbourhoods are also a source of technology, energy, beneficial economic and commercial cooperation as well as mutually enriching cultural exchanges. Whilst the negative tendencies need to be countered, opportunities need to be nurtured, by going beyond the zero-sum thinking, for India to grow into a technologically sophisticated and socio-economically enriched society. Problems that were remote until a few decades ago are now closer to home due to India's growing role, economic ties, and large diaspora. Tensions in the ostensibly faraway waters of the East China Sea, South China Sea, Mediterranean, and remote areas of the Indian Ocean region directly influence India. Hence it is time that we intensively engage with our immediate neighbours on all fronts be it strategic, economic, socio-political and people to people exchanges.

Editor-in-Chief

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India's Strategic Outlook Towards Its Neighbourhood States

Gautam Sen

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to examine the problematics that the neighbourhood states face, their fault lines and how they affect the peace and stability in South Asia in general and towards India in particular. The analysis of the same would lead us to define India's strategic outlook and decision making. It would hence be necessary to cast India's Strategic outlook in relation to the conceptualisation of the term National Interest, the emerging global order and the fault lines in the new Global Order and a brief understanding of the phenomenon of nuclear proliferation, collapse of Communism and keeping in mind Huntington's postulation of the clash of civilisation and its aftereffects as we see in the 21st century.

Introduction

Globally no other nation-state is surrounded by neighbourhood states which can be termed as "illiberal states".¹ According to Zakaria, illiberal democracies are increasing around the world and are increasingly limiting the freedoms of the people they represent. India's immediate

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neighbourhood thus comprises of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar covering the West to the East on its northern side having an international boundary along with China with whom India shares over 3000 km of international border. Down South is the island state of Sri Lanka which is separated by the sea. It is to be noted that all the neighbourhood states listed above are illiberal states in one form or the other.

Definition of National Interest²

What exactly is national interest? Napoleon had said that he was acting in the interest of France when he initiated his campaign against Russia, and later when he launched his desperate battle at Waterloo. Adolf Hitler justified his expansionist policies, including annexation of Austria and breakup of Czechoslovakia, in the name of Germany's national interest. "Friendly socialist" governments were installed in Poland and other East European countries by Stalin in the name of the Soviet Union's national interest. President Bush was acting in America's national interest when he led the war against Iraq on the question of Kuwait's annexation by Iraq. Benazir Bhutto thought that it was in Pakistan's national interest to destabilise the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Thus, all actions, howsoever, wrong are taken in the name of national interest. We must now try to find an acceptable definition of national interest. The idea of national interest is singularly vague. It assumes a variety of meanings in different contexts. The concept of national interest has not been objectively or scientifically defined. However, Padleford and Lincoln observe: "*Concepts of national interests are centered on the core values of the society, which include the welfare of the nation, the security of its political beliefs, national way of life, territorial integrity and its self-preservation.*" According to Robert Osgood, national interest is "*state of affairs valued solely for its benefit to the nations.*" Morgenthau maintains that the main requirements of a nation-state are to protect its

physical, political and cultural identity against threat from other states. But, Joseph Frankel writes about aspirational and operational aspects of national interest. Aspirational (what one expects) aspects include the state's vision of good life and an ideal set of goals to be realised. Put into operation, national interest refers to the sum total of its interests and policies actually pursued.

Therefore, the governments try to narrow the definition of "National Interest" to Defence, National Security, economy, Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Foreign relations and the state of general national affairs.

The Global Order

The Contemporary Paradigm

With more than two hundred nation-states on the roster of the United Nations, loss of bi-polarity due to the demise of the former Soviet Union, proliferation of nuclear technology and weaponisation of nuclear technology creating multi-node nuclear weapon state actors, plus the complexities of globalisation whose darker side is the evolution of international terrorism, has made study of security far more complex than what we have known or postulated even in the cold war period. The armed forces as an organisation will become even more significant for the nation-states to be used to contain internal security problems apart from maintaining the integrity of the nation-state from external aggression or projecting power beyond territorial limits. This entails the nation-states to rationalise the purpose of their national power of which one component is the organisation called the Armed Forces. Hence we observe that since 1630s, the role of national interest and defining of national interest becomes important to conduct the business of the present nation-state militarily, socially, politically, economically and diplomatically.

It is hence necessary to place ourselves on the track of thinking about the concepts of theory used in conjunction with methods and

methodologies in the complex mosaic of the use of force, international relations, diplomacy and internal compulsions of nation-states which have to grip with crisis of identity, centre-state relationship, religion, political ideologies and diverse range of ethnic as well as multi-racial problems. All the answers to the above dilemma confronting the political elites and the managers of government lie in how each nation-state rationalises her “national interest”. Secondly, national interest does not and cannot change with every change of Government be it a nation-state, which is developed, developing or underdeveloped.

Emerging New Global Order?

There are two questions that need to be addressed. First, if there has emerged a specific pattern of global order in the post-cold war period and if so what are its principle constituents. The second, is whether this order is to be defined in terms of globalisation.

There is obviously a pattern in the new international politics in the post-cold war stage as compared to the one that existed prior to the end of the cold war. The second question leads us to understand whether this contemporary order can be ensconced within globalisation. There is a major debate raging on this to understand the exact meaning and the process of globalisation. However, what is beyond doubt is that some kind of transformation is already underway. It is hence to be fathomed out as to what way it is to be discerned and what this will mean in practice.

A serious study to determine the overall character of the post-cold war world order is still in its infancy. We do not know how it will culminate. It is still not an ‘enclosed’ period with a determinate ending like in the case of the period between the two world wars. This makes it difficult to assign particular characteristics. While there have been individual aspects of the present order (ethnicity, identity, peacekeeping, humanitarian

intervention, globalisation, integration, financial instability, terrorism and the war against it, weapons of mass destruction, regime change, etc.), there still exists the lack of making any general evaluation of its essential nature. In the earlier period, the interest in the international order was largely 'negative' and lay on ensuring that no threats emerged from it. Today there is a high level of integration and interdependence and hence the interest is 'positive' which makes the international order act as a great provider of a large number of social goods. The international order today can deliver information, access to global social movements, economic resources, human rights, interventions, and action through non-governmental organisations at national and international levels and sharing of cultural artefacts.

It will be important to state that the new order which is unfolding is being pulled in a number of different directions. At one end of the spectrum, it continues to be largely state centric, concerned with structure of the balance of power, the polarity of the international system and the current form of collective security. At the other end is a widening agenda of order, which encompasses relationship between economic and political dimensions, new thinking about human security, examining the consequences of globalisation, human rights, and environmental security. In an address to the Congress on 11 September 1990, President George Bush spoke about his vision of the New World order as follows:

“A new era—freer from the threat of terror, stronger in pursuit of justice and more secure in quest for peace, an era in which the nations of the world ... can prosper—a world where the rule of the law supplants the rule of the jungle, a world in which nations recognize the shared responsibilities for freedom and justice, a world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.”

Hence it is difficult as yet to make out the characteristics of the contemporary world order because we live in the midst of it thus making it hard to get a historical perspective.

Fault Lines of New Global Order

Conceptually one can identify two main theories, which explain the post-cold war world. Liberalism and proponents of liberal persuasion like Francis Fukuyama, wrote one of the most effective articles entitled “End of History” in 1989, where he put across a set of assertions. First, history since the end of the French Revolution has been driven by the core dynamic conflict between the forces supporting collectivism and those endorsing ‘bourgeois’ individualism, second with the Russian revolution in 1917, the balance began to tilt toward ‘collectivism’ and third by the late 1970s the tilt began to go towards ‘individualism’ as the various efforts at economic planning in the Third World started to “show signs of fatigue”. Thus the cold war ended in terms favourable to the West where Liberal economic values would prevail globally. Hence there was no alternative to ‘bourgeois democracy’ to take over globally which in essence stated that while authoritarianism breeds war, democracies ushered in peace. Hence more the number of democracies, more were the possibility of a peaceful world. While the Liberals painted a more peaceful world, the Realists painted a bleaker picture of the world. They saw much more of chaos and conflict occurring because the international system continues to remain competitive and anarchic and past history showed the failures of building new world orders or the assessment of the world as it became after 1989, with all the barbaric wars, failed states and collapsing regions. The inference was hence that there was nothing to be too optimistic about. The three main political thinkers of the realist school to challenge the liberals were John Mearsheimer, Professor of political science at the University of Chicago, Robert D Kaplan, and Samuel Huntington of Harvard

University. Mearsheimer concentrated on the analysis of structure of the international system during the cold war in line with Kenneth Waltz's thesis on bipolarity which produced stability in the post-second world war and therefore its collapse could generate new problems, especially it would further nuclear proliferation as the most dangerous one. Mearsheimer also postulated that the division of Europe and Germany after 1946, had created new continental order and hence the unification of both would usher in uncertainty. He argued that with the collapse of Communism in the East, old ethnic hatred would resurface to thrust the continent back to chaos and bloodshed.

Kaplan in his study of the cold war worked on the assumption that economics and human collapse in parts of Africa were as relevant to our understanding of the future character of world politics. Kaplan felt that in his real world, old structures and traditional certainties were fast disappearings producing chaos and misery. Samuel Huntington, the third scholar from Harvard placed realism at the forefront of the post-cold war debate. He warned about the world after 1989. He refuted the Liberal argument by stating that the world now faced the cold war clash of secular economic ideologies, which meant no end to conflict as such. He postulated that conflict would assume a new form defined as a 'clash of civilizations' as evolution of conflict in the modern world. He argued that this conflict would be between the West and those other countries of the world and regions of the world that did not adhere to such values as respect for the individual, human rights, democracy and secularism. Identity and culture were thus the core issues to create antagonism and that they would form the new fault line in the post-cold war world, pitting those nations in Western Europe and the USA which embodied one form of 'civilization' against those in the Middle East, China and Asia, post-communist Russia, where the value system was profoundly different. He even has warned the West that unless the West recognised this reality, it will be unable to deal with it wisely.

To sum up, Ken Waltz's prediction about nuclear proliferation in post-Cold War, collapse of the Communism in the East resulting in ethnic hatred, Sam Huntington's postulation that conflict will assume new form due to the possibility of the clash of civilisations in which identity and culture would be the core issues to create antagonism to form the fault lines in the post-Cold War world between the Western Europe with the USA against those in the Middle East, China and Asia have come out to be true. Today, nation-states small or large, powerful or otherwise, democratic or non-democratic have to formulate their national security strategy individually by linking up with their own national interest by factoring in the evolution of the new world order emerging in the post-Cold War period. Therefore, every nation-state around the world will be affected by these happenings and India will be no exception. Hence the theoretical moorings of India's National Security Strategy and its linkage to her National Interest will lie in her policies to securitise her own strategic outlook towards her neighbourhood states juxtaposed against her own national security, national interest and national security perspectives.

India's Neighbourhood

In the following pages, we are going to undertake a composite overview of India's Neighbourhood States comprising of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and China in the North and Sri Lanka in the South to arrive at the Indian strategic outlook. This article will give a telescopic viewpoint for each of the neighbourhood states and draw the conclusion.

A few factors may be considered for evaluating the strategic outlooks as listed below:

1. Fault lines
2. Political Structure
3. Civil Society
4. Institutions

5. Judiciary
6. Military
7. Education
8. Industrial Capability
9. Financial Status
10. Trade and Commerce
11. Standing in the global comity of nations.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a land-locked and mountainous country, bordered by Pakistan in the south and east, Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the north and east. It sits at an important geostrategic location, at the crossroads of Central Asia.



Source: Britannica.com

Afghanistan is an Islamic country, with a turbulent history & a diverse population. The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan recognises the following ethnicities: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek and Turkman, Aymaq, Nuristani, Pachai, Qizilbash, Baluch, Arab, and Kirghiz. Afghanistan is a youthful country, with an estimated median age of 18 years for both men and women. Having acted as a buffer between the British and Russian Empires in centuries past, and following a brief period of democracy in the twentieth century, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. This led to other countries, including the United States, becoming involved, and a long and destructive war began. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US and its coalition allies launched a military campaign in Afghanistan in October 2001, which led to the fall of the Taliban later that year. However, situation remained fragile, and unstable despite the efforts of the international forces led by the US and 2010 marked the deadliest year and the Taleban led insurgency group started showing their capabilities to overrun the US-led coalition forces. As the Taliban surged and the US found it impossible to continue its operations, President Joe Biden on 14 April 2021, ended the longest war in United States history, announcing that the last remaining American troops in Afghanistan would leave by 11 September.

In the following weeks, the Taliban conquered dozens of rural districts and closed in on major cities. When the last of the US forces left Afghanistan, it left behind more than \$6 billion of arms including aircraft, helicopters, and allied military hardware which naturally fell in the hands of the Taliban who did not have a single pilot trained to fly any aircraft. It is estimated that US intervention in Afghanistan had cost the US more than \$1 trillion. The Taliban government has yet to be recognised by the UN. Thus on 30 August 2021, at 3:29 pm East Coast time Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr., commander of US Central Command reported that the last manned aircraft had cleared the airspace above Afghanistan. Hence by the time, the last military plane departed in the early hours of August 31

Kabul time the airlift had flown out more than 116,700 people on more than 720 military and chartered flights in just 15 days, according to daily passenger and flight data released by the White House. An additional 40,000 escaped on commercial, private or allied planes with US military supervision. But thousands more Afghans were still seeking refuge when the airlift ended, and at least 100 American citizens hoping to be rescued were left behind.³

Pakistan



Source: Worldatlas.com

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is the world's fifth-largest population of almost 242 million, and the world's second-largest Muslim population. Pakistan today is a middle power nation, has the sixth largest Army in the

world and declared nuclear weapons state Pakistan's political history since independence has been characterised by periods of significant economic and military growth as well as those of political and economic instability. In April 2022, Shehbaz Sharif was elected as Pakistan's new prime minister, after Imran Khan lost a no-confidence vote in the parliament. SIPRI evaluated that Pakistan was the 9th-largest recipient and importer of arms between 2012 and 2016. Pakistan had warm relations with Bangladesh, despite some initial strains in their relationship. Pakistan was one of the closest allies of the United States. Relations between Pakistan and Russia have greatly improved since 1999, and cooperation in various sectors has increased. Pakistan has had an "on-and-off" relationship with the United States. A close ally of the United States during the Cold War, Pakistan's relationship with the US soured in the 1990s when the latter imposed sanctions because of Pakistan's secretive nuclear development. Initially, the US-led war on terrorism led to an improvement in the relationship, but it was strained by a divergence of interests and resulted in mistrust during the war in Afghanistan.

Since the time Pakistan established formal diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, continues to be a dominant factor at all times. China is Pakistan's largest trading partner, and economic cooperation has flourished, with substantial Chinese investment in Pakistan's infrastructural expansion such as the Pakistani deep-water port at Gwadar. Both countries have signed 51 agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in 2015 for cooperation in different areas and Free Trade Agreement in 2000 and to crown the relationship. In December 2018, Pakistan's government defended China's re-education camps of more than a million Uyghur Muslims. Pakistan's latest debacle has been the unbridled corruption during the Imran Khan regime leading to mismanagement of finances and almost a state of bankruptcy. Pakistan faces an uphill task to rejuvenate the

economy and presently any conflict or war with India makes it an impossible preposition.

China, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh

These four neighbourhood states have been clubbed together. China has geographical congruous international border with Nepal and Bhutan and is separated from Bangladesh by a very small Indian territory which almost represents like a chicken neck. A small narrative first on India's relationship with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh will be followed by a narrative on China.

Nepal is an important neighbour of India and occupies a special significance in its foreign policy because of the geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries. The two countries shared a very strong relationship for a long time which has been impacted by some recent events and issues.

India-Nepal ties have declined due to **border issues**, and **internal security issues**: Open border between India and Nepal leads to illegal migration and human trafficking threatening Indian security. **Big Brother attitude**: There is a widespread perception in Nepal that India does not respect the country's sovereignty. **Peace and friendship treaty**: The India-Nepal treaty of 1950 has been criticised by the Nepali political elite as an unequal one. Treaty obliged Nepal to inform India and seek its consent for the purchases of military hardware from third countries. Nepal wants to change this provision. **Nepal's growing proximity to China**: In recent times China's presence has increased in Nepal which has heightened India's security concerns. China plans to extend the Tibet railway to Kathmandu across the border in the next few years. Nepal signed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework agreement with China. **Demonetisation**: Demonetisation has badly affected Nepali nationals because those notes were legal tender in Nepal too. India thus has to extend areas of cooperation in Trade and Commerce, Water

Resources and Energy cooperation: Defence Cooperation, Infrastructure and connectivity.

Bhutan: India and Bhutan have been sharing ties since 1910 when Bhutan became a protectorate of British India, allowing the British to “guide” its foreign affairs and defence. Bhutan also has a historically tense relationship with China. Bhutan shares a 699 km border with India and shares border with four Indian states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Sikkim. The basis for bilateral relations between India and Bhutan was formed by the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1949. However, Article 2 of the treaty critically gave India a role in guiding Bhutan’s foreign policy. Hence, some changes in the treaty were made in 2007. Security of Bhutan’s present borders especially its western border is very important for India. A politically stable Bhutan is important to India. About 60,000 Indian nationals living in Bhutan, employed mostly in the hydroelectric power construction and road industry. In addition, around 8000-10,000 daily workers enter and exit Bhutan every day in border towns.

Bangladesh: The friendship between India and Bangladesh is historic, evolving over the last 50 years. India’s political, diplomatic, military and humanitarian support during Bangladesh’s Liberation War played an important role in Bangladesh’s independence. Post-Independence, the India-Bangladesh relationship has oscillated as Bangladesh passed through different regimes. In the last decade, India-Bangladesh relations have warmed up, entering a new era of cooperation, and moving beyond historical and cultural ties to become more assimilated in the areas of trade, connectivity, energy, and defence. Bangladesh and India have achieved the rare feat of solving their border issues peacefully by ratifying the historic Land Boundary Agreement in 2015, where enclaves were swapped allowing inhabitants to choose their country of residence and become citizens of either India or Bangladesh. Bangladesh is India’s biggest trading partner in South Asia with exports to Bangladesh in

FY 2018-19 at \$9.21 billion and imports at \$1.04 billion. Bangladesh accounts for more than 35 per cent of India's international medical patients and contributes more than 50 per cent of India's revenue from medical tourism. Having said that it is important to note China is the biggest trading partner of Bangladesh too and is the foremost source of imports. In 2019, the trade between the two countries was \$18 billion and the trade is heavily in favour of China," Recently, China declared zero duty on 97 per cent of imports from Bangladesh. The concession flowed from China's duty-free, quota-free programme for the Least Developed Countries. India has provided developmental assistance worth \$10 billion, but China has promised around \$30 billion worth of financial assistance to Bangladesh to overcome India's assistance. Bangladesh's strong defence ties with China make the situation complicated and China today is the biggest arms supplier to Bangladesh. Bangladesh forces are equipped with Chinese arms including tanks, missile launchers, fighter aircraft and several weapons systems, including two Ming class submarines.

China: What is worrisome is China-Nepal strategic relationship with inking nine agreements in the month of March 2022. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 27 March 2022 held talks with Narayan Khadka Nepal's top leadership, and discussed bilateral relations and mutual cooperation, including one on the technical assistance scheme for the China-aided feasibility study of Cross border railway which is an important component of the Trans-Himalayan Multi-dimensional connectivity network between Nepal and China. The cross-border railway was incorporated into China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) at the second Belt and Road Forum for international cooperation in April 2019. Khadka reiterated Nepal's commitment to 'One China' policy and not to allow any activity against China in Nepali territory. Both sides reaffirmed their support for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national independence of each other. "They underscored the importance of the

exchange of high-level visits on a regular basis in order to strengthen mutual trust and confidence and to further consolidate Nepal-China relations”.⁴

Myanmar and Sri Lanka

The developments in Myanmar have been disquieting ever since the Coup. In September 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) invited a representative from Myanmar’s National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of detained former leader Aung San Suu Kyi, to its virtual summit for political parties in South and Southeast Asia. The overture came shortly after Beijing’s special envoy for Asian affairs, Sun Guoxiang, paid a low-key visit to Myanmar, where he asked to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and was denied access by the authorities. Sun made another unannounced visit this month. A September editorial from the *Global Times*, a CCP-owned newspaper, called the NLD the “legitimate party in Myanmar”. But Beijing sees a fine line between supporting the NLD and supporting the underground National Unity Government (NUG), which seeks to overthrow the junta and upend the pre-coup status quo. Although the NUG is stacked with NLD members and former ministers, to China it appears a force of instability. Increasingly, China is now operating under the assumption that the junta will eventually establish effective control of Myanmar and so has moved toward de facto recognition of its authority. While maintaining a line of communication with the NLD, Beijing now seeks to sit out the deepening crisis and push ahead with its own interests in Myanmar with the group that holds power. China has called for dialogue between the junta and those fighting against it, but it has cited non-interference as justification for not putting more pressure on the generals—a position that puts it at odds with Japan, South Korea, and the West and in strategic terms important for India to take note of.

Sri Lanka

Unlike all other Neighbourhood states of India, Sri Lanka poses the maximum instability to the region of South Asia because of its economic meltdown. Sri Lanka's economic outlook is highly uncertain due to fiscal and external imbalances. Urgent policy measures are needed to address the high levels of debt and debt service, reduce the fiscal deficit, restore external stability, and mitigate the adverse impacts on the poor and vulnerable. The World Bank in its twice-a-year regional update on 13 April 2022, in the **South Asia Economic Focus**, released the report *Reshaping Norms: A New Way Forward*. It projects the latest projects in the region grow by 6.6 per cent in 2022 and by 6.3 per cent in 2023. The 2022 forecast has been revised downward by 1.0 percentage point compared to the January projection, mostly due to the impacts of the war in Ukraine. To quote the World Bank will be appropriate:

*“The World Bank is deeply concerned about the uncertain economic outlook in Sri Lanka and the impact on people,” said Faris Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. “We are working on providing emergency support for poor and vulnerable households to help them weather the economic crisis and we remain committed to the wellbeing of the people of Sri Lanka, and to a narrative of sustainable and inclusive growth that will require concerted and collective action”.*⁵

India's Strategic Objectives Towards her Neighbourhood States

1. India should counter Chinese hard power by projecting soft power. In contrast to China's efforts to muscle its way into Nepal, India should emphasise on its historically close cultural, religious, and people-to-people relations with Nepal. India should provide an

alternative narrative for India-Nepal ties, one that takes into account longstanding people-to-people ties and cultural connect. Thus, India should maintain the policy of keeping away from internal affairs of Nepal. Meanwhile, in the spirit of friendship, India should guide the nation toward more inclusive rhetoric. With its immense strategic relevance in the Indian context as an Indian security concern, a stable and secure Nepal is one requisite which India “*can’t afford to overlook.*”

2. India should intellectually neutralise the Chinese notion of “invincibility” from their (Chinese) mindset. This will ensure that China does not embark on further adventurism as she did in Eastern Ladakh.
3. Diplomatic efforts should be launched to offset any Chinese attempt to recognise Afghanistan under the Taliban internationally till the regime in Afghanistan undertakes to usher in democratic norms of human rights, gender equality, constitutional reforms, establishment of a Judicial System, and Rights to Education to all, Freedom of the Press, Religious freedom and the freedom of speech.
4. Vis-à-vis Bhutan, India should try as much as possible to remain out of Bhutan’s internal matters, though it can act as a mentor only if Bhutan desires. Safety of Border from China is a concern for both nations. Therefore, both sides need to work together on this issue.
5. Chinese inroad in Bangladesh’s trade and defence requirements is alarming and it is virtually arming Bangladesh to become a very modern force with Chinese dependency. It can be a hostage to Chinese mechanisation against India when Bangladesh’s regime may or could become unfriendly towards India.
6. India has to have a strategic outlook to mitigate Sri Lanka’s instability with immense amount of aids and grants to ensure it does not fall further in a debt trap in the absence of strong leadership or from

becoming a Chinese satellite state never to recover as a sovereign nation.

7. Chinese attempt to cosy up with Myanmar and having an aspiration to recognise its present military regime, in the long run, is strategically important for India to take note of. Indo-Myanmar international border is quite porous and needs to be addressed so that China does not take advantage of the same.
8. India's strategic objectives toward Pakistan must factor in the "Resilience" that Pakistan is displaying post-Imran Khan regime and her growing relationship both with China and Russia too. Pakistan though referred to as a "failed state, or a rentier state, or a deep state⁶ or even a soliciting state" has been displayed in various forms of academic writings. It has created warm relations with Bangladesh but more than that Pakistan's display of resilience to take on all adversarial situations is a continuum.

Notes

1. Refer and see Wikipedia on "Illiberal Democracy" In a 2014 speech, after winning re-election for the first time, Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary described his views about the future of Hungary as an "illiberal state". In his interpretation the "illiberal state" does not reject the values of the liberal democracy, but does not adopt it as a central element of state organization. Orbán listed Singapore, Russia, Turkey, and China as examples of "successful" nations, "none of which is liberal and some of which aren't even democracies." See "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp". 30 July 2014. And so in this sense the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organization, but instead includes a different, special, national approach and also "Orban Says He Seeks to End Liberal Democracy in Hungary". Bloomberg.com. 28 July 2014. Retrieved on 22 October 2017.

I have serious reasons to disagree what Fareed Zakaria analysed and described India as the largest illiberal democracy in the world, in his book *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. An example of an illiberal democracy can be said to also define Singapore, especially during the leadership of its first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew See Mutalib, H (2000). "Illiberal democracy and the future of opposition in Singapore". *Third World Quarterly* 21(2): 313-42.

2. I have purposely quoted in original from my own writings related to Definition of National Interest, The Global Order, The Contemporary Paradigm, Emerging New Global Order, Fault Lines of New Global Order. See Gurmeet Kanwal (ed.) *The New Arthashastra: A Security Strategy For India*, (HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 2016), pp. 4-9.
3. See Tara Copp Report Senior Pentagon Reporter, Defense One, 30 August 2021, 4:36 PM ET.
4. <https://www.deccanherald.com/international/china-nepal-ink-nine-agreements-for-bilateral-cooperation-1095028.html>
5. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/13/sri-lanka-faces-unsustainable-debt-and-balance-of-payment-challenges>
6. Jyoti M. Pathania, *Deep State Continuum in Pakistan & Implications for India*, KW Publishers, New Delhi, 2022.



India's Strategic Gameplan vis-à-vis China-Pak Collusive Linkage

K J Singh

“For China, Pakistan is low-cost secondary deterrent to India while for Pakistan, China is a high value guarantor of security against India.”

—Hussein Haqqani

Abstract

The basic approach of this article is to discuss an outline optimum strategy or broad game-plan to tackle collusive Sino-Pak threats. The detailed strategy and specific action plan are beyond the scope of this article. However, deliberations and inferences drawn in this article can help refine/validate template for such formulation. It will be appropriate to reiterate that clarity on threat parameters is an essential pre-requisite for planning levels of preparedness, force structures, equipment profile, modernisation and budgetary allocations, hence these are discussed in brief. Reasonable assumptions have been factored in, where necessary, as detailed national security policies are yet to be promulgated.

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Introduction

The ongoing Chinese aggressive deployment and prolonged face-off in Ladakh have rekindled the debate on collusive threats posed by two neighbours, China and Pakistan. The latter has maintained an aggressive and hostile posture with calibrated proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), fire assaults on unsettled Line of Control (LoC) and hostile presence on Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL). It is heartening that cease-fire inked in February 2021, has been holding for the last fourteen months. China has delayed resolution of border, coupled with orchestration of transgressions and ‘salami-slicing’ at periodic intervals, to stake her claim on shifting claim lines, on Line of Actual Control (LAC). India and Bhutan are the only two neighbours, having dubious distinction of unsettled land borders with China, due to stonewalling and obduracy by Beijing. These coercive orchestrations are primarily designed to keep India in check and unsettled, thereby denying her development, progress and stability.

The recent strategic situation on Northern borders coupled with ongoing proxy war in J&K has once again stoked concerns on challenges of two and half front threat. It has thrown up number of issues, relating to scope of collusion, likely manifestation scenarios, designation of primary and secondary threats and above all, need for an effective response strategy. The scope of collusion between Pakistan and China transcends from geo-strategic to geo-economic and other domains like defence manufacturing, transportation, power generation, nuclear weapons and space. The most notable multi-dimensional, collaborative project is ongoing China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is described as a signature project for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and sets a new benchmark in collusive collaboration.

Preview

The subject is analysed with a focus on the following major parameters:

- (a) Collusive Linkages—Definitions, Scope and Manifestation.

- (b) Historical Context.
- (c) CPEC—New Collusive Paradigm.
- (d) Construct and Catalysts for Collusion.
- (e) Strategic Options to Counter Collusion.
- (f) Summary of Recommendations.

Collusive Linkages-Definitions, Scope and Manifestation

Definitions. ‘Collusion’ and its derivatives like ‘Collusive’ are terms increasingly used in geo-strategic dialogue and have spawned another more commonly used, non-dictionary but colloquially popular variant, ‘Collusivity’. The word may soon get included in the dictionary, considering its extensive usage. Webster’s dictionary defines, Collusive as “secret agreement or cooperation especially for an illegal or deceitful purpose.”¹ More appropriate formulation in our context is outlined in Collins Dictionary as an adjective, “Collusive behaviour involves secret or illegal co-operation between countries or organizations”.² There are many other definitions but common strand in almost all is threefold, co-operation characterised by secrecy and deceit. Collusion requires collaboration or working together, albeit in covert or secret mode combined with deceit. China and North Korea provide an apt example of such comprehensive collusive linkages. Sino-Pak relationship is another such case study. With China acting as nucleus, relationships with North Korea and Pakistan are a complex web of concentric, collusive networks including nuclear proliferation. As a concept, it is natural that alliances, especially in security domain, facilitate or promote some degree and form of collusion. Most security pacts, invariably have classified/secret clauses and even classified annexures. An apt example was, leasing of Shamsi airbase, by Pakistan to UAE for hunting and in turn, base being sublet to US forces for drone and missile operations against Taliban. Tri-lateral collusion essentially was a clever ploy for bypassing regulations and pressure of domestic lobbies. However, presence of American personnel

on air-bases like Shamsi and Jacobabad, accorded Pakistan some degree of immunity, during Operation Prakram in 2001-02. In all probability, India would have been constrained to omit these bases from possible target lists in the event of hostilities.

Scope. The scope of collusion is defined by geo-political and geo-strategic templates but transcends increasingly into geo-economic domains. Recently, Chinese President, Xi Jinping in a telephonic chat with Imran Khan hailed their ties as between ‘iron brothers’.³ A commentary in state-run Xinhua news agency in 2013 during the visit of the Chinese PM to Pakistan stated that “China and Pakistan have shaped a paradigm of neighbour-to-neighbour relations. Their time-tested friendship, described by some as “higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans,” is not just a bunch of empty words”.⁴ The important and relevant details of Sino-Pak collusion are mapped later in this paper, in the section on historical context. It will be appropriate to emphasise growing scope of collaborative linkages, which is now being referred to and alleged in secret bio-weapon labs in China and more recently in Ukraine, reportedly funded by USA and western pharmaceutical lobbies. CPEC also has plans for vaccination projects.

Manifestation of Collusion. Collusive ties as per conventional understanding are described to be secretive like nuclear exchange between China and North Korea and Pakistan. They even incorporate deniability, as was attempted by AQ Khan and his clique, in proliferation of nuclear designs on Iran and Libya. Notwithstanding, the emphasis on secrecy in basic definition, there are methods to project positive aspects and hide spin-offs with security pay-offs. It is axiomatic that in age of enhanced transparency through satellite imagery and remote sensing techniques, collusion will be **couched and designated, invariably for benign purposes like communications, connectivity and economic development, CPEC, which is discussed later, is the most relevant example in this context.** In an era, where wars are described as ‘Special

Operations', **collusion rather than declared collaboration is likely to become the new normal accompanied by deniability.**

Forms of Collusion. Collusion may adapt various shapes like *synchronized or sequential/deferred in timing*. It may be *planned or even impromptu* to take advantage of a situation/opportunity or redress reverse/criticality. Deployment of Seventh Fleet by the USA in Bay of Bengal in 1971 operations was deferred collusion and to bail out East Pakistan in dire straits (criticality), though it failed to have the desired effect. In application, collusion may be *in same theatre or in proximity or even in different theatres*. Gulf operations witnessed application of multiple national forces in same theatre and in synchronized mode. Collusion and collaboration may have **deterrent effect, even when not actually applied, as threat in being**. Fear of Chinese posturing in 1971 forced deferring of operations to December during pass-closure period to preclude two front scenarios. Collusion can be *short term or even episodic, essentially tactical or long term or strategic* collaboration/collusion. Sino-Pak collusion meets the criterion of long-term and strategic one, having completed nearly 50 years. On the other hand, the US-Iran collusion in CENTO era was broken off with advent of Ayatollah regime in Iran, making it short-term engagement.

Historical Context

Setting the Stage. Pakistan was among the first to accord diplomatic recognition to PRC in 1950. The **first signs of China-Pak collusion manifested as early in 1950s, erstwhile East Pakistan became a sanctuary for Naga rebels**. Phizo escaped to London via East Pakistan in December 1956.⁵ Mowu Angami and others trekked to China for training.⁶ Similarly, Naga rebels were ferried from Eastern Wing to Western one for specialised commando training in the late 1950s. **Pakistan gifted vast tracts of strategic territory of Shaksgam Valley, measuring 5180 sq km in 1963, enabling it to settle boundary issues**

with China. The treaty incorporates Section 6, which mandates that after settlement of Kashmir dispute, there will be another round between China and treaty designated sovereign state for final settlement. It actually was abject surrender of territory, which de-jure belonged to Kashmir and India. It was also flagrant violation of standstill arrangements mandated in the UN resolution. Pakistan planned 1965 operation to take advantage of situation in India after Chinese aggression in 1962. It was based on assessment of Indian forces being demoralised and unprepared. As per some media reports, US-based think tank had reportedly recommended 1965 as now or never opportunity to put it across India. In the interim, USA, as reward for membership in military pacts, had armed Pakistan with modern weapons like Sabre jets and M-48 Patton tanks, emboldening it to undertake 1965 aggression on India. Beijing having warmed up to Pakistan in early 1960s, issued an ultimatum to India during Indo-Pak war of 1965.⁷ This was followed by formalisation of military assistance in 1966, leading to providing assorted weapons worth \$60 million. In the economic domain, there was inking of trade pacts in 1979, triggering growing economic cooperation.

Pak Propensity for Alliances. Unlike the Indian policy of non-alignment and stress on near equal partnerships, rather than alliances, **Pakistan has displayed commendable diplomatic manipulation and dexterity.** Pak has managed to leverage her geostrategic location, at crossroads of civilisations, to the hilt, by forging concurrent collusive linkages, across divergent spectrum. It first became part of SEATO in 1954, Baghdad Pact in 1955 and CENTO in 1956. This in effect, making it an outpost for the USA in Central Asia. Surprisingly, it was also cosyng up to China in 1960s, as also concurrently keeping alive OIC connections. **Pakistan became surprising enabler, between USA and China.** Henry Kissinger's visit to China in July 1971 was shrouded in secrecy and concealed as diversion, during his Pak visit. After Bangladesh operations and losing the Eastern wing, it established a strategic alliance

with China in 1972, concurrently retaining active membership of US-led military alliances like CENTO. **Pakistan has shown compliance and even agreed to become a client state in unequal tie-ups.**

Indian Response and 1971 Operations. Trilateral linkages between Pakistan, China and USA, **forced India to sign Indo-Soviet friendship treaty in 1971, which did act as restraining check on Chinese designs to provide aid to Pakistan during Bangladesh liberation war.** However, China extended over flying rights and passage to Pakistan for operations in the Eastern wing. Pak's linkages with China impacted on India's plans, in responding to refugee crisis in 1971 and deferring planned operations to December to preclude Chinese intervention. In the intervening period of six months, India had to cope up with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, caused by massive influx of refugees. Both in 1965 and 1971 wars, despite choosing an appropriate period to preclude Chinese intervention, minimum forces and readiness posture had to be maintained on Sino-Indian border, thereby restricting availability of forces to be applied against Pakistan.

Proxy War and Insurgency. The sordid chapter of collusion between China and East Pakistan and later Bangladesh, though documented is rarely discussed.⁸ Ironically, **ISI and Chinese managed to keep camps and sanctuaries active till Sheikh Hasina regime.**⁹ It was only Awami League government, which handed over fugitives like Anup Chetia and threw out others like Anthony Shimray, after cracking down on insurgent camps. Ruili in Yunnan province, reportedly still acts as hub for procuring weapons and sanctuary for fugitive insurgents of NE rebel groups. Pakistan employed Kabayali narrative in 1947-48 conflict and later infiltration task forces in 1965 war. Having suffered humiliation in 1971, **it adopted 'bleeding by thousand cuts' strategy.** It fomented terrorism by funding and aiding Khalistanis in 1980s and 1990s (1984 to 1995). Later, it initiated proxy war in Kashmir in 1988, which is still simmering. Kargil raiders in 1999 were also described as Mujahedeen

despite clear evidence to the contrary. The challenges for India in terms of narco-terrorism, counterfeit smuggling and arms trafficking remain. ISI has also been toying with the idea of K2 (Khalistan and Kashmir), after the opening of Kartarpur corridor.

Mujahedeen and Taliban. Pakistan has the dubious distinction of setting up Mujahedeen and Jihadi militias at the behest of USA in 1990s. Pakistan managed to calibrate her duplicity and perfidious behaviour to remain as America's main interlocutor in Afghanistan. The first venture was training, arming and aiding Mujahedeen militias for overthrowing Russian backed regime, from 1979 to 1989. Since then, it has remained frontline state, till US withdrawal in September 2021. It still retains some degree of control and is now engaged in carving a role for China in Afghanistan. This turnaround comes at considerable cost to Indian interests including investments of US\$ 3 billion in development projects. **China and Pak are colluding to deny India, a legitimate role in Afghan talks.**

Calibrated Chinese Collusion. China has taken a carefully calculated approach to supporting Pakistan. There has been undiluted support from international bodies like UNO and FATF. It put up the facade of responsible power during Kargil operations in 1999, when it chose to maintain restrained posture despite appeals by Pakistan.¹⁰ This has even spawned a strong belief that in a conflict initiated by Pakistan against India, China may not intervene. Indian strategic thinkers opined that historically China had not made decisive interventions in 1965, 1971 and Kargil conflicts and limited support to providing arms, issuing ultimatums and tying down troops deployed on Sino-Indian border. Any intervention by Chinese troops is likely to generate signals of opportunism, fear and awe amongst smaller neighbours. There was also a feeling that even in conflicts initiated by China, she may not like to be seen colluding and taking help from Pakistan. However, there are unverified reports of intelligence sharing and posturing in the recent Ladakh stand-off, but

physical participation is not yet proven. There is also a belief that **Pakistan will invariably try to take advantage, of any conflict initiated by China against India.** It will be appropriate to place on record that Pakistan has acted in restrained manner in current stand-off with China in Ladakh, in all likelihood at behest of her controlling partner, China.

CPEC—New Collusive Paradigm

Defining Treaty. A special bilateral China-Pakistan Treaty of Friendship, cooperation and good-neighbourly relations, ratified by both sides in 2005-06, is the most significant milestone in China Pakistan collusion and collaboration. It mandates the two nations to desist from **‘joining any alliance or bloc which infringes upon the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other side’.** It also forbids both countries to conclude a similar treaty with a third country, thereby closing avenues for strategic pact with the USA. It set the stage for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). **It has been pitched as show-piece for Belt and Road Initiative ((BRI) adding geo-economic heft to collusion.** The project with projected investment of US\$ 62 billion is also being dubbed as colonisation of Pak economically by China, thus adding an ironical twist to the acronym itself. Dependencies and debt traps are likely to lead to China getting ownership of Gwadar and chunks of transportation corridor on long lease basis. Pakistan also figures prominently in maritime, digital and health silk routes, also described as ‘string of pearls’.

Strategic Drivers. CPEC is showcased as benign, economic collaboration in an open domain, yet behind this cloak of development, it conceals and down-plays, collusive strategic drivers like warm-water port (Gwadar) connectivity for China to Makran coast. The collateral benefits of enhanced interoperability between two armed forces, two additional divisions for protection of corridor, maritime co-operation, logistics and optic fibre connectivity are all downplayed. The very alignment and execution of projects in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB)

and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir like Kohala and Daimer-Basha dams are altering the very status-quo, mandated in UN resolution. **These projects challenge de-jure sovereignty of India and extend legitimacy of Pakistani claims.** Pak has allowed access and deployment of the Chinese workforce along with security personnel in GB and POK. This amounts to negating her territorial claims. **Chinese presence in operational terms constrains targeting options to avoid escalation, consequent in collateral damage to Chinese personnel and assets.**

Construct and Catalysts for Collusion

Pak Objectives. Pakistan as a state is defined by the **self-professed raison d'être for its creation, the need to be separate theological state and anti-India in its orientation.** This urge and mindset acquired fanatic flavour, when **Pak added ideological frontiers** as an add-on to its physical boundaries¹¹ Pakistan chose to name her capital as Islamabad and even describe her nuclear bomb as 'Islamic bomb'. Most of her strategic missiles have been named after invaders like Babur, Ghaznavi and Shaheen. Even infiltration task forces in 1965 were named similarly—Saladin, Khilzi, etc. Kargil raiders were described as Ghazis and Mujahideen. This has **spurred craving for 'parity fixation in strategic domain'**, tendency of constant comparison with India, articulated recently by former Pak PM, Imran Khan's recent comparisons of Pakistan's foreign policy, with the Indian neutrality, strategic autonomy and heft in international community. In blunt terms, it amounts to Pak's desire to punch much above her weight classification. The quest for parity has degenerated into multiple aggressions, proxy war and constant affliction to foment anti-India narratives. Pak while aspiring to be leader of Islamic ummah has displayed rank hypocrisy by maintaining stoic silence on Chinese atrocities on Uighur community in Xinjiang.

Chinese Aspirations. China on the other hand wants to establish her hegemony and keep India hyphenated with Pakistan. It is **diabolic**

‘push-pull’ formulation of push down India to keep her embroiled in sub-continent, denying her, rightful place on the global stage. This is concurrently accompanied with pulling up to artificially hoist Pak to drum up notion of parity. The only glue in this collusive relationship is to deny India, strategic salience. Chinese actions in denying India membership in Security Council and Nuclear Security Group are reflective of this trend. Ironically, Beijing links Indian admission with Pak, being concurrently given membership of NSG, notwithstanding her dodgy record in nuclear proliferation. Double pincer collusion drives multi-spectral linkages like helping Pak to acquire nuclear weapons. China has aided and colluded with Pak to bypass Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Collusion between these two nations was predicted by **Samuel Huntington** in his famous book, ‘Clash of Civilizations’, wherein he had flagged congruence between Sinic and Islamic civilisations.¹²

Multi-spectral Collusion. China has emerged as the largest arms supplier to Pakistan replacing America. Pakistan has allowed Chinese cloning experts to reverse engineer US-supplied equipment, in flagrant violation of proprietary end-user clauses. China and Pakistan are also engaged in regular training exercises, manoeuvres and exchange visits. All these weapons and expertise is likely to be focused against India and some of it is being used in proxy war. China allows Pak to piggyback on strategic projects like missiles, defence production and space collaboration. North Industries Corporation (NORINCO) and other Chinese arms manufacturers have upgraded Heavy Industries Taxilla (HIT), Ordnance Factories, Aviation Complex Kamran and Missile plant at Tarwanah, near Rawalpindi. It has enabled Pak to execute joint production of JF-17 aircraft, Al-Khalid main battle tanks, howitzers, missiles and a variety of munitions. China has announced joint projects in submarines and underwater vehicles. **The proliferation of Chinese origin weapons in neighbouring countries enables Pak presence**

for servicing and repairs besides export orders. Pak reliance on Chinese equipment has its own glitches due to relative technological and serviceability levels. There have been reports on problems in Chinese supplied equipment and its comparison with modern American platforms like Huey Cobras, Strykers, Chinooks, drones and Javelin missiles.

Strategic Options to Counter Collusion

Strategic Baggage. Till the recent course correction on designation of primary threat, Indian policymakers believed that China can be managed diplomatically. There was marked reluctance to discuss ‘two and half front’ scenarios, with half denoting internal security threats like Left Wing Extremism (LWE). It was coupled with **primary focus bordering on Pak threat as a sort of strategic affliction or even strategic historical baggage.** There was over-reliance on Dual Tasked Formations (DTFs) and inter theatre switching of forces. This belief was based on three premises; first, the Chinese focus on internal economic consolidation and development. It was inferred that China will avoid distractions. Second, reliance on border treaties and protocols, especially on agreed Confidence Building Measures (CBM). India rightly expected maturity on part of China in keeping with her rising stature. This was bolstered by historical reticence on part of China to decisively intervene in Indo-Pak conflicts. Third, global coupling of supply chains and trade linkages, especially with the huge Indian market will discourage such adventures. However, China seems to have leveraged Indian dependencies in critical sectors in smart and coercive format.

Recalibration. However, the recent trend of ‘**aggressively rising China**’ and ‘**wolf warrior diplomacy**’ as also flagrant violations of agreed CBMs, treaties and protocols during Ladakh face-off have forced a complete rethink and recalibration of strategy. Discarding sort of self-generated denial syndrome, there is clear designation of China, as primary

threat. Collusion has been accepted as corollary and reality. Collusion in many facets like intelligence, info operations, cyber, surveillance, manufacturing, preparation and many more disciplines has **acquired abiding permanency and seamless fusion between the two nations**. The two-front challenge refers to a simultaneous or synergised armed conflict (aggression) with both China and Pakistan engaging India. They could follow either a collaborative or a collusive approach, the difference in these two terms has become mere semantic, as collusion is permanent. Collaboration is declaratory and becoming rare, it implies one country openly aiding the other militarily, whereas the collusion involves covert cooperation between the two. **In this case, we are confronted with collusive collaboration.**

Response Matrix. Indian preparation levels against Pakistan are reportedly pegged on parameters of 'credible deterrence' to be upgraded to 'punitive deterrence'. Against China, it has been indexed as 'dissuasive deterrence', to be upgraded to 'credible deterrence'. Punitive deterrence entails building up asymmetrical capabilities in niche domains to deliver sharp and surgical responses. These like Balakot air strikes can be pre-emptive, provided targets are carefully selected with due justification for international opinion. Execution has to be surgical, with minimum collateral damage and backed up by information operations to amplify the message. As a corollary, initiator has to be prepared for retaliatory response and retain control of escalatory ladder. Against??, China's mandate is to graduate from defensive dissuasion to credible deterrence, which should at least ensure stalemate, as for an aggressor, unresolved stalemate, amounts to loss of face. This would require a need to build and execute quid-pro-quo (QPQ) options like pre-emptive deployment on Kailash heights, South of Pangong Tso. **Such QPQ responses predicate meticulous and more importantly 'will power' to act.** Application of riposte or counter-offensive in other theatres facilitates horizontal escalation. This can be applied in vertical mode by enlarging

conflict to maritime or nuclear/space domains. India is opposed to both as it believes in peaceful use of space and also that there is adequate space below the nuclear threshold for conventional conflicts.

Rebalancing. There has been **rebalancing of force levels and resources across frontiers in keeping with reappraisal of threats.** The most notable change is re-orientation of one strike corps from western to northern borders, primarily for Ladakh theatre and its reconfiguration from mechanised to mountain. It enables two mountain strike corps to focus on their respective theatres. **The scope of rebalancing is holistic and extends to mechanised, firepower, surveillance, airpower, cyber and communications domains.** There is also enhanced focus on development of infrastructure, logistics and connectivity in border areas. This reorganisation has consequences on reduced force levels on the western front. It can impact notion of ‘decisive victory’ and emphasis has shifted to focused surgical capabilities and synergised integrated battle groups with limited objectives. It will be appropriate if integrated theatres are formed, on priority, to synergise and orchestrate more coherent response. There have been concerns on ammunition stocking for two-front wars, especially with earlier decisions to prune stocking levels to cater for short war scenarios. The ongoing Ukrainian war has brought into question this premise, it is axiomatic that stocking policy and levels for collusive threat are reviewed. It is imperative to maintain enhanced focus on internal security and need to expedite conflict resolution to tackle ubiquitous half front threats and internal fault lines. India also needs to evaluate its ‘No First Use and Massive Retaliation’ nuclear policy to inject certain degree of ambiguity for better deterrence vis-a-vis China. **In a scenario, where all three players are armed with nuclear weapons, need is to build genuine CBMs, more transparency and reduce collusion.**

Ramping up of deliberations, interoperability exercises and other connected initiatives, **alliances/partnerships are not silver-bullets or**

panacea and have their inherent limitations. It is unlikely that alliance partners will commit troops on ground especially as India is the only Quad nation to.

Strategic Autonomy. Countering collusive linkages requires strategic autonomy, which can be achieved by **Smart Atam Nirbhar.** **The thrust should be on minimising dependence on strategic and critical technologies.** Some examples are power plants for aircraft and naval crafts; cyber, guidance, surveillance and communications; autonomous and remote systems, rare earths, API for pharmaceutical industry and many more sectors. It bears reiterating that self-reliance is not self-isolation. A smart edge can be acquired by transiting to role of lead integrator. It will be axiomatic to gain autonomy in strategic sectors coupled with acquiring leverage in niche areas. **This is long term agenda and predicates sustained focus backed up with budgetary allocations to acquire 'know why' besides 'know why'.** This will entail expenditure on research and development (R&D) and building up domain competence.

Summary of Recommendations

In conclusion, the following need to be emphasised:

- (a) Collusive collaboration between China and Pakistan is abiding strategic reality.
- (b) Aggressively rising China has emerged as the primary challenge, yet Pakistan remains permanent irritant.
- (c) Internal fault lines need to be addressed and conflict resolution expedited to reduce scope for collusive interference.
- (d) Alliances/strategic partnerships are certainly not enough and reliance has to be on building own capabilities.
- (e) The whole of Nation approach to boost Comprehensive National Power can make Pak irrelevant due to decisive asymmetry and reduce gap with China.

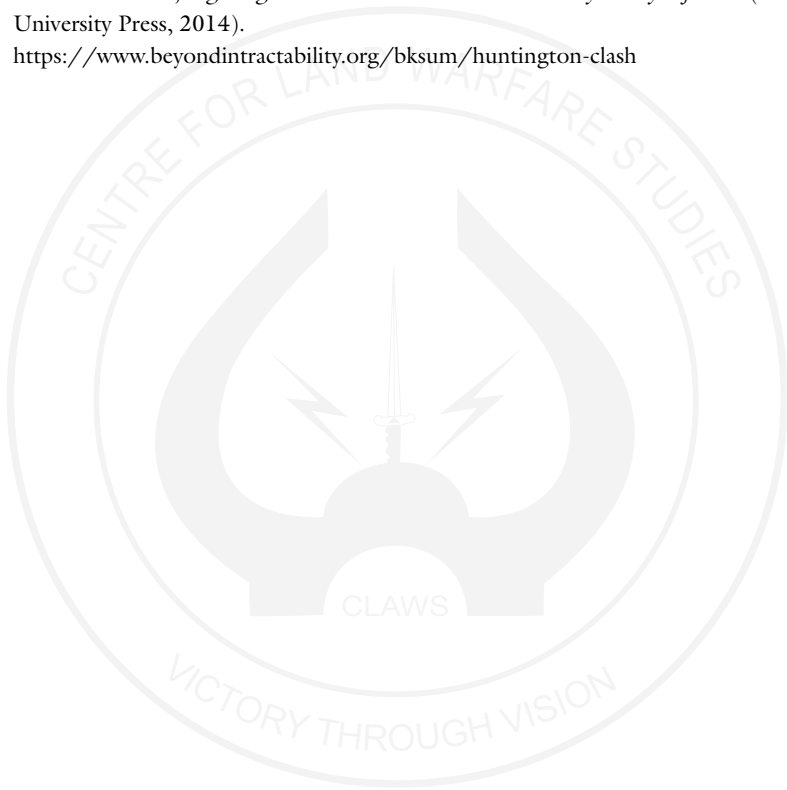
- (f) Force rebalancing and theatrisation needs to be expedited to synergise integrated responses.
- (g) Modernisation, capability building and infrastructure require sustained focus, backed up by adequate budget.
- (h) Terrestrial and maritime domains need to be concurrently developed.
- (i) Smart Atamnirbhar is the recommended way forward to gain salience in niche and disruptive technologies.
- (j) Realistic scenario-based war-gaming and simulations, backed up with net assessment should be carried out to improve responses and preparation levels.
- (k) Notwithstanding, Chinese obduracy, India should continue efforts to resolve boundary dispute and also build credible CBMs to avoid border flash-points.

Collusive two and half front threat is the ultimate challenge and requires synergy at all levels and ‘whole of nation’ approach. It will be appropriate to quote Clausewitz, “War is the continuation of policy with other means”. Deft diplomacy is required to prevent and mitigate this threat. Intelligence and surveillance agencies should remain vigilant to generate appropriate warnings. Security agencies have to rebalance and reorganise optimum force levels to generate appropriate responses. Preparation in itself is the best deterrent.

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India, Vietnam in the Indo-Pacific: A Unifying Construct

Pankaj K Jha

Abstract

Is Indo-Pacific the one overarching forum, evolving from a geo-political imagination which can bring the two countries closer? If it be so, then what are the avenues and possibilities that exist in the Indo-Pacific sphere for India and Vietnam, and what are the benefits and drawbacks of subscription to such a concept? Will it be feasible enough to sustain the aspirations as well as concerns of the two countries or there is a need for returning back to basics, and entrust ASEAN with the centrality which is required for the peace and security in the larger Asia-Pacific region. Is China a necessary evil or is it being demonised by the western media? What could be the contours of the evolving geo-political order when alternatives such as BRICS, SCO and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank have been getting attention and subscription from countries across the Europe, Africa and Asia? Has regionalism lost sheen, and bilateralism is the only way to deal with larger security and political issues. This paper would address these issues and look for possibilities with regard to India and Vietnam cooperating

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in the geo-political, and geo-strategic construct which is now known as Indo-Pacific.

One of the biggest questions that linger in the minds of the decision-makers is whether Indo-Pacific would be the future of strategic discourse or if it will expand its horizons to include economics, culture and people to people interactions under its ambit. It seems pertinent to deliberate on the evolution of regional constructs, and how it defines regional multilateralism. Whenever there has been a discussion on the issue of security in the Asia-Pacific region, Vietnam appears to be located at a good vantage point. Australia has to focus its interest in the North, given its location in the Southern Hemisphere. However, it has been discounted as a major player owing to its relatively small population, and the increasing umbilical attachment to the West. Few erstwhile British colonies still profess England's Queen Elizabeth as the titular head of the country instead of declaring itself as a republic. Southeast Asia which used to be a priority area during the Second World War, lost its relevance due to a struggle between two major powers representing two different ideologies and the withdrawal of the British from the theatre after colonial powers were uprooted from the region. The Second World War highlighted the rise of Asian power primarily Japan and the expanse that it can achieve unhindered, given the limited resistance capacity of the allied powers.

In the early 1920s Karl Haushofer, a German strategic thinker propounded the 'Indo-Pacific', as conceptualised. This construct was more conversant with the marine biologists who have been studying the migratory patterns and also movement of marine organisms as well as contiguous ecology across the Indian and Pacific oceans. The botanists, geologists and anthropologists have been working on gene sampling and the physical features of the Pacific islanders; wanted to geographically map their migration patterns from Asia and other continents including

Africa over long periods of time. This has helped in drawing linkages between civilisations across the Indo-Pacific region. However, in the geopolitical discourse, it had not garnered the expected attention. The ‘Indo-Pacific’ construct gained political currency in the late 2000s when it was felt that Asia-Pacific need to include India and the Indian Ocean to be more inclusive and create a cooperative sphere between democracies and like-minded nations. It is now widely resonating as the fulcrum of new geopolitical realities.¹

Many geographic regions have flexible geopolitical boundaries. As a result of this, sub-regions such as the Greater Mekong sub-region, Bay of Bengal community and even emergence of selective membership organisations such as BRICS which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa have defied all logic related to regionalism which has been more geographically based. BRICS as an *a la Carte* institution depicted the structures based on economic priorities, geopolitical compulsions and as an alternative to western regionalism concepts. As a result, geography more particularly political geography gained subscription and evolved as a new stream of study in global politics. The political geography has anchored itself taking a cue from classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics. In the two cases of geopolitics, the latitude and longitude become irrelevant, and are replaced by the perceptual position and perception regarding the other emerging powers.²

Karl Haushofer in his discourse referred to the Indopazifischen Raum “Indo-Pacific region/space” as the fusion of the two regional constructs and buttressed the fact that “the geographic impact of the dense Indo-Pacific concentration of humanity and cultural empire of India and China, which ... are geographically sheltered behind the protective veil of the offshore island arcs” of the western Pacific and Bay of Bengal, offshore island arcs through which they are now both actively and competitively deploying.³ Furthermore, the trade and cultural routes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans had been reflected in the archaeological studies

and historical data. The new construct of Indo-Pacific has relatively more Oceanic orientation in comparison to Asia-Pacific but also in rediscovering, forging and strengthening cultural and historical links between the mainland and island communities. The debate over the viability and utility of the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific has been widely debated but for both India and Vietnam, Indo-Pacific seems more appropriate because it is inclusive of both the countries as equal stakeholders and also integrates the two into the emerging geopolitical calculations.

India's Act East Policy and Vietnam's Asia Policy

India's Act East policy incubated from the basic fundamentals of the Look East Policy in which the attempt was to engage the countries of Southeast Asia both at the bilateral level and also through multilateral organisations linked to ASEAN and also working on a common economic integration which has been undertaken through platforms such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (RCEP) involving ASEAN nations and six dialogue partners. If one looks at the Act East policy which has been proposed in 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi led NDA government, the focus is on two very basic issues of giving increased attention to the CLMV countries which include Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Second, the attempt is to expand the horizon of the Look East policy to include countries such as Japan in the East to Australia and New Zealand in the South. The arc of the Act East Policy has expanded and therefore cord between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific looks more concrete and formalised.

The slew of strategic partnerships that India has signed in the last eight years with Australia, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan (even though Global Security Partnership) encapsulates the larger strategic framework that India has been looking forward to. In the case of Vietnam, increased interactions and better diplomatic manoeuvres were seen when the Communist Party of Vietnam General Secretary went to the US, Japan

and India within a year showcasing the strategic priorities for Vietnam with regard to these nations and how Vietnam positions itself as the epicentre of the strategic discourse related to the Indo-Pacific. When one looks into the geographical expanse of the East Asia Summit it expands from the Eurasian region to the west coast of the US, clearly signifying the larger geopolitical expanse of the informal forum. However, given the fact that the larger geopolitics has become more maritime in orientation, therefore the Oceans depict the larger canvas of geostrategic priorities. The fusion of Indian and Pacific Ocean signify this tectonic movement from the integration envisaged in the early 1990s when Asian and Pacific regions were fused as the Asia-Pacific construct. However, in the larger discourse with regard to Asia-Pacific India was missing in the early phases. The exclusion of India forms the Asia-Pacific cooperation and subsequent attempts were also made to exclude India from the East Asia Summit but the inclusion of India in the informal summit expanded the horizon and helped in bringing important stakeholders to the Asia-Pacific region. The increased attention that was given to India and also subsequently to Vietnam resulted from three major factors; firstly, a rather impressive economic growth ranging between 6-8 per cent and secondly having a large youth working force. And lastly, the attempt made by both countries to modernise its defence and military weapons as well as equipment led to a belief that these two countries can play a viable role in the larger strategic discourse.

Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh during his speech at ICWA, New Delhi said, “I think we should have an ever-broader view that Asia-Pacific and South Asia are interlinked into what is called Indo-Pacific. There are today many proposals, ideas, concepts and initiatives that promote linkage between South Asia with East Asia and the Pacific. This reflects a reality that we all share common prosperity; our destinies are intertwined. And ASEAN plays the crucial role as the bridge linking our regions, as the threshold for India to enter Asia-Pacific”.⁴

Tran Dai Quang, President of Vietnam while outlining Vietnam's priorities said and outlined the different formulations which exist at the regional and transregional levels. He said, "the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between ASEAN and its six partners; India's "Act East" Policy; China's "Belt and Road Initiative"; Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy"; the United States' "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision"; and, most recently, the establishment of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, joined by eleven economies on both sides of the Pacific".⁵ He outlined priorities for his nation when he said, "this aspiration will only come true when all countries share a common vision for an open and rules-based region, and a common interest in the maintenance of peace, stability, and inclusive prosperity, wherein no country, no nation, and no group shall be left behind".⁶

There is an inherent need to protect the freedom of navigation and unhindered trade, and not let the Indo-Asia-Pacific be Balkanised into spheres of influence manipulated by power politics, hindered by protectionism, or divided by narrow nationalism.⁷ He said, "We should promote maritime connectivity as a key area, not just in bilateral relations but also in the context of peace, stability and development in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region".⁸ The speech clearly outlined what is the future of this bilateral relationship and contextualized it keeping Indo-pacific as centre of vision. President Quang said during a media interaction, "We will work together for an independent, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region where sovereignty and international laws are respected and disputes are resolved through dialogue".⁹ Prime Minister Modi also reiterated the same views. He said, "We have decided that we will enhance cooperation in defence production and explore opportunities in transfer of technology. We will jointly work for an open, independent and prosperous Indo-Pacific area where sovereignty and dialogue mechanism to resolve disputes is respected".¹⁰

Even in the Delhi Dialogue 2018 edition, the theme line was “Strengthening India-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation” primarily outlining the maritime dimension of India-ASEAN cooperation and cooperating connectivity. Further during the India-ASEAN Blue Economy workshop, Ms Preeti Saran said, “It is this reality that led our prime minister to highlight the importance that we attach to the subject of ASEAN-India Cooperation in the Maritime Domain since we believe that it will be a key facilitator for growth and development of the Indo-Pacific region”.¹¹ In his speech at Shangri-La Dialogue, Prime Minister Modi said, “India’s global strategic partnership with the United States has overcome the hesitations of history and continues to deepen across the extraordinary breadth of our relationship. It has assumed new significance in the changing world. And, an important pillar of this partnership is our shared vision of an open, stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific Region”.¹² He further added, “India Armed Forces, especially our Navy, are building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region for peace and security, as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. They train, exercise and conduct goodwill missions across the region. For example, with Singapore, we have the longest uninterrupted naval exercise, which is in its twenty-fifth year now.... We work with partners like Vietnam to build mutual capabilities. The Indo-Pacific is a natural region. It is also home to a vast array of global opportunities and challenges.... I am increasingly convinced with each passing day that the destinies of those of us who live in the region are linked. Today, we are being called to rise above divisions and competition to work together”.¹³

In fact, ASEAN also took note of the concept of Indo-Pacific and it was reflected in one of the Joint Communiques released in 2013. It said, “We took note of the idea for an Indo-Pacific framework envisaged based on the principles contained in the TAC and in line with the 2011 Declaration of the East Asia Summit on the Principles for Mutually Beneficial Relations (Bali Principles)”.¹⁴ ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-

Pacific also highlights that maritime security is one of the areas where ASEAN can seek support and assistance from the dialogue partners and might become the converging point between ASEAN priorities and the Indo-Pacific construct. There have been areas which can work for both countries in developing and outlining the concept of Indo-Pacific. These include trade and commerce, investment, energy and cooperation in science and technology. However, the bigger question is whether outline of this vision is there or is it just a geopolitical imagination, still in nascent stages.

Indo-Pacific: Vision or a Dream?

Looking at the Indo-Pacific there are different versions which have been proposed by different countries. Japan has been credited with initiating the first discourse with regard to the Indo-Pacific when the reference was made with regard to the ‘Confluence of the Seas’.¹⁵ Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said, “The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity. A “broader Asia” that broke away geographical boundaries is now beginning to take on a distinct form. Our two countries have the ability—and the responsibility—to ensure that it broadens yet further and to nurture and enrich these seas to become seas of clearest transparency”.¹⁶

Michael Auslin in his work on Indo-Pacific stated, “the Indo-Pacific’s unique geography makes the balance of regional security most vulnerable in its “commons”: the open seas, air lanes, and cyber networks that link the region together and to the world. The interests of the United States and its allies and partners lie in protecting the Indo-Pacific commons from any disruption that would cause political tension or conflict, adversely affect global economic activity, or hinder the access of any nation to the rest of the region and globe for political or military reasons. However, as a result of China’s military buildup, in particular, the United States and its allies can no longer be assured

of maintaining regional superiority of forces either numerically or, eventually, qualitatively”.¹⁷

Given this predicament and a looming challenge to US superiority, it has become imperative to address this challenge through diplomatic, military and political means. As a result of which apart from the strategic allies, the US has been looking at partners such as India and Vietnam. For countries such as Australia, Indo-Pacific is a compulsion to build up its security and keep the US engaged in this region. James Ferguson writes “Indo-Pacific’ includes the wider South Asia as well as the Indian Ocean and fused with the Pacific Ocean.” He had argued that after Asia-Pacific, Australia’s foreign policy is directed at sustaining and nurturing this concept. It has been felt that Asia and Australia’s inclusion into Asian organizations would not serve its foreign policy objectives as much as the Indo-Pacific concept would. Australian Defence White paper of 2013 acknowledged and strongly advocated for the ‘Indo-Pacific’. Further, its official documents be it the foreign policy white paper and even the DFAT website acknowledges the importance of the Indo-Pacific. ‘The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ refers to more narrowly (and meaningfully?) consisting of the East Indian Ocean and Western Pacific Ocean as interlinked waters with the South China Sea as a middle intervening stretch. In terms of regions, we can note the argument that ‘regions are, among other things, social constructions created through politics ... cognitive constructs that are rooted in political practice’.¹⁸ Even Indonesia has also subscribed to the concept but has been wary of the responsibilities as well as the new balance which will emerge when China becomes an accepted superpower.

The then Foreign Minister of Indonesia Marty M Natalegawa in his speech at the Conference on Indonesia in Washington said, “In terms of geography it refers to an important triangular spanning two oceans ..., notably with Indonesia at its center”.¹⁹ He further added, “Not least, the term Indo-Pacific brings into focus the reality of the interconnection

between the futures of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans”.²⁰ Given the fact that most of the regional and global powers have subscribed to the concept, there is a future for the concept but like all geopolitical imaginations, this concept also is facing teething problems and this needs to be addressed so that commitment and future possibilities can be explored. Indo-Pacific is seen largely as a security construct and in this context, the defence and strategic ties between India and Vietnam would be a platform for convergence of interest both from a strategic viewpoint and larger defence ties.

Developing Defence Ties and Strategic Understanding

One of the important aspects related to India Vietnam cooperation has been in the field of defence, technology and science. While defence in strategic cooperation has improved over a period of time given the fact that two countries have been utilising Russian systems and many of the officers were trained on erstwhile Soviet Union weapons and platforms. The friendly prices offered by the USSR at one point of time and the increased political understanding with erstwhile Soviet Union made India and Vietnam rely much more on their weapons and platforms. The successor to Soviet Union, Russia enhanced its relationship with the two countries because of the common Soviet/Russian systems and it subsequently grew over a period of time. Vietnam has been resistant to purchase of US weapons systems because of constitutional obligations and the differences with the US.

India has signed one of the earliest MoU on defence cooperation with Vietnam and under its defence diplomacy, India has engaged Vietnam through official high-level military interactions, liaison visits of naval ships, exchange of defence personnel and limited non-lethal weapon exports to Vietnam. With the sale of Brahmos to the Philippines it has been expected that Vietnam would also be able to afford this supersonic missile to strengthen its defences against adversaries which have threatened

Vietnam's maritime security and also challenged its sovereignty on South China Sea islands.

India has been looking for indigenisation in defence and has been looking for alternate means so as to offset the huge defence expenditure that it incurs because of importing various weapon systems and platforms. Defence relations between India and Vietnam have grown with the sanctioning of lines of credit (500 million) for Vietnam to purchase weapon systems and also engage Indian defence manufacturers in providing military platforms and equipment to Vietnamese defence forces. If one looks into the defence cooperation between the two sides it started with India's engagement with many Southeast Asian countries during its liberalisation process in 1991. The wars which the two countries have fought with China respectively in 1962 and 1979 brought forth the concerns, that a powerful neighbour remains a security concern for times to come. However, neither India nor Vietnam, has openly criticised China for its aggressive moves, albeit everyone is concerned with regard to increased Chinese military modernisation across the border as well as in maritime zones.

The differences in relationship with China grew since 1980 when India opened its defence attaché office in Vietnam in 1980 while Vietnam reciprocated by opening its military attaches office in 1985. It has been stated that in 1994 during the visit of the Indian minister defence technology was offered to Vietnam. Vietnam has accepted the offer and during the course of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to Hanoi in 1994 a protocol on defence cooperation was signed. Further, Vietnam has also entered into an agreement with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for the overhaul of MIG 21 engines which have been the mainstay of Vietnamese Air Force. In May 1995 Vietnamese military delegation along with its deputy defence minister visited India and toured military installations at Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Goa, and Pune.²¹

India signed the defence cooperation protocol in the year 2000 which formulated the dialogue between the two defence ministers in terms of exchange of strategic perceptions, intelligence sharing and conduct of naval exercises between the two countries. This protocol and defence cooperation will pave the way for training and repair programs for Vietnamese Air Force aircraft by the Indian Air Force. India also agreed to upgrade the new avionics and radar systems of MIG 21 so that it can be integrated with Russian missile systems including R-77 and R-27 missiles.²²

During the visit of the then defence minister AK Antony to Vietnam, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the two sides in which it was outlined that bilateral cooperation in areas such as National Defense, Army, Navy and Air Force along with training modules was also provisioned. During that time only, security dialogue was instituted which was at the deputy ministerial level.

Since 2000 the interaction between the two defence forces has increased multi-fold under which India had agreed to transfer 5000 naval parts of Petya class ships to Vietnam's navy for functional and operational reasons. The Indian defence delegation had also visited defence industries in Ho Chi Minh city and a Joint Working Group was instituted for looking into the deliverables under the MoU. In the year 2005 Indian Navy gave 150 tonnes of machines related to warships and other accessories to the Vietnamese Peoples Liberation Navy. The government enterprise ordnance factory board also offered materials for turrets, and negotiations related to TNT explosives were also explored. Vietnam has also been scouting for small arms and at one point of time had even purchased carbines from Pakistan which was disliked by the Indian establishment and it was conveyed to the Vietnamese defence ministry. Subsequently, Vietnam had entered into supply agreement with India with regard to aerial photographic films, aircraft tires, short-range missiles up to the range of 5 km, and a large number of submarine batteries.²³ Even though

there has been a lot which has been provisioned under the MoU and defence cooperation the defence trade between the two sides has been very limited.

One of the important areas of cooperation which have been left and explored is related to science and technology. Vietnamese National Defence forces have been working on upgrading their capabilities in Hi-tech defence warfare and therefore they have been looking for possibilities related to setting up an institute of military strategy, military science and technology, and military history.

India's entry into the elite missile technology control regime MTCR club had facilitated India's export of Brahmos missiles to third rd world countries and Vietnam has been keen to purchase the equipment. Following the export of Brahmos missiles to the Philippines there is a high probability of Vietnam also purchasing it in due course of time. Vietnam has also embarked on military modernisation programme where it has inducted Russian made frigates, 6-kilo class submarines and purchased one full squadron of Sukhoi-30 MKV aircrafts. Vietnam has reciprocated India's approach of providing the docking facilities in Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay. Since 2015 there has been wide-ranging discussions between the two sides on a number of issues which include training of technicians and maintenance staff for Sukhoi-30 MKV fighter planes, cooperation in aerospace, live firing exercises for the Sukhoi pilots in Indian firing ranges, and long term training modules for Vietnamese Sukhoi-30 pilots.

Possibilities and Challenges

Taking into cognizance the trajectory of evolution of the Indo-pacific, there are five discernible arguments which have been made from different countries and groups of strategic thinkers. The first group which comprises of the Australian experts have stated that Indo-Pacific should be the fulcrum of global politics and in fact, Australian governments in its

document have tried to fulfil this objective of placing Indo-Pacific as the centre of their policy articulations. This has been seen in the case of the Defence White Papers since 2009 and also very late in the Foreign Policy White paper released in 2018. The objective was that Australia should act as the vantage point as well as the strategic tower of the Indo-Pacific discourse.

The second group of scholars hailing primarily from China and its friendly countries have called this either a myth or an anti-China formulation which cannot sustain itself. In order to counter this, with the economic might of China, the one belt one Road was heavily sponsored and promoted by the Chinese government as well as by almost all Chinese think tanks. The third group of strategic thinkers primarily from India call Indo-Pacific as a necessary and evolutionary articulation of India's foreign policy priorities, given the fact that Act East Policy effectively overlaps the larger Indo-Pacific region. However, few scholars and even diplomats have called for an East Asian Region much akin to the Hatoyama prognosis of East Asian Community. Ken Rudd has also promulgated the Asia-Pacific Community in 2009. In both these conceptions, Vietnam and India were included in the discourse.

The fourth group of scholars hailing from countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia called for a larger Indo-Pacific region so as to build peace and stability. In fact, Indonesia the then foreign minister Marty Natalegawa had urged for the countries to come together for 'Indo-Pacific Treaty'. This concept was proposed and also supported during the Bambang Yudhoyono but lost sheen when Joko Widodo came into power. However, once again reflections and debates about the viability and acceptance of the Indo-Pacific have started with a few US-supported think tanks urging the Indonesian government to take it forward. Indonesia given that fact is strategically located and has been building a national economy through Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) and also working for sustained economic growth has now supported the idea. The

biggest challenge however lies in finding utility and the large objectives for future for this strategic concept.

The last group of scholars hailing from Japan have called for this anti-China alliance and has supported the use of this concept for military, maritime and strategic objectives. Japan has also been credited with working on the draft concept when Prime Minister Abe talked about confluence of two seas. On the contrary, there are countries like Singapore which have a deficit of strategic depth, have denounced Indo-Pacific and have not subscribed to this concept despite being the alliance and strategic partner to almost all countries on the Indo-Pacific horizon including India, the US, Japan and Australia.

There are different strands of thought, however there is a need for a structured approach and this includes the Quad and the regional partners acting as the foundation of this concept as well as working for maintaining peace and stability. The concept needs a suitable economic platform such as Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor to sustain the interest and momentum. In both cases, India and Vietnam would be the most valuable partners for the cause.

Conclusion

India and Vietnam have weathered the end of the Cold war and the bilateral ties have remained unaffected by the change in the geopolitical order. At one point of time, the disintegration of Soviet Union meant that the US would dominate the global strategic scenario but the two countries have created a place for themselves. Both the US and China are engaging the two countries. However, China while challenging the US-led international order has posed serious concerns. It is again argued that whether bringing China onboard the Indo-Pacific concept would bring peace to the larger geostrategic region or not. There are concerns that the uncertain US leadership might lead to serious thinking in the policy establishments of the two countries. However, the fragile situation

and the instability and tensions in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean pose a serious question that what can the two countries do under the ambit of Indo-Pacific to work for a lasting and peaceful solution. Is Beijing's consensus on Asia and particularly Indo-Pacific an impending thing? or there is a better way for the trade, investment and strategic cooperation to foster in Indo-Pacific.

India and Vietnam can act as the responsible stakeholders and should make things clear in various forums that peace cannot be comprised in the power balance between the US and China. However, the two countries need to strengthen the dynamic relationship with the two powers—US and China so as to bring peace and harmony to the region. Indo-Pacific like all other formations needs an economic foundation to work and engage the willing partners because, given the lacklustre US performance and an increasingly assertive China, the choices are limited. While ASEAN centrality is required by ASEAN, it should keep contentious issues as the focus of its discussion otherwise it would not augur well for its future. Undermining the concerns of the new ASEAN members on territorial and related issues is important so that the inherent fissures in ASEAN should not get apparent and visible. India and Vietnam must work out their bilateral strategy while taking into consideration the multilateral dynamics. ASEAN would serve them but the need is to address security and economics in a balanced way. However, the time has come to address security in maritime and related spheres in a more concerted way.

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India and Bangladesh: A Multi Faceted Relationship

Alok Deb

Abstract

The physical map of the Indian subcontinent depicts an integrated landmass, bounded by the Pamirs/ Hindukush to the North West and the Himalayas to the North, with the Patkai Range, Naga and Chin Hills forming a natural border between India's North-Eastern states and Myanmar. The ends of the Indian Peninsula are bounded by the seas in three directions. This article attempts to review important aspects of the continuously evolving India-Bangladesh relationship—as Bangladesh, today with the second largest GDP in South Asia,¹ journeys through its fifty-first year as an independent nation.

Introduction

As noted by eminent statesman and former ambassador to China, KM Panikkar ‘geography constitutes the permanent basis of every nation’s history. It is not too much to say that it is one of the major factors that determine the historical evolution of a people’.² In the same vein he goes on to say that ‘both the internal policies of a country and its external relations are governed largely by its unalterable geographical

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conditions and their relationships in space to other countries'.³ Within the subcontinent, the importance of undivided Bengal, the richest province in the 18th Century before the depredations of the British East India Company⁴ is recorded in history. The benefits bestowed upon this region in terms of trade and connectivity, being the shortest route from the Bay of Bengal to the Himalayas, further linking up to the Silk Route are equally well documented.⁵ 1947 saw the creation of Pakistan. Less than 25 years after this event, a mass movement in its Eastern wing was driven by misdeeds of a myopic and prejudiced central government that denied people their due and culminated in an armed struggle aided by India. A free nation, Bangladesh, was born. It is a paradox of history that it was the former citizenry of this newly freed nation that in the early 20th Century, was attracted to the idea of Pakistan primarily for socio-economic reasons, overlaid with the politico-religious.⁶

Brief Geopolitical Outline

A researcher has defined Geopolitics as 'the planning of a nation's security policy on the basis of geographic factors'.⁷ Of the 15,106.7 km of land borders that India shares with seven countries, a peculiar geography results in its having the longest border with Bangladesh (4096.7 km).⁸ Bangladesh borders five Indian states—Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal, and is surrounded by India on three sides. Inevitably, this has led to a feeling in that country of being 'India locked'. Conversely, India's entire North East, reliant on connectivity with the rest of India through the narrow, Siliguri Corridor (a short distance from Tibet's Chumbi Valley via the Jampheri Ridge of Bhutan), finds itself 'Bangladesh locked', with that country implanted as a 'strategic wedge' between the Indian mainland and the 'Seven Sisters' of North East India with the corridor itself vulnerable to ingress from North and South. Even without external stimuli, such observations have coloured security perceptions of many in both countries. For some Bangladeshis,

it breeds a sense of insecurity, should this huge neighbour with the largest economy in South Asia and fourth-largest military in the world, become a regional hegemon. Correspondingly, in India, it generates an impatience & strategic issues—more so considering the assistance rendered to the nation for achieving freedom. Certain quarters also voice concerns about powers unfriendly to India securing a foothold in Bangladesh to threaten India's security. Combined with grievances on trade, economy, water sharing, border management and other issues between neighbours, 'India bashing' remains a convenient tool for interested parties in Bangladesh (and governments other than the current dispensation) to whip up passions in domestic politics or gain favour with forces inimical to Indian interests. Similarly, long-running issues like illegal immigration continue to form part of the security discourse in India. To summarise, the India Bangladesh relationship has traditionally been and shall continue to remain, complex, sensitive and multidimensional.

Some in Bangladesh have decried what they perceive as an unequal relationship with India. For many years, commencing from the time of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib's assassination onto the period of multiple coups and military rule, a barely concealed animosity became characteristic of this relationship, overshadowing all else. Though Sheikh Hasina's government from 2001 to 2006 was relatively balanced in its approach towards India vis a vis her rivals, *it was her return to power in the 2009 general elections and stated decision to strengthen ties with India that transformed the relationship, making it transparent and mutually beneficial*. She has held fast to this resolve despite opposition and taken positive steps on all fronts, including acceding to the long-pending demand to release Indian insurgents hiding in that country. India has responded equally proactively in other spheres. Major long-standing disputes over land and maritime boundaries have been successfully resolved either mutually or through international arbitration.

With a 271 km long border with Myanmar, Bangladesh provides an additional land bridge to that country and onto South East Asia. Through its inclusion in regional South Asian groupings like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, whose secretariat is located in Dhaka), BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) and the proposed BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India Myanmar corridor from Kolkata to Kunming which has seen little progress for many reasons), India sees Bangladesh as indispensable for the success of its 'Act East' policy. With a stable government in Dhaka now in its third consecutive term, *the India Bangladesh bilateral relationship is without doubt the most successful and amongst the most important in the Indian subcontinent today. The outcome of this success is a greatly enhanced strategic relationship.*

Major Non-Military Aspects of the Relationship

Improved Connectivity. The deepening strategic relationship between the two countries and their increasing connectivity act as drivers for each other. With Bangladesh having three of the 12 major ports on the Bay of Bengal coastline⁹ and well-developed inland waterways, India's landlocked North East is more accessible than ever before from the mainland through a much shorter combination of land/river/sea routes, all passing through Bangladesh. At the time of writing, there are four rail interchanges between the two countries from the Southern portion of West Bengal Northwards to the Chicken's Neck (Haldibari in the Siliguri corridor). The fifth interchange on the Tripura border from Agartala to Akhaura is due for completion.¹⁰ A sixth from Mahishashan in Karimganj in the Barak Valley to Sylhet is planned.¹¹ These provide seamless rail connectivity across Bangladesh from many points to and from West Bengal and the North East. The scale of commerce can be gauged from the assessment in August 2021 that 20 freight trains per month would be using the Haldibari link alone.¹² For travellers, the number of passenger

trains has increased to three, on the Kolkata-Dhaka, Kolkata-Khulna and Dhaka-New Jalpaiguri routes respectively.

Operationalisation of the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (originally signed in 1972 and renewed in 2015)¹³ has resulted in movement of goods using a combination of sea, inland waterways and roads from 2016 onwards.¹⁴ The second addendum to this protocol signed in May 2020 included two new Protocol routes, five new ports of call and two extended ports of call.¹⁵ In February 2022, the Protocol was utilised to transport foodgrains as well with 200 Metric Tonnes of rice leaving Patna by ship via National Waterway No 1 for Pandu (near Guwahati), travelling 2,350 km to reach its destination after one month.¹⁶ As regards roadways, Tripura and other Northeastern states have benefitted enormously with opening of the bridge over the Feni river, connecting its Land Custom Station at Sabroom (just 80 km from Chittagong Port) with Ramgarh in Bangladesh (the Prime Minister's Office has forecast that Tripura is poised to become 'the gateway to the Northeast'¹⁷). Bus services on the Dhaka-Siliguri-Gangtok-Dhaka and Dhaka-Siliguri-Darjeeling-Dhaka routes (in addition to the original Dhaka Kolkata) have commenced. Discussions on operationalising the Motor Vehicle Agreement between India, Bangladesh and Nepal are ongoing.¹⁸ For travel by air, around 100 flights operate weekly between New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai to Dhaka and Chittagong.¹⁹ During Prime Minister Modi's visit to Bangladesh in March 2021, Sheikh Hasina '*offered the use of Chottogram and Sylhet International Airport, by the people of North East India, especially of Tripura*'.²⁰

Improved Economic Ties. Enhanced connectivity has been matched by great economic activity, whose scale and scope are difficult to summarise adequately. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh.²¹ It is also India's fifth-largest export destination.²² Trade between the two countries has grown steadily. Exports of Bangladesh to India have tripled

over the last decade, crossing \$1 billion in 2018-19. In FY 2019-20, India's exports to Bangladesh were \$8.2 billion and imports were \$1.26 billion.²³ As a comparison, in 2019, total bilateral trade between India and Russia from January-September 2019 stood at \$7.55 billion (all data from the same source). Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of *India Today*.²⁴ India has extended three Lines of Credits to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to US\$ 8 billion for development of infrastructure in various sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports, while providing assistance through grants for other infrastructure projects. *This is the largest concessional credit given by India to any single country. Additionally, India is also developing two Indian Economic Zones at Mirsarai and Mongla in Bangladesh.*²⁵ As the example of private firms from Bangladesh supplying LPG to Tripura shows, interdependency is increasing by the day.²⁶ India and Bangladesh have also agreed in March 2022, to conduct a joint study on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).²⁷

Infrastructure Development and Capacity Building. The scale of cooperation in other spheres is equally wide and touches every aspect—be it digital infrastructure, disaster management, education of students and other aspects of human resource development or capacity building. Till March 2021 India had funded 68 High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) in Bangladesh such as construction of student hostels, academic buildings, skill development and training institutes, cultural centres, and orphanages. Training of professionals and bureaucrats carries on at a regular pace, with 1800 Bangladesh Civil Service officials training at the National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG), Mussoorie from 2019 onwards and 1500 Bangladeshi judicial officials training at the National Judicial Academy Bhopal from 2017 at National Judicial Academy, Bhopal. 800 Bangladeshis avail of the ITEC training courses. In addition, 200 scholarships are awarded by ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) every year to students from

Bangladesh for pursuing under-graduation, post-graduation and M.Phil/PhD courses in educational institutes in India including NITs and IITs.²⁸ 1,000 ‘Shuborno Jayanti’ Scholarships in India for Bangladeshi students were also announced in March 2021. Exchange programs for NCC cadets are keenly awaited events. The Nutan Muktijoddha Santan Scholarship Scheme for children of Bangladeshi freedom fighters continues to be popular.

Security Aspects

Strategic dialogues at the apex level have been regular. NSAs of both countries have met frequently at various fora (the most recent being the interaction at the Colombo Security Conclave in March 2022 where Bangladesh and Seychelles attended as observers²⁹). At the strategic level, there appears to be a good understanding of each other’s sensitivities, providing scope to extend some leeway over matters which are difficult to immediately resolve. Cooperation on intelligence sharing, combating terrorism, maritime cooperation (including the Blue Economy) and other strategic issues continue to grow. Today, prominent Bangladeshis in important positions openly acknowledge India as ‘... our most important partner...’.³⁰

Defence Cooperation. Considering that the Indian Army and Mukti Bahini fought shoulder to shoulder in 1971, mutual defence ties even predate Bangladesh’s independence. Immediately after independence, the 25 years ‘India-Bangladesh Friendship Treaty’ was signed by Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Despite being a comprehensive document covering all aspects of security *including people to people exchanges*, this treaty was viewed essentially as a security pact in Bangladesh. Given short shrift by its military rulers and unpopular with a suspicious public, it lapsed in 1997.³¹

Today the Bangladesh military is the third-largest in South Asia and an important arbiter in that nation’s destiny. Improvement in defence

relations and a shift from the Pakistan coloured perspective commenced after Bangladeshi military officers who were commissioned after 1971 gradually came into senior positions. An alumnus of the first course at the Bangladesh Military Academy, Gen Moeen Ahmed became COAS in 2008 and also headed a caretaker government. The first step in structured military to military cooperation however was taken only in 2017 with the signing of three MoUs on defence supplies and technology transfer and cooperation in defence and security studies between respective Staff Colleges and National Defence Colleges.³²

Today, military exercises between all three services take place annually—SAMPRITI for the Army, BONGO SAGOR for the Navy and a multilateral involving the Air Forces, SAMVEDNA.³³ Since 2018, the navies and coast guards have been carrying out coordinated patrolling exercises (CORPAT) in the Bay of Bengal. Over the years a large number of Bangladeshi officers and men have attended training courses in India, including a recently retired Chief of Army Staff who attended the Long Gunnery Staff Course at the School of Artillery, Devlali. The scope of joint exercises encompasses Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), anti-terrorism coordination and others. Multilateral UN peacekeeping exercises such as SHANTIR OGROSENA in April 2021 are also held.³⁴ Examples of joint adventure and sports activities are cross border cycling expeditions, parachuting and free fall exercises, and white water rafting events. For the first time on Republic Day 2021, a 122 member tri-service Bangladesh military contingent marched on Rajpath as part of the Parade. Similarly, an Indian contingent participated in Bangladesh's Victory Day Parade on 16 December 2021.

While much has certainly happened in some spheres of military cooperation, one fundamental issue remains to be tackled—the requirement to remove any suspicions about India's intentions towards that country in the minds of the Bangladesh military, especially at the middle level. The transparent effort is required to bring about this attitudinal change, so that

perceptions about each other are realistic, forward-looking and not based on incorrect premises—more so given the disproportionate influence that the military wields in that country and its force structuring which focusses on defending the nation against an aggressor. It is therefore important to institutionalise as many of such interactions as possible including bilateral exercises, courses of instruction and visits, to strengthen goodwill, remove misperceptions and maintain fraternal relations between the two militaries. Further, it must be appreciated that most Bangladeshi officers are exposed to UN peacekeeping operations, and a sizeable number have done courses in Islamic countries like Turkey and Pakistan. Thus, to foster confidence closer home, enhancing the scale and scope of interaction is a must. An extremely positive initiative in this regard is the venture of Sheikh Hasina's of hosting Indian veterans of the 1971 war on a yearly basis every December, including widows and dependents of soldiers to honour their sacrifice. India reciprocates by hosting annual delegations of Muktiyoddhas at the same time. For their Indian comrades too, a long view of India Bangladesh relations and unbiased accounts of the 1971 war should be made part of academic syllabi in training academies and courses of instruction. Also, the invariably positive feedback from serving Bangladeshi officers who have visited India with their families on long courses should be utilised to enhance all-round military to military cooperation.

India remains sensitive to Bangladeshi concerns of not wishing to be 'allied' to India. This is one reason for the scale of exercises remaining at the tactical level wherein despite the mostly Chinese origin weapons and platforms held by the Bangladesh military (though dissatisfaction with some of these systems is increasingly available³⁵), interoperability is manageable. Some forward movement toward increasing the acceptability of Indian weaponry and other defence-related items in Bangladesh can be discerned; the \$500 million Indian lines of credit for import of defence equipment, extended in December 2019, is likely to

be operationalised soon.³⁶ There is potential for further cooperation in this field in days to come.

Contentious Issues Impinging on Security

Border Management. 'The India Bangladesh border ... has a mix of hills, forests, and flat plains with no physical barriers. This diverse mix of topographical features makes the border extremely porous through which illegal migrants, smugglers, criminals, insurgents and terrorists freely circulate'.³⁷ In more turbulent times, border management has led to deaths of civilians and paramilitaries on both sides, resulting in nose diving of bilateral relations. It was therefore the first security-related issue to have an institutionalised mechanism in place, with a Coordinated Border Management Plan signed between heads of the Border Security Force and Border Guards Bangladesh in July 2011.³⁸ Even so, despite pledges of 'zero killings' incidents on the border continue to occur. A Bangladesh human rights body claims that 48 Bangladeshis were killed along the border in 2020 alone.³⁹ *What goes unreported is the far higher casualties sustained by the BSF when small patrols armed with only one lethal weapon are attacked by large armed gangs, and the inability to distinguish at night between ethnically identical communities. Most importantly, such attacks take place along the border fencing, which is inside Indian territory.* Much work remains to be done to reconcile differing narratives realistically.

Effect of Internal Socio-Political Dynamics. Domestic politics is known at times to hold a nation's foreign policy hostage. Whether the issue pertains to treatment of minorities, passing of the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA) or approval of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), both countries have to deal with the fallout of such sensitive matters on their bilateral relationship. Currently, mature leadership on both sides has avoided taking extreme positions on these issues and managed to contain adverse reactions. However, these highly sensitive matters need just a

spark from fundamentalists to create widespread communal disharmony and negatively impact the public.

The Rohingya and Myanmar. The Rohingya crisis is close to six years old. Bangladesh has taken in over one million refugees and made commendable efforts towards their rehabilitation pending repatriation to Myanmar. India has provided economic assistance to redress the situation in Bangladesh refugee camps, simultaneously providing assistance for economic development in Rakhine state. It has also taken up the issue of Rohingya repatriation with the Government of Myanmar.⁴⁰ While Bangladesh has accepted India's stance on the matter considering the extremely sensitive nature of current India Myanmar relations, it would welcome greater Indian participation in resolving this crisis which has only adverse implications for the region in the long and short terms- both directly and indirectly.

The Teesta Waters. Despite being just one of the 54 rivers that India and Bangladesh share, the Teesta issue is a highly emotive topic in Bangladesh, showcased by detractors as a symbol of Indian intransigence and useful for stoking anti-India sentiment. Many pessimists overlook the fact that provisions of the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty of 1996 are being honoured by India and that a 2019 MoU on sharing of waters of the Feni river for Tripura's benefit is under implementation. Possible solutions to the Teesta issue such as establishing reservoirs in North Bengal to accommodate excess monsoon flow to cater for the lean season, or looking at alternate crop patterns in the river basin continue to be debated, even as the West Bengal government continues to oppose a settlement on the matter.⁴¹ While India stands committed to resolving the Teesta issue, overall sharing of common waters is another option that has made headway, with six rivers identified for water sharing purposes between both countries.⁴² Nevertheless, arriving at a *modus vivendi* on Teesta sooner than later will remove an unnecessary irritant in the relationship.

The China Factor

China has multiple interests in Bangladesh—it is the ‘intersection between India and ASEAN,’⁴³ a littoral providing access to the Bay of Bengal, a rising ‘Asian Tiger’ and strategically located vis-à-vis India. Today it is Bangladesh’s largest trading partner, and in FY 2019 provided Foreign Direct Investment to the tune of \$1.159 billion⁴⁴ and duty-free access to 98 per cent of Bangladeshi goods. China has skilfully invested in developmental aspects and infrastructure building across sectors—roads, ports, bridges (including the signature Padma River railway bridge), high-speed railways, airports, power plants and power infrastructure, green energy, digital connectivity, data centres, IT projects and a Special Economic Zone (SEZ)—in a manner similar to India’s though on a much larger scale. With Bangladesh included in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it ‘... is considered to be the second-largest recipient of Chinese loans under the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) after Pakistan ... is set to receive an investment worth \$40 billion from China under a bilateral partnership ...’.⁴⁵ However, till 2019, loans from China comprised just 6% of Bangladesh’s total debt.⁴⁶

Bangladesh’s military dispensation was decidedly pro-China. Defence cooperation between the two nations was cemented as early as 2002 with a Defence Cooperation Agreement. China is Bangladesh’s largest arms supplier, accounting for 74 per cent of Bangladesh’s arms imports between 2010-2019. It supplies tanks, fighter jets, submarines, frigates, anti-ship missiles and the majority of small arms.⁴⁷ However, awareness of Indian sensitivities at the strategic level and a consensus on the perils of over dependence on China have restrained Bangladesh from proceeding further; one example is the cancellation of the planned development of the Sonadia Island Deep Sea Port by China and coopting of Japan instead to develop the Matarbari port. It’s independent foreign policy was very visible when the Chinese ambassador to Dhaka was soundly rebuked for his comments on Bangladesh joining the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

(QUAD).⁴⁸ Overall, Bangladesh strives to derive maximum benefit from its relations with India and China, while striking a balance between the two. As India plays to its strengths in Bangladesh, it must keep in mind the strategic implications of the China Bangladesh relationship, which will continue to expand.

The American Role

There is renewed American interest in Bangladesh as the US operationalises its Indo-Pacific Strategy. While sanctioning certain Bangladeshi entities in 2021 over human rights issues, the USA has signed a draft defence cooperation agreement with that country in March 2022, and provided over 61 million doses of Covid vaccine, the highest from any country.⁴⁹ At the conclusion of the Eighth ‘United States-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue’ in March 2022, there was “renewed, multi-faceted, and deepening” focus on the entire gamut of bilateral ties: trade, investment, labor, human rights, governance, global threats including climate change, terrorism, maritime security, regional issues including the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific,” and the Rohingya crisis.⁵⁰ The US Bangladesh relationship is on the upswing; as the QUAD continues to take shape and an augmented American naval presence in the Bay of Bengal becomes visible, how Bangladesh manages to maintain its relations with India, China and the US on an even keel will be a test of statesmanship for Sheikh Hasina’s government, given its professed intention of staying away from big power politics.

Conclusion

Bangladesh has come a long way from its birth in 1971, overcoming humongous challenges. Today it is making purposeful strides towards shaking off the United Nations ‘Least Developed Country’ tag by 2026. With a resilient economy that has withstood the ravages of Covid and a geographical location that provides many benefits, it is being courted by

powers from within and outside the region. As closest neighbours who share ‘ties of blood’ with each other, it behoves India and Bangladesh to optimise the advantages of their strategic geography. *This relationship has immense potential for growth but is prone to equally great pitfalls if not managed proactively with maturity.* Both neighbours must work to ensure that over the next 50 years, the bilateral relationship becomes more resilient, notwithstanding inevitable changes in government. The momentum provided should be such that the gains achieved from such cooperation prove irreversible.

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Strategic Contours: India and Myanmar

P S Rajeshwar

Abstract

India and Myanmar have deep historical, cultural, ethnic and commercial links. Common geopolitical, economic and security interests exist that are spread across vast land and maritime frontiers. Apart from this, there is a sizeable Indian diaspora residing in Myanmar for generations. India's land border with Myanmar of over 1600 km, involving Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram adjoin Kachin, Sagaing and Chin states across. Myanmar also serves as the land bridge to South East Asia and coupled with the maritime connection in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, makes it a very important neighbour in the regional's security calculus.

Introduction

"The defence of Burma is in fact the defence of India, and it is India's primary concern no less than Burma's to see that its frontiers remain inviolate. In fact, no responsibility can be considered too heavy for India when it comes to the question of defending Burma."

—KM Panikkar, 1943¹

India has been pursuing a pragmatic foreign policy in recent times that puts immediate neighbours at the forefront. "Under its 'Neighbourhood

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First' policy, (Indian) Government is committed to developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all its neighbours. India is an active development partner and is involved in several projects in these countries".² As part of this policy India has been engaging Myanmar with great purpose.

India launched its Look East Policy in 1991 to promote economic, strategic and cultural relations with the countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). This helped to highlight the importance of Myanmar in our foreign policy, further emphasised by our Act East Policy in 2014, leading to strengthening of relations in the last decade.

In a pivotal moment on 1 February 2021, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military) staged a coup and seized power from the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. India reacted cautiously to this event. "We have noted the developments in Myanmar with deep concern. India has always been steadfast in its support of the process of democratic transition in Myanmar. We believe that the rule of law and the democratic process must be upheld. We are monitoring the situation closely".³ Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of Myanmar Armed Forces has since run the country through the State Administration Council (SAC).

India and Myanmar Relations: The Ebb and Flow

Myanmar (known till 1989 as Burma) was a part of the British Indian empire till 1937. Consequently, a number of Indians were involved in Myanmar's trade, business and key services such as railways, banking and other public utilities. Burma gained independence in January 1948. "A Treaty of Friendship was signed between the two nations (India and Burma) in 1951".⁴ During this period, the ties between India and Burma were special. "Warmth in bilateral relations is reflected in the statement of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru: We are in frequent touch

with the Government of Burma on many matters. We are not only friendly in the normal sense of the word, but if I may say so somewhat more friendly”.⁵ Throughout the 1950s the relations remained warm and stable. The Burmese nationalisation initiatives, following a military coup by General Ne Win in the early 1960s, saw the exodus of a number of Indians to India. Myanmar continued isolating itself from the world and declined as an economy in the next two decades. The Indians now present in Myanmar, (estimated at approx. 2.9 million in 2009), are either descendants of the original settled community, often small traders and farmers, or expats in trade, investment and industry.

Myanmar was also plagued by ethnic strife and faced huge challenges integrating as a nation, meanwhile, Chinese influence in Myanmar continued increasing. During this period India prioritised its commitment to the return of democracy in Myanmar instead of engaging with it. But by 1988 India realised that it needed to work with Myanmar more constructively to counter adverse security developments in its East. A review of India’s position then led to progressing our ties with Myanmar. “A Memorandum of Understanding on Peace and Tranquility in Border Areas was signed by India and Myanmar in January 1994”.⁶

Myanmar became a member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in 1997, which facilitated its larger role in the development of the region through participation in infrastructure and connectivity initiatives. India also began engaging Myanmar through the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative, a sub-regional organisation established in November 2000. Following Gen Than Shwe’s visit to India in 2010, Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh reciprocated with a visit in 2012 and thereafter in 2014. These meetings enabled many important memorandums and agreements. Military and economic ties continued with a new found impetus.

India and Myanmar Relations in recent times

“When in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Act East policy, India’s economy was relatively robust and its global profile was higher than it was in the decades prior. Modi gave a new thrust to intensify economic, strategic and diplomatic relations with countries that share common concerns with India on China’s growing economic and military strength and its implications for the evolving regional order”.⁷ Significantly, he announced the policy during the 12th ASEAN summit in Myanmar and followed it up with a bilateral visit in 2017. Aung San Suu Kyi visited India in 2016 as her country’s State Counsellor. These visits helped the political leadership to develop an understanding of each other’s challenges and progress key aspects of their relations. India also put in an effort to train Myanmar’s parliamentarians in order to help the democratic processes.

The trade between India and Myanmar which signifies its economic relations has roughly doubled in the last decade. “India is the 5th largest trading partner of Myanmar. India’s export to Myanmar during 2019-20 was US\$ 973.89 million and import from Myanmar was US\$ 547.25 million. There exists enormous potential for bilateral trade enhancement and a number of initiatives such as upgrading the Integrated Check Post at Tamu-Moreh, and infrastructure at Rihkhawdar-Zokhawthar, negotiations on signing a coastal shipping agreement, development of Sittwe Port, etc., are in various stages of implementation with the aim of increasing trade with Myanmar.... In recent times, engagement with Myanmar in the energy sector has expanded with Indian investments in Myanmar’s energy sector being over US\$ 1.2 billion. Discussions are ongoing to establish a petrochemical refinery at Thanlyin in Yangon Region”.⁸ However, the pandemic has retarded trade in the last two years, understandably due to border restrictions, protests against the coup, and continuing connectivity challenges.

Growth in trade is often dependent on connectivity, which has been a challenge between the two countries. India has tried to augment this by executing key projects in Myanmar since 2000. “India’s Border Roads Organisation (BRO) built the India-Myanmar Friendship Road connecting Moreh (India) to Tamu, Kalembo and Kalewa in Myanmar in 2001”.⁹ TATA Motors has established a Turbo-truck assembly plant, while TCIL has built a high-speed data link project connecting various cities in Myanmar. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) attempts to connect Kolkata to Lawngtlai in Mizoram via Sittwe Port (by ship) and Paletwa on River Kaladan (by Inland Water Transport) and thereafter by road. The project has unfortunately got delayed due to the pandemic and disturbances following the Tatmadaw take-over. “The Kaladan project faces a new deadline in 2023, but government officials are worried this will be missed too. Much of this concern is centred on the 110 km stretch of road within Myanmar, which has proved particularly tough to navigate, with a series of hurdles—including a company involved going bankrupt, and a Myanmar militia group—playing truant with its construction”.¹⁰

The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is a 1,360-km highway from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand that India is deeply engaged within Myanmar. It has the potential to boost trade and commerce not only in Myanmar but also with the ASEAN-countries. However, this project has run into a hurdle. “The work on the Kalewa-Yagyi stretch has been delayed for a number of reasons including the challenge of building roads with “steep gradients and sharp curves,” due to which only one-fourth of the road has been done”.¹¹ These connectivity projects thus need sharper focus, better delivery and lots of safeguarding to benefit the local people.

The MGC group comprises, India, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, which aims to facilitate closer contact among the people inhabiting the major river basins in these countries and enhancing

cooperation in tourism, culture, education, and transportation and communications. “India has launched 68 community-oriented projects worth US\$ 3.4 million under the Quick Impact Projects scheme during 2016-2020—of which 38 projects have been completed and 30 other projects are under implementation”.¹² People to People contacts between India and Myanmar have increased due to these types of projects.

India-Myanmar defence relations have considerably improved in recent years. More interactions have taken place since the visit of India’s Chief of the Army Staff in 2017, when 10 ambulances, 15 sniffer dogs and 4 English language laboratories were gifted to Myanmar. In November 2017, the first edition of India-Myanmar Table Top Exercise was held. In 2018, bilateral exercises between the armies and navies of the two nations were conducted. In 2019 Army to Army Staff Talks were held after which, both armies carried out a three-week-long “coordinated flushing out” of the militant groups operating along their side of the border. India remains concerned about the India based insurgent groups operating from Myanmar which continue to cause a security concern. An MoU on Defence Cooperation was signed. In May 2020, Myanmar handed over 22 cadres of Indian insurgent groups. The visit of Chief of the Army Staff and Foreign Secretary to Myanmar in October 2020 during the pandemic was a significant one too. Later, India gave a Kilo-class submarine, INS *Sindhuvir*, to Myanmar Navy. Both sides signed an MoU on Exchange of White Shipping. India also imparted training to Myanmar defence personnel in UN Peacekeeping. Overall, there has been an increase in visits of military leaders, training cooperation, capacity building and defence exports from India to Myanmar.

The Rohingya Issue

The Rohingya Muslims who mostly live in Rakhine State, exceed a million in numbers and are not considered as its citizens by Myanmar. Tensions between them and the Buddhist community have increased in

the last decade. Of late, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) have indulged in attacks on the Tatmadaw security posts and even Hindu minority villages in the area. In 2017 escalation of violence eventually led to the internal displacement and mass exodus of Rohingyas to the Cox Bazar region in Bangladesh. UN Human Rights have since brought out a report on this conflict. “Non-State armed groups have committed crimes against civilians, for which they should be held accountable. During the period under review, the Tatmadaw was the main perpetrator of serious human rights violations and crimes under international law in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States”.¹³

The China Factor

Myanmar’s borders with India and China make it a crucial state for both neighbours. Bertil Lintner described Myanmar’s value to India’s security—“But the problems in India’s northeast are far from over, and Burma remains a cockpit of anarchy that continues to have a severe impact on India’s national security. And the regional rivalry with China is actually becoming more serious—even in areas far away from the traditional conflict zones in India’s northeast”.¹⁴ Hence the nature of Myanmar-China relations need to always be factored in.

China and Myanmar have a 2100 km land border which was mutually settled in 1960. A number of powerful armed groups operate against the Tatmadaw near this border. During the reign of Gen Ne Win, the Chinese built a strong relationship with Burma. China’s ‘Malacca Dilemma’ prompted it to seek access to ports in Myanmar that abut the Indian Ocean. Further, China has been keen to utilise hydrocarbon and mineral resources of Myanmar to meet its requirements. “The Myanmar-China Pipelines project comprises of the construction of two separate, parallel pipelines for transporting crude oil and natural gas from Daewoo International’s offshore blocks A-1 and A-3 in Myanmar, to China”.¹⁵ China has also been keen to limit Western influence in Myanmar.

China launched the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) as part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) over the last decade. “A huge array of activities is being implemented under the BRI framework in Myanmar...: (1) the interconnection of the Myanmar and Chinese national electricity grids, (2) the China-Myanmar High-Speed Railway, (3) the Sino-Myanmar Land and Water Transportation Passage and (4) special economic zones (SEZs) and Industrial Zones”.¹⁶ These large scale projects utilise the capacities and surpluses available in Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), but might eventually end up creating a huge debt for the people of Myanmar.

The Myanmar Approach

Myanmar has always wanted to be able to balance its two big neighbours, China and India. Within Myanmar, a hybrid model of governance was in vogue till the coup, where the Tatmadaw had ample control over its functioning. On the external front, the Aung San Suu Kyi led government appeared to have leaned heavily on China for its growth and development. Once it opened up to the world, Myanmar welcomed support from the US and EU too. Aid from Japan benefited Myanmar in large measure. “By 2017, the government had provided more than a total of 1 trillion yen (\$9.3 billion) in loan assistance, more than 320 billion yen (\$2.9 billion) in grant aid, and 98 billion yen (\$912 million) in technical assistance”.¹⁸ Further, Myanmar actively participated in ASEAN and BIMSTEC activities.

Elections were held in November 2020, where State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, who headed the NLD, led her party to victory. But the Tatmadaw-Myanmar military-seized power on 1 February 2021, disputing the results and citing fraud. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under arrest. The people, who had tasted the freedom of social media and global connectivity did not take kindly to the coup and derailment of the NLD government and carried out a spate of protests throughout the country.

The NLD leaders formed the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CPRH). Opposition activists have since organised strikes and held mass protests, while local militias have taken to violence against the military.

Western nations were swift in their condemnation of the military seizing power in Myanmar. “The US denounced in the strongest possible terms Burma’s military leaders for seeking to reject the will of the people of Burma also announced the redirection of \$42 million of bilateral assistance from the government to civil society”.¹⁹ EU soon followed suit with sanctions in addition to existing bans that prohibited military training and military cooperation with Tatmadaw. “Restrictive measures, which now apply to a total of 43 individuals and 6 entities, include an asset freeze and a prohibition from making funds available to the listed individuals and entities. Additionally, a travel ban applicable to listed persons prevents them from entering or transiting through EU territory”.²⁰ Japan expressed grave concern on the developments. “The Japanese government’s approach to the coup in Myanmar is in some ways a middle road between the ‘distant’ Western states that prioritise human rights and democracy and the ‘local’ Asian states that prioritise stability and development”.²¹ Japan continues to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar.

The previous sanctions on Myanmar do not seem to have had much effect on the Tatmadaw. The country had lived in isolation for a long time before it marginally integrated in the last decade. Before the coup, Myanmar was already under sanctions for human rights violations and the Rohingya issue. “The (UN HRC thematic) report has identified the two conglomerates in Myanmar which are essentially holding companies i.e., Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) as being owned and influenced by senior Tatmadaw leaders who have also been identified as responsible for gross human rights violations and family members”.²² Thus it is likely that

fresh sanctions would not have made much difference to the Tatmadaw and instead added to the suffering of the common man. “Sanctions and boycott by the West could once again lead to the international isolation of Myanmar which would inevitably push it into further dependence on China”.²³

The Chinese response to the Tatmadaw seizing power has been a mixed one. While it has stuck by ‘Non-interference’ in Myanmar at the UN, it has not hesitated to influence the power groups in Myanmar. “While maintaining a line of communication with the NLD, Beijing now seeks to sit out the deepening crisis and push ahead with its own interests in Myanmar with the group that holds power”.²⁴ However, it has maintained its distance from the underground National Unity Government (NUG). On the other hand, China has also to deal with a degree of mistrust with the Tatmadaw. “Although China is the largest arms supplier to Myanmar, the military suspects Beijing’s involvement in the country’s multitude of internal conflicts”.²⁵

The Russian response to the February 2021 event appears to be based on ‘non-interference and sovereignty’ in Myanmar. Russia’s Deputy defence minister attended a military parade in Myanmar on 21 March, while Min Aung Hlaing visited Moscow thereafter. Since Myanmar perceives Russia as a neutral power that is responsive to its needs, the latter is in a position to appreciably influence the Tatmadaw.

The World Bank has been supporting financial initiatives in Myanmar in the past decade which have alleviated poverty in the strife-torn country. But its forecast has now turned quite grim. “Myanmar’s economy and people continue to be severely tested by the ongoing impacts of the military coup and the surge in COVID-19 cases in 2021. Following an expected 18 per cent contraction of the economy in the year ended September 2021, the World Bank’s Myanmar Economic Monitor, released today, projects growth of 1 per cent in the year to September 2022”.²⁶

India's Challenges and Way Ahead

India is directly affected by the security situation close to its border with Myanmar. On 21 November the PLA Manipur and Manipur Naga Peoples Front (MNPF) laid an ambush to kill a Commanding Officer and six other ranks, and then fled across the border. This incident was cited by Indian Foreign Secretary, Mr HV Shringla, during his visit to Myanmar on 21 December. "The visit also provided an opportunity to raise matters relating to India's security, especially in the light of the recent incident in Churachandpur district in southern Manipur. Foreign Secretary stressed the need to put an end to any violence and maintain peace and stability in the border areas. Both sides reiterated their commitment to ensure that their respective territories would not be allowed to be used for any activities inimical to the other".³¹

The situation in Myanmar again came to fore during the Quad Foreign Minister's meeting in Melbourne on 22 February. The issue of India is opposed to imposing sanctions on the Tatmadaw was raised. External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar said, "Our dilemma is this. We (India and Myanmar) have a complicated border with insurgents operating. One way to secure that border is by working with the government, which means the military. So, despite unfortunate developments, we can't not work with them".³²

Stability in Myanmar is a key imperative for us. Further, while it is evident that any solution to the imbroglio in Myanmar must come from within, we need to continue with our attempts to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi and progress efforts to convince the Tatmadaw leadership to restore democracy at the earliest. Simultaneously there is a need to provide succour to the refugees who have already crossed over, based on pure humanitarian consideration, at the same time discouraging any huge influx.

The Tatmadaw appears to have its hands full with the internal security situation there. A prolonged period of conflict looks likely, wherein it will be tough to progress any business or infrastructure building, thereby

hindering any worthwhile development India will also have to interact more often with the Tatmadaw leadership to keep up the pressure on insurgent groups that operate from their side to secure our sensitive NE region.

There is a need to work closely with ASEAN and like-minded Japan, which are keeping a balanced approach towards Myanmar. Concurrently, we have to counter the influence of China on Myanmar, which presently appears to be benefiting due to the West pulling away. All this must be done with a long-term perspective.

Conclusion

February 2021 saw a setback to democracy and stability in Myanmar, where the hybrid government model was abandoned. Myanmar being geostrategically important is not only a part of our 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East policies' but has also the 'Indo-Pacific dynamics'. The Russia-Ukraine war has currently taken away the intense focus from Myanmar, but India will require to monitor and act with agility. Till the aspirations of Myanmar's people are met, for which the elections in 2023 will be a key milestone, the situation could remain uncertain and volatile. Meanwhile, India will do well to visualise various outcomes and be prepared to respond to them robustly.

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India's Strategic Concerns from Nepal & Bhutan

Sangeeta Thapliyal

Abstract

Peace and tranquillity in the Himalayas are essential for India's security and cordial relations with China. This has been a long-standing understanding of the Indian government and was also stressed upon and reiterated by the Indian officials during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to India in March 2022. Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar said that relations between the two countries cannot be normal unless there is total disengagement of forces by China. He reminded China to respect treaties and agreements signed between the two countries on border-related issues.¹ A peaceful and stable border is relevant for not only the Indian Himalayas but also for the Himalayan countries having common borders and border-related issues with China.

Introduction

Since the early fifties, the Indian government has emphasised on the strategic importance of Nepal and Bhutan for India's security. An open border with them has been one aspect of India's strategic calculation but China's policy pronouncements and activities in the Himalayan states had further raised the strategic bar. China had claimed that its borders with Nepal and Bhutan were unresolved and undemarcated. With Nepal, the

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issue was resolved but with Bhutan, it has lingered despite the bilateral negotiations on borders, and new claims have been put forth on the territory. The article tries to describe how China's border contentions with Nepal and Bhutan are causing concern for India's security. What are the available options to meet those challenges?

China-Nepal Border

As recently as 2020, there were reports that China had encroached on some territory of the bordering villages of Humla district in far west Nepal. To probe this matter PM Sher Bahadur Deuba had set up a six-member committee under the joint secretary of the Home Ministry in August 2021.² BBC News had claimed of getting hold of the report and published that the Chinese had restricted religious activities of the villagers in Lalungjong in Humla and also the grazing by the herders. It further wrote that people living in those border areas were dependent on the economic activities of people across the border villages in Tibet and hence were hesitant to openly talk about border violations.³ The report is still not made public but it was evident that the border issue was influenced by the domestic politics of the country.

The very next day Global Times countered the BBC News and wrote that such kind of reporting had been often raised especially in the last two years but was rejected by Nepal's ministry of agriculture and foreign affairs and also the Chinese foreign ministry. It considered the news as a smear campaign coinciding with the winter Olympics in China and tacit support to the Tibetans.⁴

Nepal and China share a 1414.88 km long border demarcated by boundary pillars. According to the former director-general of Topography, Buddhi Narayan Shreshtha there are two trijunction points where Nepal's border meets with India and China: Limpiyadhura (Kalapani) in the west and the Jhinsang pass in the east.⁵ India considers Limpiyadhura as its territory.

The issue related to border demarcation between Nepal and China dates back to the fifties. In a press conference in 1959, BP Koirala, Prime Minister of Nepal, had said that, “before the situation changed in Tibet, the northern border did not pose any problem ‘even from the defence point of view’. Tibet paid us tribute and we enjoyed extraterritorial concessions there. Historically speaking, we had some suzerainty over Tibet”.⁶

In the early 1960s, Nepal was engaged with China on territorial and boundary issues. To delineate boundary and resolve border demarcation a Boundary Agreement was signed in March 1960. It set up a Joint committee comprising of equal numbers of members from both countries, to conduct a survey of the boundary, erect markers and pave way for a Sino-Nepalese boundary agreement. Both the signatories agreed to not send armed personnel within 20 km from their side of the border but could keep officials for administrative and police services.⁷ In a press conference, BP Koirala informed the media that China had laid claims over Mount Everest during his visit to Beijing in April.⁸

In another incident in June 1960, there were reports that the Chinese Army had killed and captured Nepali Army personnel in Mustang. China clarified that their Army mistook them to be Tibetan rebels and the incident happened within Chinese territory. Chou en Lai had submitted a written apology to Nepal. Since there were reports of China’s military build-up in the demilitarized zone, Koirala sent a letter of protest against it and refuted the Chinese claim that the shooting incident had occurred on Chinese territory. It accepted Nepal’s demand for a compensation of Rs 50,000 for the losses but adhered to their position that the Nepalis were shot or imprisoned in their territory.⁹ Nepal expressed gratitude for the Chinese gestures while placing it on record that the incident took place in the Nepali territory. Koirala further noted that the unilateral action taken by the Chinese government within 20 km was in violation of the 1960 agreement.¹⁰

All this happened while India's relations with China were under strain as it had claimed Indian territory as its own. Added to it Dalai Lama along with Tibetans had taken refuge in India and that had become a major eyesore in the relationship. Simultaneously, Nepal was going through domestic upheaval. BP Koirala had assumed office through the first general election in the country that took place in 1959, however, his tenure was cut short as King Mahendra had dismissed the government on charges of corruption, misgovernance, etc. The Indian government's response was not favourable toward the dismissal of the democratically elected government and this did not go well with the King. Mahendra preferred visiting China after dismissing the Koirala government and signed a boundary treaty and an agreement on road construction linking Kathmandu with Kodari, at the border with Tibet. Nepal was using strained relations with its neighbours to its advantage by bringing in China as a balancer against India.

China utilised the opportunity to showcase itself as a benign neighbour by signing the Boundary treaty on 5 October 1961. Through the Treaty the issue of Everest was amicably resolved by agreeing that the boundary line passed through it. The southern slope of Everest belongs to Nepal and the northern face lies with China. China resolved border demarcation with Nepal while laying claims on the territories of India and Bhutan.

As happens in frontier areas, people move across borders with animals looking for pastureland. People in the Trans-Himalayas have been crossing the border with their animals for grassland. However, the administrative boundaries and rigid border demarcation by China affected the grazing rights of the people in the borderland of Nepal and Tibet. Through a Joint meeting of a Trans-Border Pasturing held from 8 July to 30 August 1983, both the sides agreed to end the trans-border pasture practices and develop their own pasturelands within their

territory. Till such time the locals had to pay in cash or kind to the local authorities compensation per animal.¹¹

On the whole, the border has been peaceful until news about the construction of a few buildings by China in the Nepalese territory made rounds in the media around two years back. China has built nine buildings in the Humla district in Nepal, it was reported in the House of Representatives by Rangmati Shahi of the Nepali Congress. She reported that China had constructed buildings on an area that earlier had a shed for animals, which was used by the graziers from Nepal.¹²

China has rejected the Nepali claims and its embassy in Kathmandu issued a statement that it “has always respected Nepal’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The buildings mentioned by the media have been verified to be on the Chinese side of the China-Nepal border.”¹³ Refuting media reports through a press statement the Nepalese foreign ministry said that the Chinese constructions were within their own territory.¹⁴ Some in Nepal allege that Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli’s government was defensive on the border issue as it was facing opposition from the alliance partners and opposition parties. Soon after the adoption of the new constitution in 2015, his government’s relations with India were strained and he had moved closer to China. Oli had asked the Chief District Officer (CDO) of Humla to look into the matter. CDO Chiranjibi Giri along with his inspection team found that the construction activity in Lalungjong was within Chinese territory.¹⁵ The opposition party wasn’t convinced of the report and demanded a thorough investigation. Later Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba had set up a committee under the joint secretary of the ministry of home affairs to investigate the border issue with China. The committee found that some boundary pillars in Humla district were repaired and fenced unilaterally by China, which was against the boundary protocol signed in 1961 that entailed that both the signatories would repair boundary pillars in collaboration. The

committee suggested a joint inspection team composed of members from both countries.¹⁶

On an earlier occasion, Nepali media had reported construction of an embankment along Arun river near India-China-Nepal eastern trijunction. The embankment is constructed within Chinese territory but it has changed the course of the river and entered Kimthanka settlement in Sankhuwasabha district.¹⁷ Sankhuwasabha district was also in news because it is the shortest route for Nepal to reach both its neighbours. Nepal wants to take advantage of the geographical location of the trijunction for trade purposes and is constructing Biratnagar-Khandbari-Kimathanksa road with the help of China. It is said “362 km-long Biratnagar-Khandbari-Kimathanka road section is nearing the finish line with only 14 km of road left to build”.¹⁸ There is a change in the Nepali mindset regarding the land link with China. Nepal wants to be a transit between India and China for economic and trade purposes. On the other hand, issues of Chinese activities on the northern border are either brushed aside or trivialised by bringing it within the domestic political playground.

China on the other hand has followed a different trajectory with Bhutan. Its dealings with Bhutan do not establish it as a country ready to resolve boundary issues with its Himalayan neighbours.

China's claims over Bhutan's Boundary

In June 2020, during the 58th meeting of the global environment facility council, China had opposed Bhutan's proposal for funding the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary by claiming it to be a part of China. Despite China's objections, the Council cleared funding for the project.¹⁹

These are not new claims by China on Bhutan's territory. In the *Brief History of China* published in 1954, China had laid pre-historical claims on Bhutan's territory. In 1958, China laid claims on 300 sq km of Bhutan's territory. While it was signing a treaty of peace and friendship with Nepal

in 1960, China was claiming Bhutan, Sikkim and Ladakh as part of Tibet and hence part of China.²⁰ In 1731, Tibetan ruler Polhane had claimed suzerainty over Paro valley of Bhutan though Tibet never directly ruled over it. The Anglo-Bhutan war had brought Bhutan under the British Indian influence through treaty arrangements that were mainly interested in using it as a trade and transit country to reach Tibet. It is said that on certain occasions Bhutan also tried to lessen British influence by showing close relations with Tibet. Proclaiming close relations with Tibet the King of Bhutan wrote to the British Viceroy and Governor-General of India in 1946 that it had “acknowledged Tibetan sovereignty” up to 1860” and “a Bhutanese representative was posted in Lhasa up to 1959 as part of a tributary relation.”²¹ However, Tibet never had political authority over Bhutan. China after taking control over Tibet laid claims over Bhutan, basically, an extension of its middle kingdom thought.

After the Chinese maps claimed Bhutan’s territory as its own in 1958, the Chinese Army had occupied eight enclaves a year later. Chou En Lai had expressed to resolve the boundary issue with Bhutan bilaterally. This is the time when China had laid claims over Indian and Nepalese territory too but had resolved the issue with Nepal bilaterally. Bhutan’s border with China was closed.

Responding to these developments on 28 August 1959, Nehru had declared in the Parliament that aggression against Bhutan and Sikkim would be considered as aggression against India. This basically stemmed from the Treaty of Friendship that was signed between the two countries through which Bhutan had agreed to be assisted by India on its foreign policy.²² However, China challenged the Treaty and India’s relations by directly negotiating with Bhutan on the boundary issue.

The two countries share 477 km of common borders which China claims to be un-demarcated. Graziers and herdsmen have been historically crossing borders for pasture land leading to the assertion of traditional rights over the territory. In 1979, Tibetan graziers had crossed

the border. Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the fourth King of Bhutan said, “Recent intrusions by Tibetan graziers deep into Bhutanese territory have underlined the need for direct talks between Thimphu and Beijing with the explicit purpose of demarcating and delineating the boundary between the two countries.” “Even this year, let me emphasise, there was no crisis situation.” But the graziers had penetrated deeper this year ‘for reasons which are truly difficult to analyse’. He confirmed that, “we have protested to the Chinese and have not yet received an answer.”²³ Responding to the protest, China put forth its desire to solve the issue bilaterally. The two countries directly started dealing with boundary settlement issues from 1984 onwards. It was decided to hold talks every year alternatively in Bhutan and China.

In the process of 24 rounds of talks, it has been decided to negotiate on a sector-by-sector basis. China has shown more interest in the western sector than the middle sector. The western sector in question is at the trijunction of Sikkim state of India, Haa and Doklam province of Bhutan and Tibet region of China. It is in the Chumbi valley. The Chinese interests in the western sector was evident in the tenth round of talks held in November 1996, when it proposed to exchange 495 sq km area of Pasamlung and Jakarlung in the northern borders of the Central sector with 269 sq km of Sunchulumpa, Dramana and Shakhtoe in north-west Bhutan.²⁴ It is apparent that China’s claim and interest was more strategic than otherwise as this would shift the Bhutan China border closer to India.

As Bhutan is the only South Asian country with which China does not have diplomatic relations, the border talks provide enough reasons to engage bilaterally. “Lyonpo Om Pradhan, minister for Trade and Industry, informed the National Assembly of Bhutan that, “the Chinese government had made proposals that the border negotiations be based on the establishment of bilateral trade and diplomatic relations.”²⁵ Diplomatic relations haven’t been established between the two countries

but the border talks resulted in the signing of an interim agreement for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the borders in 1998. It's a significant development as there has been no written document between the two countries before this agreement and in a way, it confirms Bhutan's sovereignty from the Chinese claims.²⁶

It is said that China wants to establish diplomatic relations before finalising border agreement.²⁷ In 1999, during the thirteenth round of boundary talk, China had proposed a package deal stating establishments of diplomatic and trade relations for the final settlement of the boundary demarcation.

Despite the boundary talks and the peace and tranquillity agreement, the Chinese have been indulging in construction activities or their soldiers intrude in Bhutan's territory, something they have been found doing in the entire Himalayan borders with India, Nepal or Bhutan. One major incident was the road construction in Doklam area in western Bhutan in 2017. Bhutan had protested against the intrusion and construction citing it to be against the peace agreement that had been agreed upon that, "The agreements also state that the two sides will refrain from taking unilateral action, or use of force, to change the status quo of the boundary. Bhutan has conveyed to the Chinese side, both on the ground and through the diplomatic channel that the construction of the road inside Bhutanese territory is a direct violation of the agreements and affects the process of demarcating the boundary between our two countries. Bhutan hopes that the status quo in the Doklam area will be maintained as before 16 June 2017."²⁸ India also considered the Chinese activity against their mutual agreement signed in 2012. The Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement clarifying its position that, "the two Governments had in 2012 reached agreement that the tri-junction boundary points between India, China and third countries will be finalised in consultation with the concerned countries. Any attempt, therefore, to unilaterally determine tri-junction points is in violation of this understanding."²⁹ The Indian

Army intervened and stopped the Chinese from road construction that would have linked Doklam plateau to the Chumbi valley. After a military standoff lasting for nearly 70 days, the ministry of external affairs in a press release announced that both the sides had disengaged from the conflict site.³⁰ However, there were reports that there is an increase in the deployment of Chinese forces in the location.³¹ It is also reported that China has not retreated to the original position and has gained a few kilometres, similar to what they have done in Ladakh. China was not only challenging India's strategic interests but also testing its response in support of Bhutan. Gen. Bardalai is of the opinion that China was trying to assess the Indian response so as to prepare for a bigger challenge in future.³² There are reports that China has constructed a new village, helipad and communications tower in Doklam in order to consolidate their claims on the territory. They have been indulging in similar tactics elsewhere by setting up frontline villages on Tibet's border adjoining Himalayan states of India, Nepal and Bhutan.³³ John Pollock writes that as per the satellite images of Maxar Technologies and Google earth, China has been active in Tibet's borderland with the Himalayas by constructing nearly 600 new villages, highways and rail lines, etc.³⁴ Barnett says that by constructing new habitats and infrastructure along the Himalayan frontiers China is trying to make Tibet secure.³⁵

The recent episode of the Chinese claim has been on the Sakteng sanctuary in the eastern trijunction. Bhutan had applied to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for finance to develop Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary. It is in the Trashigang district of Bhutan adjacent to West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh. China made a claim on the sanctuary calling it a disputed territory. Its foreign minister made a statement that borders with Bhutan was not demarcated in the western, northern and eastern sector. Bhutan refuted the Chinese claims and its Embassy in India issued a statement claiming that, "*Bhutan totally rejects the claim made by the Council member of China. Sakteng Wildlife*

Sanctuary is an integral and sovereign territory of Bhutan and at no point during the boundary discussion between Bhutan and China has it featured as a disputed area".³⁶ The statement was presented by Aparna Subramani, an IAS officer and Executive Director in the World Bank representing Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. GEF council did clear Bhutan's proposal for funding but the minutes of their meeting included Bhutan and China's official position on the territory.³⁷ Taylor Fravel, Director of the MIT Security Studies Program is quoted in India Today that the "*Old Chinese maps do not show Sakteng or nearby areas in Bhutan as Chinese territory*". Through the representation of old maps, he has demonstrated that the Chinese map used in the 1962 war with India also showed Sakteng as part of Bhutan.³⁸ There is a view that China's claim on Sakteng was to bring Bhutan back to the negotiating table as the border talks had stopped after the Doklam incident in 2017.³⁹ Another view is that China's tactic is to "pressure Bhutan to concede border territory, specifically territory politically and militarily sensitive to India."⁴⁰

China's new claims in Bhutan came close to its aggressive postures in challenging India in Ladakh. It had equally become aggressive in challenging India's relations with Nepal. It was visible when PM KP Sharma Oli's government had strained Nepal's relations with India in 2015. China tried to cultivate Nepal and signed various agreements on trade and infrastructure development. It was actively involved in the domestic politics of the country and tried to consolidate left forces.⁴¹ Chinese ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi was visibly active in trying to save the Oli government from challenges posed by the opposition leaders and coalition partners. China's stance to pressurise Bhutan was the continuation of a similar policy to challenge India's traditional relations with Bhutan, to see how far could India come to help Bhutan.

It is said that there were murmurs from some quarters in Bhutan that they could have negotiated a better deal with China on Doklam. The Chinese have not retracted to their original position and some in

Bhutan feel the loss of their territory. These are not dominant and strong voices in Bhutan and can be sidelined only on the basis of India's political, economic and military strengths. Bhutan and China had a virtual meeting in October 2021 and signed a memorandum of understanding that has a three steps roadmap for border negotiations.⁴² Indian response has been that they have taken note of it.⁴³ As said earlier, border negotiations between Bhutan and China have been bilateral but the Indian government has been kept informed about it by Bhutan.

China was a factor in India's security in the Himalayas and it is here to stay. It would continue to challenge India in the Himalayas and its relations with the Himalayan countries. These challenges are a security concern for India. PM Nehru considered the Himalayan states as India's frontline. The strategic concerns remain albeit in a changed atmosphere. Nepal has come out of the old framework of special relationships and tries to develop relations with both the neighbours. However, either in its zeal to be a transit country or to create pinpricks by bringing China close to Indian borders, Nepal tries to ignore India's security concerns. Nepal has given some projects to China in its Terai region. China and Nepal have signed a rail project linking Kerung in Tibet Nepal border to the valleys of Kathmandu-Pokhara and Lumbini in Terai. Nepal Army has given contract to the Chinese company Poly Changda Engineering to construct bridges on Kathmandu-Terai Fast track expressway project.⁴⁴ Nepal and China have jointly set up a cement factory Hongshi Shivam Cement factory in Nawalparasi in terai.⁴⁵ There are plans to set up an industrial park by China in Jhapa and Chitwan in Nepal.⁴⁶ As of now China perceptibly has a good image in Nepal as a country that delivers. One has to see how much China is able to deliver in the long run. It is clear though that Nepal is looking for economic benefits from both its neighbours. It is equally clear that Nepal does not share India's security concerns vis-à-vis China as it did in the 1950s. There are reports of Chinese nationals crossing terai border and illegally entering India but Nepal does

not seem to be bothered but to bring Chinese presence in terai, closer to the open border with India. Even up in the Himalayas, it is suggested in the Indian media, Nepal had claimed Kalapani and Limpiyadhura and incorporated it in its map at the behest of China. General MM Naravane, had made a statement that, “there is a reason to believe that they might have raised the matter at the behest of someone else”.⁴⁷ That “someone” is considered as China more so because Nepal’s new map was issued close to the border skirmishes in Ladakh. There has been no official statement from India linking the episode to China. These strategic concerns can be mitigated by politico-diplomatic measures.

India has not lost its space in Nepal. The Oli government had many setbacks, the Chinese backed left coalition didn’t last its term. India has major stakes in Nepal from socio-economic, politico-diplomatic to military linkages which have to be strengthened not just to counter extra-regional influences but for consolidating bilateral relations. For this India has to strengthen its own capabilities be it political, economic or militarily. However, an economically strong India would be more attractive to Nepal.

Bhutan’s territorial disputes with China are alive and facing new pressures. China is not only engaging with Bhutan on border issues bilaterally but has made it conditional to open embassies in each other’s countries as a part of deal-breaker. India has intervened militarily in Doklam though it was silent on Trashigang. The Indian military has displayed its prowess to counter Chinese forces in Doklam. A militarily strong India capable of providing security to Bhutan would elicit confidence in the backdrop of expansionist China. Along with this, an economically strong India capable of helping Bhutan towards economic development and prosperity would hold the bilateral relations strong and stable in the long run.

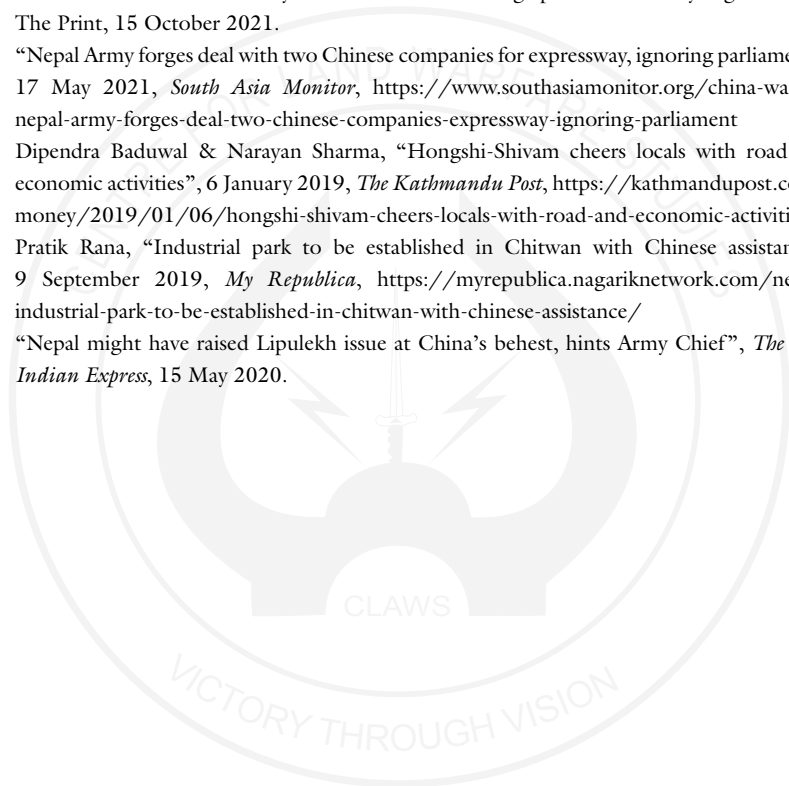
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Leveraging Indian Space Capability through Military Diplomacy in South Asia

Gurpreet Singh Bajwa

Abstract

The Indian Space domain capability can be expanded in the South Asian Neighbourhood for offering solutions in the ISR, communication, Meteorology, Navigation, Guest Astronauts for the Human space flight programme and space infrastructure building. India's South Asian communication satellite launched in 2017 was one such initiative leveraging the space capability for diplomatic outreach and developing the new space services market for Indian enterprises.

The Indian Military has a strategic and friendly relationship with the neighbouring militaries and now the time has come to upgrade the existing security cooperation through Military Diplomacy and believe in the dictum of India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'. India's growth is tethered to a secure and well-governed South Asia and the emerging space market is one of the sunshine sectors which like India's outreach to evolve the digital payments ecosystem can also be employed to improve the cooperation in South Asia.

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This article will analyse how India through its military diplomacy can enable better security, border management and smart governance solutions through efficient space applications and custom created space solutions for its neighbours based on the principle of mutual respect, mutual trust and mutual cooperation.

'I can clearly see that the world is moving very fast towards a new world order, towards new systems, after the Corona period. This is a turning point that we as India should not miss this opportunity. India's voice should also remain vociferous on the main table. India should not underestimate itself for a leadership role.'

—Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**
at Lok Sabha on 7 February 2022¹

Introduction

The Ukraine conflict has once again highlighted the use of the space domain for intelligence gathering, data connectivity and utilisation in the information operations. The Russian ASAT test in mid-November preceded the conflict, the Russian build-up was beamed across the TV channels world-over showcasing the role of the commercial satellite imagery providers. The imagery showcasing destruction of infrastructure and the chaos of the 40-mile convoy en route to Kiev are just a few examples of ubiquitous utilisation of the space domain in the conflict. India now has a major role in the post-COVID new world order which is accelerating towards Great Power Competition.

New Delhi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy in 2014 was preceded by multiple initiatives for increasing regional cooperation. In 1985, South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was launched in Dhaka with Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan being the founding members of the initiative. Afghanistan joined the grouping in 2007. In 1997 new multilateral initiatives were launched as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Bay of Bengal

Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). In 2013, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) working groups were created on Connectivity, Transit, Water resource management, Power, and the Motor Vehicle Agreement was signed in 2015. All these initiatives focussed on improved connectivity and trade, but proxy war and sponsorship of terrorist activities has hindered the growth of regional cooperation. India should continue to move ahead with bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to improve connectivity and trade in the region.

World Bank² has reported that the inter-regional trade within South Asia was only 5 per cent against a whopping 30 per cent in ASEAN region and 60 per cent in Europe. India's EAM S Jaishankar in 2019³ had noted that 'while regionalism took root in every corner of the world but we have lagged behind, as South Asia does not have normal trade and connectivity as other regions do'. Earlier, during the cold war, India had embraced strategic insulation through non-alignment and missed out on the regional connectivity benefits enjoyed by Europe and ASEAN. The political lines of division have cut across the natural ecosystems, economic spaces and ethno-lingual groups. Now a new regional construct is required to encompass shared culture and values and a common marketplace. India has to move fast and prevent any implementation gap as the competition (China) is quite fierce in all domains.

It was the pragmatic realisation that India's interests would be best achieved by building a web of dense interdependencies with our neighbours who must be given a stake in our economic prosperity that is the driver for the 'Neighbourhood First' policy. The new paradigms of 'Sab Ka Saath, Sab Ka Vikas' and 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) are the implementation guiding principles. India to prevent the ingress of China's infrastructure debt traps and technological prowess into the neighbourhood has tied up with global economic powers for the trilateral infrastructure group mechanisms. Delhi and Japan are

now building a new port terminal in Colombo⁴ and India has a tie up with Russia to develop nuclear energy plants in Bangladesh.⁵ However, USA's aid grants to Nepal⁶ declared in 2017 had seen stiff resistance in 2022, before acceptance.

The space market is expanding due to lowering the cost of access to space by using disruptive technologies like reusable rockets and LEO based satellite communication constellations and miniaturised sensors. The increasing benefits of space-based applications are capturing newer markets. Space is a strategic domain whose biggest users earlier had been the military and the governments for the benefit of society. As commercial needs grow, the space sector is expected to expand to a trillion-dollar market by 2040 from the existing \$350 billion. The cost to launch a satellite has now dropped to \$60 million from the earlier \$200 million with a potential drop to \$5 million. The satellite manufacturing has also been transformed due to mass manufacturing i.e., from \$500 million to only \$500,000.⁷

The Ukraine conflict has once again highlighted the use of the space domain for intelligence gathering, data connectivity and utilisation in the information operations. The Russian ASAT test in mid-November preceded the conflict, the Russian build-up was beamed across the TV channels the world over showcasing the role of the commercial satellite imagery providers as also the destruction of infrastructure and the chaos of the 40-mile convoy en-route to Kyiv, are just a few examples of ubiquitous utilisation of the space domain in the conflict. Elon Musk offered a sparring match with President Putin and also publicly enabled internet operations of the STARLINK constellations over the conflict zone, while ONEWEB had to shift their dependency to SpaceX for their remaining launches, the ISS remained the zone of cooperation despite public spats to the contrary, the on-going race for the Great Power Competition threatens the space domain to split into two astrophysical groups reflecting the ground realities of the Great Power Competition.

China's 'Space Information Corridor' has been clubbed along with the BRI since 2016 giving access to the client states services based on Beidou Navigation constellation, the Fengyun weather satellite constellation and terrestrial satellite control and relay data nodes.⁸ The Chinese space actors have already gained footprints in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The Chinese space companies are providing launch services, fabrication of communication satellites and ground stations besides offering Pakistan a guest Taikonaut a visit to its space station which is now fully operational.

Space also provides avenues for unprecedented International Cooperation as was seen in the operation of the international space station even during the cold war. It is essential that South Asia adopt smart solutions derived from space applications for protecting its population, economic interests, sovereignty and safeguarding against threats from non-state actors. Commerce builds trust and leads to expansion of trade, as relations grow warmer more trade barriers are lifted, regulations are eased, trade and tourism increase and a new security architecture evolve. Space cooperation within South Asia is a low hanging fruit which can be diplomatically exploited to accelerate regional cooperation.

India needs to acknowledge its role in South Asia as 'Net Security Provider' and enable access to space-based security and smart governance solutions to its neighbours. In the emerging space domain security setup, India should engage in military diplomacy in the space domain and conduct Space domain enabled exercises with both its strategic partners and its neighbours. The ensuring of safe space operations necessitates the need for a space situational awareness, ISRO already has operationalised its observing telescopes alongside Multi-Object Tracking Radar at Benagaluru, but more capabilities are required for independent operations. Any existing gap can be bridged through collaboration and also leveraging emerging commercial players in the Indian Space Sector. There is also a need to conduct periodic security audits of space assets, networks and ground stations, which can be enabled by India.

India's emerging space start-up and private industry ecosystem will also have a huge payoff with multilateral collaboration through the Indian Space Association (ISpA)⁹ and Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (INSPACe). Any capacity deficit in manpower for space operations in our neighbourhood can also be bridged by the huge talent pool available in India.

ISRO International Cooperation

ISRO has the highest inventory of satellites, launch vehicles and developed space-enabled services useful for providing smart governance solutions in South Asia. The objectives of collaborations are to enhance the capacity of the Indian Space Program, strengthen diplomatic relations and formulate global guidelines on space. ISRO has concluded about 250 Space agreements with 59 countries and five multinational bodies as of June 2021.¹⁰ The ISRO's space program has been shaped with international cooperation. Its erstwhile benefactors like USA, Russia, France and Japan have now become equal partners in many joint endeavours and it also trains space personnel from Asia Pacific Region as per UN mandate. Internationally, India is viewed by space-faring nations as an emerging space power, capable of achieving its goals in a more cost-effective and time-efficient manner. Specifically, the developing countries look to India for assistance in building up their capabilities to derive benefits of space technology. The cooperation domains¹¹ include:

- Realisation of Joint Satellite Missions. (MEGHNA-TROPIQUE, SARAL, TRISHNA (France), NISAR (USA).
- Accommodation of Payloads. (CHANDRAYAN-1, OCEANSAT-2, ASTROSAT)
- TTC Stations in Brunei, Indonesia and Mauritius and a remote sensing data reception station in Antarctica.
- Disaster Management. (International Charter, Sentinel Asia, UNSPIDER, Search & Rescue) ISRO supports disaster management

activities across the globe by sharing satellite data and expertise. ISRO is also part of the Satellite Aided Search and Rescue (SASAR) Program and providing operational services to the users in India and seven neighbouring countries since 1998.

- Capacity Building (CSSTEAP, UNNATI)
- Participation in Advisory Committee on Policy Regulations.

Dr Vikram Sarabhai was able to create the Space programme with humble beginnings at Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station (TERLS) with the international cooperation from both superpowers, i.e. USA and USSR and also France, later, TERLS was given UN sponsorship in 1968. Some of the important international partners' cooperation are enumerated below.

Russia (USSR). USSR provided a free launch for India's first Satellite named ARYABHATTA, and also later two experimental Earth Observation Satellites. A satellite optical ranging and tracking station was established in Kavalur as part of USSR's Inter Cosmos Network. A guest cosmonaut Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma visited the SALUT 7 Space Station in April 1984. But with former USSR disintegrating, Russia could not supply the contracted cryogenic engine due to the USAs intervention in Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). This led to a delay in GEO launch capability by 15 years. Similarly, the Lander for CHANDRAYAN-2 was not supplied by Russia after contract when it realised an anomaly in its Mars Lander Phoebes-Grunt mission. In 2011 India launched a jointly developed Russia's student Satellite YOUTHSAT. Russia is now enabling the human space flight programme GAGANYAAN and assisting India by thorough training and equipment like space suits, life support systems and radiation shielding solutions.

USA. NASA had provided Micro Lock Satellite Telemetry Data Reception Station at Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad in

1962. MoU with NASA enabled India to access Satcom of ATS 6 Satellite for one year. Later a SITE broadcast experiment i.e., Satellite Instruction Television Experiment was conducted in 1975-76, this was the precursor to the Television proliferation in the nation. INSAT 1&2 were made by Ford Aerospace Communication Corporation. A ground station was established near Hyderabad to receive imagery from American LANDSAT satellites. CHANDRAYAAN-1 carried two NASA payloads, one of them Moon Mineralogy Mapper (M3) led to conclusive discovery of water on the Moon surface. Radar Tracking support for MARS orbiter mission was also provided by the USA. Joint development of an ISR satellite (NISAR) is presently in progress.

France. In 1974-78, France transferred the Viking liquid rocket engine technology in exchange of the participative development of the Ariane launch vehicle. Earlier, for the TERLS. Sud Aviation had licenced manufactured CENTOUR II B sounding rockets on-site, enabling Indian scientists to innovate on the solid propellant technology to manufacture more energetic and better solid propellants for Satellite launch vehicles, by 1981 Ariane launched India's first communication satellite as APPLE (Ariane Passenger payload experiment), France (CNES/ESA) has been actively banked upon for launch of our INSAT/GSAT series to the Geosynchronous Transfer Orbits (GTO). France is now assisting ISRO in the Human Space flight mission.

Japan. India is discussing collaboration for in-situ analysis of ice on the Moons North Pole. Japan has also hosted Asia Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum since 1993. ISRO & JAXA co-hosted the forum for two sessions in 2007 and 2017.

UN Office of Outer Space

- India has played an active role in the formulation of five international treaties and adoption of six principles in the space domain. India signed and ratified the *Outer Space Treaty, Rescue Agreement, Liability*

*Convention, and Registration Convention. India has signed the Moon Treaty, but has not ratified it.*¹²

- Under the UN aegis India also enables capacity building for Asia-Pacific through the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing (IIRS) and Centre for Space Science and Technology Education for Asia Pacific (CSSTE-AP)¹³ both in Dehradun. ISRO has also offered an 8-week capacity building programme on Nano-Satellite Development for the UN i.e.—UNspace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training at Bengaluru (UNNATI).

Indian Space Sector Reforms

The government has now decided to promote the private sector which will further build the brand of the ISRO enabling the government to act as an enabler and aggregator. The INSPACE is expected to be fully functional by First quarter of 2022. It will be based out of Bangalore and Ahmedabad to enable around 50 space start-ups and existing industry players which are expanding the ecosystem consisting of upstream companies which are making satellites, rockets, propulsion systems and new rocket fuels and the downstream companies which are looking at analysing the satellite data to provide services to the consumers in agriculture, insurance, infrastructure planning and maintenance, etc. The Space legislation and policy enabling frameworks are also likely to be released this year. Hence, going forward, the international collaborations will also see the new entrepreneurs looking for newer markets and providing competitive space-enabled services around the globe.

Need for New Global Space Rules

The imminent privatisation of space resources and the weaponisation of outer space, points towards the limited scope of the Outer Space Treaty 1967, a review of the same is essential Already the USA and Luxemburg laws have been incorporated against global commons enabling the private

industry to mine resources from Mars, Moon and Asteroids. The return of the competition amongst the great powers does not auger well for safe space operations as has been borne out in the Ukraine conflict. Despite India's demonstration of Anti-Satellite Kinetic Kill capability in 2019, it remains firm in its stand against the Weaponisation of Space. It is feared that the space domain will become the high ground to be seized and either commanded or to be denied to the potential adversaries.

In 2008, Russia and China had proposed the Prevention of Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects (PPWT), however, the USA interpreted it as unverifiable, inadequate inconsistent and advantageous to its promoters. Even the revised Draft of PPWT in 2014 did not allay the misgivings and suspicions of many including the USA. The Transparency and Confidence Building Measures (TCBMs) in outer space Activities in 2011 have been abstained by the USA, citing the mention of PPWT in the resolution thus revealing the difficulties in achieving consensus on space security.

The US DoD had in July 2021¹⁴ initiated the process for formulating the US response for 'responsible behaviour in Space' acknowledging the 'increased risks of collisions as well as miscalculations and misunderstandings.'

India's view on Space Security has been consistent—'India has no intention of entering into an arms race in outer space. We have always maintained that space must be used only for peaceful purposes. We are against the weaponisation of Outer Space and support international efforts to reinforce the safety and security of space-based assets'.¹⁵

South Asia Satellite

In 2014 during the SAARC summit, India offered a South Asian Satellite (GSAT 09) for all SAARC member states as a gift, subsequently, Pakistan opted out of the arrangements as it had already ordered its requirements through China. After necessary frequency coordination and other

arrangements, the satellite was launched on 5 May 2017 on the GSLV MK II-F09 as communication and meteorological satellite with 12 Ku Band Transponders to be shared among the six beneficiary countries i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal and Afghanistan alongside India.

PM Modi¹⁶ described it as a historic moment which opened new horizons of engagement and that it would meet the aspirations of economic progress of more than 1.5 billion people in our region. Its applications include tele-education, telemedicine, intergovernmental networks, emergency communication for disaster situations and DTH services. In 2019, PM Modi inaugurated the ground space station in Thimpu, Bhutan which was set up by Bangalore based Alpha Design Ltd.,¹⁷ the scope involved setting up of a ground Hub station at Thimpu and 110 fixed VSAT terminals and 50 receive-only terminals and 05 portable terminals.

Emerging Space Market in South Asia

Table 1: Existing Space Assets in South Asia less India

S. No.	Country	Space Agency/ Company	Satellite	Remarks
1.	Bhutan	Information and Communications Ministry	Bhutan 1 INS 2B	BIRD (Japan Cubesat Kyushu Institute of Technology) Indo-Bhutan Joint Satl (planned)
2.	Bangladesh	Bangladesh Satellite Company Ltd	Bangabandhu 1 Bangabandhu 2 BRAC Oonesha	Communication Earth Observation (planned) BIRD (Japan Cubesat Kyushu Institute of Technology)

3.	Nepal	Nepal Telecommunication Authority	Nepal Sat 1 Sanosat 1	BIRD (Japan Cubesat Kyushu Institute of Technology) Pico satellite (students)
4.	Afghanistan	Ministry of Communication and Information	Afghansat 1	Leased from EUTELSAT in Jan 14
5.	Sri Lanka	Supremesat Pvt Ltd	Supremesat 1 Supremesat 2 Raavna 1	Leased part payload from CHINASAT 12 Planned BIRD (Japan Cubesat Kyushu Institute of Technology)
6.	Pakistan	Suparco	Paksat 1R Paksat MM1 Paktes 1A PRSS 1 Badr A, B 1 CUBE	Communication (China 2011) Two Satellite Ground Control Stations at Karachi and Lahore Leased from ASIASAT4 (Hong Kong 2003) EO medium resolution, 1B under development EO High Resolution (China 2018) Micro satl UK Pico Satl (Institute of Space Technology Islamabad)

Source: Annotated by the author (Gunters space page¹⁸)

Need for Smart Space-based Services for Security and Governance

Geospatial technologies, remote sensing, satellite communication and navigation systems are providing many new ways for effective management of natural resources in the region. This has resulted in enabling variety of data and information products for societal benefits and unique people-centric space-based services.

Indian Remote Sensing Satellite constellation has many areas of space applications¹⁹ such as Agricultural Crops Inventory, Water Resources Information System, Potential Fishing Zones, Ocean State Forecasts, Inventory & Monitoring of Glacial Lakes/Water Bodies, Location-based Services using NavIC constellation, Disaster Management Support Programme.

GeoMGNREGA. One example from more than 250 applications provided by ISRO to the Government is GeoMGNREGA.²⁰ MGNREGA was enacted to enhance the job security of rural people. Under this scheme, assets at the village level are created across the country related to water harvesting, drought relief, flood control activities, and sanitation at the village level. Satellite-derived and Location-based services are being utilised for planning and monitoring of nearly 3.3 crore assets annually (December 2018) through the use of mobile-based geo-tagging enabling accountability, transparency and financial effectiveness.

Similarly, smart border management and maritime domain awareness have a critical space segment. The Maritime Sea Lanes are only going to get busier and so does the need for cooperation against piracy and non-state actors in the region. A different interpretation of the UNCLOS also poses challenges to the South Asian Marine States.

The need for data connectivity is only going to explode, and the LEO based digital connectivity is likely to be fully functional in a year in India, some of the players include Airtel ONEWEB, STARLINK, JIO Space Technology and SES Luxemburg and NELCO ex TATA are planning

affordable broadband services for a pan India rollout and the same has the potential to be extended to South Asia.

M/S Pixel Ltd is planning to launch two of its hyperspectral satellites later this year and the constellation of 36 satellites is likely to be online in another year, this enables a huge jump in remote sensing capability for South Asia.

Indian Space Military Diplomacy: Way Ahead

India needs to build upon its past umbilical connections to the regional militaries and build upon the goodwill. There is a need to deepen the security cooperation through space diplomacy by capacity building and offering space-based solutions for their Earth Observation and Satellite Communications needs. Besides high-level defence contacts, India also conducts annual exercises with Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and with the QUAD-Malabar Exercises, now it only needs to incorporate the space enabled operations into these exercises showcasing smart operational planning, control and improved maritime domain awareness. India is the top training destination for officers of South Asia nations and the military education exchanges can now be expanded to cover the space domain and also to build lasting collaboration with other nations.

The defence exports in India have witnessed an increase to Rs 9,000 crore in 2021²¹ and it now aspires for an ambitious target of export turnover of \$5 billion by 2024, the defence exports are being sent to 84 countries and SIPRI holds India in the list of top 25 exporters in the world. The Defence Attaches now are the face of Military Diplomacy and now they are being provided with monetary support to expand the defence exports. A list of 152 defence items that are available to friendly nations at competitive prices has already been promulgated. Now as the Space sector booms in India, there is a huge potential for inclusion of space-based services, addition of the strategic space domain capacity building and infrastructure either as commercial contracts or as a line of

credit utilisation or grants can also be explored. The exploitation of space assets will lead to a secure and prosperous neighbourhood for India.

The Defence Space Agency needs to ideate the security and border management dimension of the space cooperation for South Asia, but it's likely that this capacity utilisation will be dual-use and hence a whole government approach including smart governance solution cooperation is recommended. There will also be a requirement to brief our Defence Attaches (DAs) on their own space capability sharing and capacity building initiatives for possible international cooperation. There is a need to identify various government users and enterprise customers who will use these services in the partner country.

The annual seminars conducted by the DSA should incorporate the DAs of friendly countries to enable showcasing our space capability. The strategic community and think tanks also need to debate on India's stand for future space operations including space traffic management. A roadmap for space cooperation for security and smart governance with South Asian Nations is given below.

In the *short term*, immediate needs of security can be met by procurement of high-resolution imagery and hiring of bandwidth for communications from ISRO which already has 200 transponders capacity and emerging space mobile connectivity in the digital domain.

In the *midterm*, dedicated satellites can be launched by ISRO for exclusive use of nations for their communication, remote sensing, disaster management and student capacity building needs. There is a need to identify additional vacancies in our space institutions which can be sponsored through the MEAs programmes.

Over the *long term*, the nations can develop ground segment and network infrastructure to share satellite resources with respective user agencies, develop a facility for storing various imagery resources and dissemination of the same to various user agencies for smart governance solutions.

Conclusion

Adopting modern space technology can immediately smoothen the security/border management, maritime domain awareness and ensure better connectivity and trade opportunities in South Asia as India moves towards a multipolar world and as a rising world economic powerhouse. India's growth is tethered to a secure and well-governed South Asia and the emerging space market should be exploited to improve the security and cooperation in South Asia. The improved space cooperation will underscore the ability of the Indian Union to grow stronger through better connectivity and smooth trade and people to people movement. India should enable better security, border management/maritime domain awareness and governance solutions through space applications as it has also benefited from international cooperation in the past and now India can reclaim its seat on the world affairs by utilising its existing and emerging capabilities in the space sector and grow its space commerce to \$25 billion by 2025.

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China's Strategic Challenges to India

Anil Jain

India and China share a complex bilateral relationship, consisting of military confrontations, diplomatic dialogues and intense economic activities, concurrent with multilateral engagements. Their growth prospects and future visions set them on a path of intense competition. Also, China's consistent growth to become a major player in the global arena poses many strategic challenges to India's growth story.

The foremost challenge is that China poses a direct military threat to India, due to its rapidly modernising military forces, as well as the bloody history of India-China territorial disputes. Second, China's burgeoning economic muscle affords it the luxury of shaping world opinion in its favour and to India's detriment. This factor is compounded by China's influence on international bodies like the UN and financial institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which may impinge on India's national interests. Coupled with this is the consistently expanding Chinese influence in South Asia, directly challenging India's dominant position in the region.¹ This commentary examines the challenges that India faces from China, and further evaluates possible strategic options for India.

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Military Challenges

India's border disputes with China exist primarily due to the absence of a mutually accepted boundary. The PLA troops have repeatedly encroached on Indian territory, leading to clashes, between the two sides, most recently in Eastern Ladakh. In addition, both in Galwan and Pangong Tso, the Chinese appears to be claiming more territory, which were not part of their earlier claims.²

Chinese actions on the LAC have implications for India. In recent years, China has displayed an increasingly belligerent attitude toward the LAC, along with an obvious disinclination to retreat to mutually acceptable positions. Post-Galwan, China has embarked upon a massive military build-up, which is conspicuously disproportionate to any actual military threat from India. Their actions include the construction of permanent military infrastructure in close proximity to the LAC, enabling Chinese troops to occupy these positions round the year.

Repeated Chinese incursions on the LAC also call into question protocols that had been carefully established since 1993. It is now quite evident that China has no intentions of either resolving the border dispute with India or implementing confidence-building agreements, which were mutually agreed to.

In 2020, the Chinese, in a marked departure from the past, displayed a clear disregard for hostile Indian public opinion to their aggressive actions on the LAC. This may be indicative of a hardened Chinese stance and greater determination to pursue their objectives.

In 2005, India and China signed the Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question, Article VII of which stated that “the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas”,³ which resulted in China pushing the development of such “settled populations” close to the LAC. China has, over the last few years, been building as many as 628 ‘xiaokang’ (well-off) model border

defence villages to fortify the borders of Tibet with India and Bhutan.⁴ It is apparent that such settlements will tend to buttress Chinese claims of the LAC alignment, whenever the two nations get down to resolving the border dispute.

On 1 January 2022, China's new land border law came into effect. Although the new law is not India specific, through this law, China may be demonstrating its intent to resolve border disputes on advantageous terms. It is possible that China is endeavouring to change territorial disputes into sovereignty issues, potentially creating conditions for a militarised solution to its boundary disputes.

Economic Challenges

In 2020-21, India announced an increased emphasis on self-reliance. Yet, India's bilateral trade with China grew 44 per cent in 2021, crossing \$125 billion, out of which Chinese imports attributed at \$97.5 billion and India's exports \$28.1 billion. India's trade deficit with China was a massive which is \$69.4 billion.⁵ Thus, India imported thrice as much from China, as it exported to the latter. Two primary reasons for this trade deficit is because of the narrow basket of commodities that India exports to China, and the lack of market access for most Indian agricultural products and sectors where India is highly competitive, e.g. pharmaceuticals and IT.⁶

The trade with China comes in the backdrop of continuing tensions with China along the LAC and is a cause for serious concern, not only economically, but in the domain of India's national security as well. The massive disruptions in global supply chains during the pandemic, primarily from China, and the increasingly aggressive orientation of China on the borders, has spurred India to implement measures to reduce its import dependencies and trade deficit with China. More worrying is that China's global trade surplus surged to \$676.4 billion in 2021.⁷ Such a massive trade surplus affords China substantial economic influence globally

and the potential to manipulate bilateral relations with India, as well as multilateral engagements, to its advantage.

For India, the adverse trade balance and potential depletion of its foreign exchange reserves constitute a major part of the Chinese challenge. India has a healthy foreign exchange reserve of around \$600 billion, but frequent dipping of foreign currency assets and gold reserves are potential pressure points.

Challenges in South Asia

China's BRI is among the world's most ambitious infrastructure projects. Launched in 2013, the vast collection of development and investment initiatives would stretch from East Asia to Europe, significantly expanding China's economic and political influence.⁸ Within the BRI's ambitious scope, however, it is South Asia which is of great concern to India. As China's influence on India's neighbours grows with BRI, India is faced with the challenges of managing its relationship with its biggest neighbour and competing for prominence in South Asia.

The most ambitious project in the BRI is the China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor (CPEC), from Kashgar in China to Pakistan's Gwadar Port. India's primary concerns on CPEC stem from its infringement on India's territorial integrity, as it passes through Indian territory, illegally occupied by Pakistan. Moreover, sustained Chinese military presence in POK, ostensibly to safeguard its assets, has serious security implications for India. Another concern of India is that China may be prepared to intervene militarily, if it perceives a threat to CPEC or its other assets in Pakistan.

As regards to BRI projects in other parts of South Asia, especially in Bangladesh, China will fund projects in transportation sector, both road and rail, as well as in power generation and digital connectivity. In Myanmar, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor is the flagship project under BRI. In Sri Lanka, China has provided loans for the new Colombo

Port Terminal, Hambantota Port and the first four-lane expressway in the country, amongst others. Nepal and China have started working on the Nepal-China Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network, which are collaboration on energy, transport, and security. In Maldives, China has involved in construction and upgradation of many infrastructure projects, including the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, Male International Airport, Ibrahim Nasir International Airport etc. The willing collaboration in BRI by India's neighbours is symptomatic of a degree of failure on India's part to offer requisite developmental assistance to its comparatively underdeveloped neighbours, as well as the inadequacy of India's strategic engagement in its backyard.

From an Indian perspective, BRI initiatives further China's strategic goals in a manner which is inimical to India's national security interests. These projects provide China with greater geopolitical influence, along with economic and diplomatic leverage over policymaking decisions in India's immediate neighbourhood. In particular, India is concerned about the increasing China's deepening relationships with Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal on the continental route and with the Maldives and Sri Lanka along the maritime route.⁹

India also harbours concerns regarding funding and execution of BRI projects, as it believes that they are not based on principles of good governance, rule of law, and transparency. India also suggests that BRI creates unsustainable debt burdens in some recipient countries. Some of India's sensitivities in this regard are manifesting clearly, as in Hambantota Port, which allowed China economic and strategic advantages in India's immediate vicinity.

Maritime Challenges

The Indian Ocean is at the centre of major geopolitical competition, with important sea lines of communication. The ocean is also rich in natural resources, with fishing, offshore oil production and aquaculture

industries. For India, it is important that the Indian Ocean region facilitates free trade, with secure passage for merchant shipping, a sustainable resource base and remains safe from adversarial military competition. It is herein where the Chinese challenge emerges.

Over the past two decades, China has significantly enhanced its presence in the Indian Ocean region. In 2017, China established an overseas military facility in Djibouti. Besides, China is constructing commercial ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, which could, eventually serve for the military purpose. Of all the key powers, China is the only one with a diplomatic mission across all six island nations in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ Although China's ultimate aims in the Indian Ocean remain somewhat ambiguous, it is clear that the Chinese leadership is actively pursuing capabilities that would allow it to undertake a range of military missions in the region.¹¹

India has serious concerns about China's increasing activities in the Indian Ocean, where Chinese research vessels and fishing boats have been seen regularly, including in Indian EEZ. These research vessels are used for surveying various oceanic parameters, which may assist PLA Navy in undertaking submarine operations in the future. While China's growing footprints across the Indian Ocean may not be aimed specifically at India, however, they point to an insidious long term Chinese strategy of global maritime domination. India particularly views Gwadar Port as a part of China's increasing power projection into the Indian Ocean, exacerbating India's maritime security concerns. Although Gwadar is currently a civilian facility, it may well emerge as a naval base for China, altering the region's power dynamics.

Traditionally, India has been a security provider and strategic partner to island nations like Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka, participating in many capacity-building programs therein. When requested, India has also deployed its naval and other maritime assets to monitor their EEZ and prevent illegal activities like piracy and drug

trafficking. Faced with the Chinese challenge, India has enhanced measures to protect its interests in the Indian Ocean, expanding its maritime infrastructure, while intensifying efforts to develop Chabahar port in Iran.

India must maximise the strategic advantages that Andaman and Nicobar islands provide. As key entry and exit points to and from the Indian Ocean, the Islands offer major advantages in surveillance and monitoring of Malacca Straits, which India must exploit, by substantially upgrading its military infrastructure and capabilities on these Islands. It is also important for India to recognise the difficulties involved in managing the Indian Ocean by itself and establish sustainable cooperation with friendly maritime powers to maintain security in the region. Australia's participation in the 2020 Malabar naval exercises is an example in this regard.

India's Strategic Options

China has set out its clear goals for itself by 2049, which is the 100th birth anniversary of People's Republic of China. China's strategy aims to achieve the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049 and revise the international order to be more advantageous to its authoritarian system and national interests.¹² India must accordingly prepare itself for an openly expansionist, irredentist and belligerent China.

As China works toward achieving its global aspirations and India pursues its ambitions to become a strong Indo-Pacific power and net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region and South Asia, it is imperative for India to conceive a balanced and sustainable strategic response to China's challenge, without compromising on its long term national interests and foreign policy autonomy.

Post-Galwan, India-China relations have witnessed a paradigm shift. Hypothetically, there might be a new beginning, as was the case after the Sumdorong Chu crisis in 1986-87, though it appears unlikely. Conversely,

a large scale military conflict, as in 1962, may not manifest either. It is most likely that the future of India China relations will continue to remain adversarial and disputatious, though economic transactions may continue.

Militarily, India must maintain a robust posture and remain vigilant for future Chinese transgressions. India must react speedily and forcefully to any Chinese misadventure on the LAC and must not allow China to continue its practice of destabilising the border at will. India must develop and employ indigenous military technology optimally and endeavour to achieve self-reliance in defence production earliest. Concurrently, India must continue to pursue diplomatic and military dialogues with China to resolve the border disputes.

Modern *realpolitik* dictates that financial clout matters more than military power in international relations. India must, without any prevarication, focus on strengthening its economy in the next decade, with concomitant upgrading of millions who live below the poverty line, augmentation of its GDP and an advantageous trade balance. Simultaneously, It must assiduously reduce its dependence on Chinese goods, through indigenisation and greater self-reliance. It is only when India is uniformly prosperous and self-sustaining, that it will earn its place on the global high table.

Within South Asia, India needs to develop a pragmatic and mutually beneficial framework with each nation and focus on execution and completion of projects within specified timeframes. India cannot obviously compete with China in capital availability and consequent funding for infrastructural and connectivity projects. India must, therefore, frame its response deliberately, in conformity with its strategic priorities and economic capabilities. For infrastructural and connectivity development in South Asia, India must reach out to developed Western nations, which are keen to collaborate with the former, and provide an alternative to Chinese-funded projects.

India has traditionally maintained a policy of non-alignment, preferring an independent foreign policy, enabling it to transact for mutual benefits with nations across the political and economic divide. While continuing on this path, India must especially look to strengthen its interactions and cooperation with like-minded democracies like the USA, France, Germany, England, Japan and Australia, all of which share common values and respect for a rules-based world order. India must look to leverage the growing concern amongst such nations over China's meteoric rise and disproportionate global influence, to ensure geopolitical balance in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia.

India must continue its involvement in multilateral institutions like Quad, SCO and BRICS, which will enable it to adapt to China's emergence as the second superpower and benefit from it. It will also allow India to retain its strategic independence and pursue a balanced foreign policy, maintaining close partnerships with different power centres, simultaneously and harmoniously. The Quad alliance of maritime democracies, in particular, conforms to India's preferred narrative of strategic autonomy in multipolarity, especially with its unstated but clear intent of creating a strategic counterbalance to China in the Indo-Pacific.

Indian policymakers must not fall prey to the common misperception that India is a secondary strategic consideration for China, and that it does not feature prominently in China's strategic deliberations. Somehow, Indian scholars have formed the erroneous impression that there is an "asymmetric threat perception in China-India ties,"¹³ so much so that China can easily afford to teach India a lesson and come out largely "unscathed."¹⁴ The sooner Indian leadership rids itself of these misperceptions, the better it would be able to leverage its strategic importance in the Chinese calculus and potentially influence China for enhanced concessions and cooperation in resolving disputed issues for mutual benefits.

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India-Israel Defence Relations: From Longstanding to Robust

Manjari Singh

India and Israel relations, even though just three decades old, have subsequently progressed over the years, especially in the fields of defence and agri-tech. After lying dormant since the time India formally recognised the Jewish nation in September 1950; the international, regional and domestic geostrategic environment compelled New Delhi to establish diplomatic relations and to normalise its relations with Tel Aviv in January 1992.¹ The normalisation not only earmarked the beginning of a full-fledged engagement between the two countries but also provided impetus to India's defence requirements.

By signing a strategic partnership agreement in July 2017 the two nations marked a paradigm shift toward encapsulating broad-spectrums in the bilateral. Needless to mention, since the normalisation of relations, it took a quarter of a century for India to openly embrace and engage with the Jewish nation. While the two countries are committed to engaging in many new unconventional domains; defence and agri-tech continue to form the bedrock of their relationship. The "strategic" component in the partnership provides leverage to further their defence relations. Today, India is Israel's largest recipient and acquires 43 per cent of the latter's

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total arms exports. At the same time, Israel accounts for 13 per cent of India's total arms imports after Russia and France. Additionally, the formation of a Joint Working Group (JWG) in October 2021 which is aimed to formulate a comprehensive 10-year roadmap and to identify new areas of cooperation in the sector; implies that the two countries are looking forward to signing a robust defence cooperation agreement. The impending defence cooperation is likely to embolden the relations further.²

Military-to-military engagements including joint exercises and defence industry collaboration are on the upsurge. Both government organisations and private industries are committed in co-developing defence systems. For instance, Israel Aerospace Industries and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) have co-developed a medium-range surface-to-air-missile (MRSAM), named as BARAK 8 Air defence system which was successfully test-fired last month. Similarly, New Delhi is also sourcing Firefly loitering ammunition, Spike anti-tank guided missiles, and Spice guidance kits from Tel Aviv. Defence companies in Israel have started to invest in India's defence manufacturing sector which is propelled by the call for *Make in India* and *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliance) initiative.

While these cooperation's in varied military domains are new and it will take some time to review their progress, the defence relations, as of now, are significantly marked by arms trade. However, the paper argues that with these new markers towards diversifying the defence relations and with the changing global order, India and Israel are aiming to expand their defence domain from loosely defined and "longstanding" relations to well-defined, concrete and robust defence partnership. Towards this progress, the impending defence cooperation agreement will play a significant role in further concretising the relations.

The trajectory of India-Israel defence relations, however, is not linearly upward-moving but is rather tortuous. Israel's independence

in May 1948 was marked by controversies surrounding the Palestinian cause and the newly Independent India which gained its freedom majorly through non-violent means following Mahatma Gandhi's penchant could not make an independent decision vis-à-vis Israel. Additionally, the then Education Minister Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad's concerns about divisions in Muslim electorate compelled New Delhi to forge a pro-Arab policy. To simplify, India's defence relations with Israel can be divided into three phases, namely, (a) during pre-normalisation; (b) post-normalisation defence collaborations; and (c) finally after the arrival of the new Indian government in 2014 and the subsequent signing of the strategic partnership agreement in July 2017.

Defence Relations: Pre-normalisation

Though marginally documented, India's defence equation with Israel pre-dates normalisation. Probably a major reason why the defence relations between India and Israel are defined as "longstanding" by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).³ However, there was no warm diplomatic embrace, rather defence and intelligence collaborations between the two countries remained under the purview of a clandestine affair.⁴ This long time interaction is attributed to the strategic communication between the two countries since the Sino-Indian war of 1962.⁵ Though it has not been established adequately and the MEA has rejected the claims of any "purported" letters written by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for seeking help from Israel, yet some scholars believe that such communication did take place though in a hush-hush fashion to avoid its adverse effects on Indo-Arab relations.⁶

January 1963 is earmarked as the establishment of Indo-Israeli defence and military relations as it was this time, that is, three months after the border conflict with China that the Government of India showed a willingness to engage with the Jewish nation on military matters. Israel's Chief of the Army Staff General David Shaltiel along with Major General

Meir Amit, Director of Military Intelligence Directorate visited New Delhi to meet India's top military brass including the then Chief of the Army Staff, General Jayanto Nath Chaudhuri.⁷ It is believed that military delegations from both sides continued to meet each other despite India's strong opposition to Israeli policies vis-à-vis Palestine. Israel's controversial yet highly decorated Defence Minister Moshe Dayan's visit in 1977 is the most noteworthy factor in bolstering Indo-Israeli defence relations. Prolonged cooperation between intelligence wings of both the nations, India's Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and its Israeli counterpart Mossad since the premiership of Indira Gandhi further confirms sharing of critical information pertaining to security and national interest.

Furthermore, it is again faintly believed that Israel supplied weapons to India in its other major wars too such as that of 1965 and 1971. It supplied M-58 160-mm mortar ammunition to India in 1965.⁸ In response, India covertly sent military equipment to Israel during the 1967 war. Gary J. Bass in his book *The Blood Telegram: India's Secret War in East Pakistan* bases his argument on the Indian diplomat P N Haskar's papers, the principal secretary to the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to illustrate that when the Nixon administration "turned blind eye" to the repressions of the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) by Yahya Khan, in July 1971, the then Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir secretly arranged for an Israeli arms manufacturer to supply mortars and ammunitions and instructors to India.⁹

Post-Normalisation

Merely six years post the establishment of diplomatic relations, Tel Aviv's unconditional support to New Delhi was again put to test when in 1998, Israel was one of the few countries that chose not to condemn India's Pokhran nuclear test. Not only did Israel support India's right to test its civil nuclear capabilities, but it also aided India with mortars and ammunitions and provided laser-guided missiles for IAF Mirage 2000H

fighters during the Kargil conflict that followed the nuclear testing.¹⁰ To be specific, Indian Air Force (IAF) were supplied and aided with unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), ‘Searcher’ and surveillance systems for Jaguar and Mirage squadrons. MIG 21 was also upgraded by Israel. The Indian Army on the other hand was equipped with Israeli made Laser Guided Bombs (LGB) and 160-mm mortar ammunition. These weapon systems helped India to secure an edge over their adversary.

After the establishment of diplomatic relations, given that it was a formative stage, India-Israel ties furthered with over 50 defence related visits alone in a span of nine years, that is, from 1992 to 2000. It is noteworthy that while Israel was more forthcoming in establishing a robust military collaboration through military co-production, given its traditional Arab policy, India was still reluctant to openly declare its developing relations with the Jewish nation. Indian Government’s reluctance is well reflected in the then Minister of State for Defence, S. Krishna Kumar’s statement in February 1992, that is, within a month of normalisation, that “there was no proposal, no initiative, no offer for any kind of defence ties with that country—that subject had not even been discussed in the Defence Ministry”.¹¹

However, by mid-1992, the situation changed and many Indian leaders began to acknowledge Israel’s role in countering terrorism in its own country and that “Israel had certain defence capabilities worth noting”. In this context, the views of former Defence Minister Sharad Pawar and later on Krishna Kumar’s himself is notable. Starting from a six-member defence team visit to India and discussion on matters of mutual interest to rapid progress made in the subsequent years including high-level visits (especially from Israel), various arms purchases and urgency regarding up-gradation of Russian purchased avionics and weapon systems such as MIG 21 Bis, Russian T-72 tanks and remotely piloted vehicles suggested that India had found another reliable defence partner in Israel.

Though not readily acknowledged, India's normalisation with Israel in 1992 had two strategic connotations and concerns. One, post the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India was required to diversify its defence procurements. Soviet Russia is one of the major traditional arms suppliers to India which accounted for 72.46 per cent of the Trend Indicator Values (TIV) of total imported arms.¹² Though the Russian military-industrial complex and production capability had been reduced by the collapse, its defence exports capabilities were barely affected. However, to reduce dependence and to avoid uncertainty, India needed to diversify its sources of defence requirements, given its adversarial concerns. Israel, in that context, was a promising option. A similar situation has once again arisen with the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis where the endgame is nowhere to be seen. Given that 90 per cent of India's arms imports are from Russia (accounting for 68.28 per cent),¹³ further diversification in sources of defence imports, co-production with friendly foreign countries (with strengthened foreign direct investments) and propelling indigenisation initiatives, can be the only saviours.

Two, given the change in the geostrategic environment, India wanted to achieve its goal of self-reliance in military equipment production. This was essential for achieving strategic autonomy as part of India's vision as a global and regional power. Israel was emerging as an embodiment of a state managing and nurturing its indigenous military-industrial complex by using state-of-the-art technologies, both dual-use and disruptive. It had made its mark and had a singular reputation in the defence sector. Additionally, it showed keenness in the commercial expansion of its defence technologies to other countries through technology transfer, up-gradation of existing machinery and providing new advanced weapons.¹⁴ Thus, for the first time, these two crucial aspects compelled India to act pragmatically vis-à-vis Israel than driven by traditional Arab-centric ideology.

Post-2014 and Strategic Partnership Agreement

While these varied instances establish that India's defence relations is indeed longstanding. However, it cannot be denied that post-2014, while Narendra Modi led National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) pro-Israel policies provided impetus to the relations; Indian profound focus on defence indigenisation through Make in India initiatives, furthered India-Israel defence domain. More importantly, since the signing of the strategic partnership in July 2017, the Indo-Israeli defence liaison is not only longstanding but is more refined and robust.

In terms of volumes of arms trade, as per recent Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports, for decades, India is the world's largest importer of arms followed by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Australia and China. In 2017-21, it accounted for 11 per cent of global arms imports wherein its main suppliers are Russia (46 per cent), France (27 per cent) and the US (12 per cent).¹⁵ Israel is the fourth-largest supplier to India with 8.48 per cent share. This shows that despite post-Cold War diversification in arms imports, India continues to rely heavily on Russian supplies, for instance, since the last decade, the Russian share in the Indian defence market stands at 68.28 per cent.

In the 2000s, Israel's share in the Indian defence market has been tortuous with declining trends in the 1998-2006 time periods, when posting the uplifting of US sanctions, Indo-American defence trade started to increase. This was also the time, especially in 2006, when India slapped corruption charges on Israel Aerospace Industry (IAI) and Rafael Advanced Defence System on procurement of Barak missiles and both the companies were banned.¹⁶ Since 2014, the share of Israel in India's arms market has been increasing.

While the arms trade continues to play a significant role in India's defence relations with Israel, the two countries are also working together in co-producing defence items to support India's *Atmanirbhar Bharat*

(self-reliance). In terms of areas of cooperation, Israel has been upgrading India's aircraft systems such as MIG 21s; cooperating on developing Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) and Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) with Indian aeronautic giants like Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) along with Israeli Elbit System IAI; co-producing surveillance equipment such as UAVs and Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs); in providing assistance on developing Main Battle Tanks (MBT) such as Arjun MBT.¹⁷ Moreover, India imports critical defence technologies from Israel such as Heron UAV, a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) system; Searcher, a multi-mission tactical UAV; air defence systems such as SPYDER-MR; BARAK surface-to-air-missile; beyond visual range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM) such as Python-5, Derby, Griffin laser-guided module, HAROP, and Crystal Maze along with guided bombs, loitering ammunition and surface-to-air (SAM) missiles; and sensors such as EL/M-2248 MF-STAR, EL/M-2221 STGR, EL/M-2032, EL/M-2075 Phalcon, etc.¹⁸

Nonetheless, as per India's *Srijan* Portal,¹⁹ a Government of India initiative for providing data on Indian Defence Indigenisation which became active since August 2020, India imported around 92 defence related items from Israel worth Rs 2,111 million (US\$ 27.53 million). Of the 92 items, as many as eight items clubbed under guided missiles warheads and explosive components MRSAM, electrical insulators and insulating materials, engine instruments, transformers, hardware and abrasives, laboratory equipment, etc. are indigenised.

Reflecting on the new global strategic challenges, while India pledges to increase its defence indigenisation process by including public and private organisations and companies, and to decrease its volume of arms import; growing self-reliance on arms will impact the quantum of the Indo-Israel defence relationship which is majorly guided by the arms trade. Nonetheless, the recent extraordinary range of cooperation in terms of procurement and co-development of equipment such as missiles

like long-range surface-to-air missiles (LRSAM), MRSAM, radars, UAVs, assault weapons and so on and so forth, confirms that there will not be any negative impact on growing defence relations between India and Israel, especially in the short-term.²⁰

Moreover, Israeli defence industry is well placed given its prolonged exposure to the Indian defence market, to take advantage of the government's measures in increasing defence manufacturing. Additionally, India's drive and demands toward military modernisation are huge, and so are its needs of the growing internal and external security concerns. Thus, in the times to come Indo-Israeli defence relations will be much more solidified and robust, even when the arms trade component may reduce. *Srijan* portal gives an inkling that India's decision to indigenise is well-supported by Israel. To improve the country's defence exports profile, a robust relationship with Israel will prove significant. For instance, with an increasing focus on joint development and production, the countries could explore markets in the developing nations such as Africa, South-East Asia, and Asia to export Indian manufactured Israeli products such as UAVs, small arms and ammunitions, radars, etc.

To conclude, while India-Israel traditional defence relations have been longstanding, however, with the changing strategic realities which demand increasing indigenisation, the relations are becoming increasingly robust. Until now, the bilateral has been earmarked by increasing arms trade and up-gradation of weapon systems imported from elsewhere. Nevertheless, even in a role changing mechanism, Israel as a dependable strategic partner will continue to contribute significantly to India's domestic defence industry. Both the public as well as the private defence sectors in both countries are well-equipped in collaborating to fulfil India's critical defence requirements. Thus, India's defence relations with Israel will continue to flourish given that both the countries provide each other with strategic unique selling points (USPs). Indian USP lies in its vibrant defence market while Israel with its cutting-edge technology and

willingness to transfer such technologies has proven to be a dependable strategic partner. Hence, defence cooperation will continue to further bolster Indo-Israeli defence relations.

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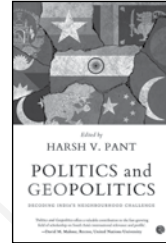
*Politics and Geopolitics: Decoding India's
Neighbourhood Challenge*

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Vaibhav Kullashri



With the change in the global geopolitical landscape, the popular discourse among scholars is that global power is shifting toward the east. This shift in global power is primarily because of China's rise and India's emerging economy bringing new challenges to global politics, especially in South Asian region with 'China rise' as it pivots, the book 'Politics and Geopolitics: Decoding India's Neighbourhood Challenge,' edited by Prof. Harsh V Pant, is a timely work to analyse the changing contours of national interest in India's neighbourhood.

The book is a compilation of nine chapters written by various scholars, experts and policymakers. With 'China rise' and India's policy initiative after 2014 as a benchmark, the various contributors try to analyse the present situation and put forward the future trajectory of India's relationship with its neighbour. The book provides a detailed

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account of India's neighbours and helps in understanding the changing geo-economic and geopolitical dynamics of the region.

Three parameters shape the opinion of the various scholars. First is the structural disparity between India and its neighbouring countries. Here, India's big brother image among the smaller nations is the major challenge in shaping the relationship. Second, it talks about India's domestic compulsion in shaping India's neighbourhood policy. Any instability in any neighbouring country affects India's internal politics and poses various national and internal security challenges. Third, India's strategic interest shift from SAARC to BIMSTEC underlines New Delhi's growing aspirations towards the countries in the east.

The underlying theme seen in every chapter is the scope that 'China rise' has given to India's neighbourhood to leverage their economic interest, which mushroomed the instability in the region. The smaller nations use China to leverage their economic interest while also keeping aligned with New Delhi for their security interest. Also, India's inability to compete with Chinese economic investment is a significant area of concern.

Chapter 1 on Afghanistan, written by Jayant Prasad, provides a detailed account of the various events in the country and talks about India's strategic interest in the country. The author considers the Pakistan factor, the emergence of the Taliban and India's historical, and cultural ties with Afghanistan in analysing the Indian policy initiatives in the region. Though written before the Taliban takeover of the country, the author provides the various options available to Indian policymakers dealing with Afghanistan in the future.

Chapter 2 on Pakistan, written by Aparna Pande, elaborates on the Kashmir issue as the prominent bone of contention, lauds the Indian government's initiative and reprimands Pakistan for not responding with the desired deal and sticking to the age-old terrorism and proxy war tactic. She recommends garnering international support for Pakistan's

disregard of international norms against India. However, the chapter provides a thorough understanding of the India-Pakistan relationship but compromises on giving concrete policy initiatives.

Chapter 3 on China, written by Gautam Bambawale, highlights the growing rivalry between India and China in shaping their interest in the region. He pointed out that cooperation and competition shall be the relationship's future trajectory. China's aggression against India in Galwan is seen as a turning point which has compelled New Delhi to shape a nuanced approach toward China. Besides giving historical facts, the chapter provides a clear understanding of China's true character and gives various policy options to be adopted for challenging the dragon in the future.

Chapter 4 on Nepal, written by Manjeev Singh Puri, provides a detailed account of historical ties, shared culture and increasing partnership between the nation while at the same time concerned over the impact of China and western influence, globalisation on Nepali's internal politics. The author suggests the (Ekla Chalo Re) walk-alone approach to reshape the India-Nepal relationship, wherein New Delhi must proactively engage with Kathmandu.

Chapter 5 on Bhutan, written by V P Haran, provides detailed facts on security and development cooperation, trade, connectivity and investment. The author dwells on the nation's shared culture and reflects on growing Chinese aggression at the Bhutan border, especially near the tri-junction.

Chapter 6 on Bangladesh, written by Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, has lauded Bangladesh's progress and upheld the cooperation between the nation. China's increasing presence in the country is seen as a significant challenge and the author suggests improving connectivity and increasing more areas of collaboration to tackle the same.

Chapter 7 on Myanmar, written by Gautam Mukhopadhaya, revolves around the growing Chinese presence in the country, north-eastern

centrality and push for India's Act East Policy. The dilemma seems to be, whether to increase military cooperation or focus on economic cooperation. However, India's inability to complete the various economic projects on time is the primary area of concern in the relationship with Myanmar.

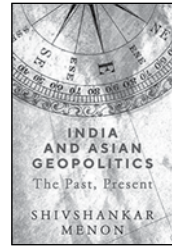
Chapter 8 on Sri Lanka, written by Indrani Bagchi, talks about the historical relations and provides an account of India's policy dilemma in the country. She elucidates on increasing Chinese presence, growing threat of terrorism and India's reluctance to review the free trade agreement with Sri Lanka.

Chapter 9 on the Maldives, written by N. Sathiya Moorthy and Vinitha Revi, underlines the detailed historical events that happened in the country after 2014. The author talks about Chinese influence, India's interest, and future policy initiatives to improve the relationship.

The book covers remarkable facts about all the events that shaped India's relationship with its neighbour since 2014. It is written in a simple language and every chapter gives a thorough understanding of the mentioned country. However, the book relies more on facts and past events. It does not provide clear-cut policy measures to be adopted to shape the future of India's relationship with its neighbour. The book comes up as an excellent read for scholars, students, and all interested in knowing about India's neighbouring countries.

India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present
Shivshankar Menon

Brookings Institution Press, (2021), Washington D.C.
ISBN: 978-0815737230, 416 pp., Rs. 5,107.92
(Paperback)



Namita Barthwal

The book, *India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present* is a thesis of Shivshankar Menon's discussion with young students of International Relations at Ashoka University. The generation of students, he teaches, is mostly born in the 21st century, the time when India is already in a race to achieve the status of an influential state along with other Asian states. He advocates that Asia, presently, is at the centre of world politics. In highlighting the success of the Asian states, he writes: "India and China have eliminated more poverty in a shorter amount of time than any other nations in history. Several Asian states have acquired the agency in the international system unprecedented in their modern history."

The wave of globalisation has turned several Asian states into vigorous engines of global economic growth. These states now are heading towards military build-up and wanting to change the world order where, at present, the US is seen as the sole superpower. The premier candidate for this is China. In the book, Menon has discussed in detail the global aspiration of China and its consequences for India.

Before joining Ashoka University as a lecturer, the author had an illustrious career that include an accomplished diplomatic career. He had

Namita Barthwal is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi.

also served as the foreign secretary of India and in the Prime Minister's Office as the National Security Advisor. In the acknowledgement, he implicitly explained the rationale for writing this book. The purpose of the book, he defined, is to give the new generation a sense of what his "generation's times were like".

The author recommends to the readers that this book "should not be considered a work of scholarship or of international relations theory," but an attempt "to look at Indian foreign policy with a wide-angle lens". That lens he uses is geopolitics, to which, "India is a significant constituent".

In the book, Menon explores Indian foreign policy through a conversant geopolitical perspective as "it reveals about India's past, present, and, possibly, future behaviour" against the backdrop of the rise of Asia, particularly, India and China.

The 13-chapter book is divided into two parts: (i) the *Past*, where the author narrates the historical evolution of India's foreign policy vis-à-vis Cold War and Asian geopolitics, and (ii) the *Present*, where he locates India as "the ultimate pivot state" in classical geopolitical literature.

The author affirms that there is an evident continuity in India's foreign policy which has not really deviated since the times of India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He cited Nehru's first speech as the leader of a sovereign state—"Tryst with Destiny"—to explain that it is the strategic autonomy that has helped India's foreign policy to maximise its choices in the international political arena. He also asserts that India's foreign and domestic policies are articulately linked. The primary focus of both policies is to elevate the status of India and transform it into a prosperous nation. The author is impressed by Nehru's vision as he states "Nehru already saw Asia free and potentially one political, economic, and strategic space". He added: "he [Nehru] saw the outlines of the three trends that were to shape India's world in the decade to come: decolonization, the reshaping of subcontinental borders, and the Cold War."

Menon has mentioned that the geopolitical drivers of India's foreign policy are geography, demography and economics. These drivers have fixed the parameters of India's foreign policy and the country reacts in a certain way because of these critical aspects. In the west, India has an arch adversary Pakistan who considers India an existential threat. The relationship between India and Pakistan has really affected India's foreign policy's fluid expansion in West Asia. Pakistan plays a geographical barrier and significantly barricaded India's geographical interaction with West Asia. On the other hand, China's exponential rise shows India cannot decisively shape global order in its favour without significant economic clout.

The relationship between India and China has been discussed and analysed in detail in the book. Menon was an Indian ambassador to China. This makes him an authority when it comes to assessing the Sino-Indo relationship. The author writes about the Galwan incident of June 2020, which marked a sharp slump in India-China relations. According to him "both India and China have developed and changed since the strategic framework was put in place in the 1980s." Issues such as maritime security and cyber security have come to the forefront in the recent times "as a result of development, their interests have grown and expanded, and they now rub up against one another in the periphery they share, starting from the Indian Ocean extending to the South China Sea."

He recalls the major incidents in the early phase of the Sino-Indian relationship. He states that from 1959 until the war in October 1962, China and India attempted to find a way out of the boundary issue. However, both the countries ignored the worth of understanding the adversary's compulsions. As a result, both operated on false assumptions and failed to build a partnership.

Menon recollects the killing of five Indian policemen in 1959 at the Kongka pass in the western sector by the Chinese. For India, Beijing's decision to return the bodies on November 14—Nehru's birthday was

mortifying. This act suggested the leadership in China, Mao Zedong, had led to the steady hardening of the Chinese position on the territorial dispute. Menon asserted that “the real driver and decider of China’s road to war with India, by subsequent Chinese accounts, seems to have been Mao Zedong himself.”

However, he also attempts to explain the slip-ups on the Indian side as well. He believes that India, in the past, terribly failed to gauge Chinese intent which has contributed to the deterioration of the complex and troubled bilateral relationship. In Chapter 3, he shared an anecdote about when Zhou Enlai visited Delhi in April 1960. He criticised Nehru’s maladroit political and diplomatic signalling. He touched upon the ambiguity about whether or not a ‘package deal’ was offered by Zhou. The ‘package deal’ talks about how “China might accept the MacMahon Line as the boundary in the east if India accepted the status quo created in the west by China moving forward into Aksai Chin during the 1950s”. Was this a missed opportunity or did Nehru deliberately reject it as it was considered by Delhi to be cartographic aggression by China? It is unanswered.

A decade later, after the Sino-Indo War, in May 1970, Mao signalled his willingness to improve relations with India. He conveyed this to the Indian chargé d’affaires Brajesh Mishra. This is referred to as the ‘Mao smile’. Mao even sent a message of friendship to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. However, India was hesitant about this proposition. In the book, Menon describes the episode as a missed opportunity. He writes: “Whatever the Chinese motives, this episode of the Mao smile, when India failed to respond meaningfully to China in 1970, must go down in the books as an opportunity unexplored, perhaps missed.”

In conclusion, Menon puts his mind on the geopolitical block of Asia. He asserts that “neither China nor Asia is ready yet for a China-centred order”. He raised a word of caution for India as he writes, “India is being reduced to a bit player on the international stage. We have lost

five years. Our national confidence has been replaced by bravado and extravagant statements.”

He urges India to set aside communal hatred and aspire to be a nation that has universal appeal. In the end, Menon remarks that “India’s future resides in the hands and heads of all of its citizens. How we as citizens perceive our situation and choose to build our narrative deeply affect our future.”



Notes for Contributors

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The CLAWS Journal welcomes professional articles on warfare and conflict, national security and strategic issues, especially those related to the art and science of land warfare including sub-conventional conflict in the Indian context. Articles may be submitted by serving and retired members of the armed forces as well as civilians in India and abroad. Articles on aerospace and maritime issues and those on foreign policy and international relations having a bearing on land warfare are also welcome. The Journal particularly encourages articles from younger members of the armed forces.

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