

FPC Briefing: India-China Relations and the Future of Af-Pak
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As instability from Afghanistan increasingly escalates into Pakistan, can improved India-China relations be a primer for security in the region? Acts of terrorism and destabilisation are now daily occurrences in Pakistan, against the country's population, army, police and intelligence services. Given Pakistan's political-military basis this appears to be a growing existential threat not only to the Pakistani state but also to the surrounding region - notably India and China. As the situation in Pakistan escalates, and combines with Afghanistan into an Af-Pak conflagration, this threat then becomes a point of shared concern for India and China. In turn, if UK, US and NATO missions in Afghanistan are unsuccessful and ultimately result in withdrawal (and a cursory reading of their historical behaviour in the region suggests as much), then a regionally-led solution may be most apt. Critically, the proximity of Pakistan and Afghanistan make them permanent features on India's and China's strategic horizons, underscoring the need for a long term solution. Orchestrating a joint India-China approach to what is shared problem could stabilise their regional security and economic ties, garner international respect and facilitate their mutual rise in the international system.

India-China Relations: From Good to Bad to Better

India-China relations were warm in the late 1940s and early 1950s as both countries emerged as modern states. Keen to dissuade the influence of external powers in the region and to assert Asia's independence and resurgence in world affairs, the two countries became increasingly close in their relations. Such sentiments were apparent with the signing of the 1954 Panchsheel Agreement that embodied five core principles - respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence. Accompanying Panchsheel, India conceded suzerainty over Tibet, and recognised it as an autonomous region of China (China had annexed Tibet in 1950). This concession, along with some fruitful 1950s border negotiation, marked the high point of India-China relations, celebrated by the slogan *Hindi-Chini-bhai-bhai* ("India and China are brothers").

However as the Cold War developed, China began to see India as threatening its perceived leadership of the Third World. Relations between the two countries became more fraught, especially given Chinese aid to the Mizo and Naga insurrections in India's northeast and the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. This became personified by ongoing border disputes between the two sides, beginning in 1959 with Chinese incursions into Ladakh and the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Eventually, these tensions led to war in October 1962, resulting in a heavy Indian defeat as she lost thousands of troops and large stretches of territory. Overall, Chinese incursions into India amounted to 90,000 square kilometres (primarily in Arunachal Pradesh in India's northeast) - claims which are still unresolved between the two sides. Soon after the 1962 conflict, Pakistan and China also exchanged land to bolster their positions in the region, much of which resulted in China gaining land from Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.



Apart from general suspicion concerning Chinese (and Pakistani-Chinese) intentions towards India's physical existence, India-China relations continued to be marked by border disputes, and led to several skirmishes - such as at Nathula on the Sikkim-Tibet border in September 1967 and at Somdorong Chu in 1987. Despite these events, a succession of Indian politicians endeavoured for better relations with China over the next decades. These included initial statements of friendship in May 1970, the resumption of diplomatic relations in July 1976, and Rajiv Gandhi's state visit in 1988 that helped to end the stasis between the two sides. As a sign of improving relations, India did not condemn China's actions at Tiananmen Square in 1989. During a September 1993 visit by Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, a landmark agreement was signed on maintaining Peace and Tranquillity on the Line of Actual Control (LoAC). This agreement significantly improved relations and included force reductions. After high-ranking Politburo members visited India in the early 1990s, in 1996 Jiang Zemin became the first Chinese head of state to visit India since the 1962 war.

Despite a brief downswing in relations due to India's 1998 nuclear tests (the rationale for which initially centred on China), the two sides continued to experience warmer relations, especially concerning growing economic links as well as increasingly cooperation in international affairs. Thus, June 2003 saw the Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation which forged a consensus on a wide range of bilateral, regional, and global issues. This consensus included shared visions of a multi-polar non-US dominated world, and was bolstered by rapidly expanding trade (from \$1 billion in 1995 to \$13.6 billion in 2004 and \$51.8 billion by 2008)ⁱ and even military exercises. Part of these exchanges involved India giving China its counter-terrorism experience (gained from combating various insurgencies from the 1950s onwards), which the latter applied to its own problems in Xinjiang. In the Indian Ocean, both sides also began to cooperate to protect their mutual trade and energy routes.

With an India-China emergent "rapprochement" that focused upon economics, maintaining parity in South Asia and de-emphasising their border issues, Indian officials noted 'the consensus that bilateral relations transcend bilateral issues and have acquired a global and strategic perspective'ⁱⁱ. Against this background, analysts have begun to talk of "Chindia". These discourses are bolstered by joint India-China cooperation in multinational fora, and collaboration on energy security and climate change. With this growing inter-dependence, India's leaders have declared there to be a 'harmony of civilisations'ⁱⁱⁱ between India and China. In turn, China's Hu Jintao recently noted how "China-India bilateral ties are now on a fast track"^{iv}. By the first decade of the 21st century China had become much more neutral concerning India-Pakistan affairs (especially concerning the status of Kashmir), as suspicion appeared to give way to greater co-dependencies. While some issues remained between India and China (most notably concerning their shared border) we are now witnessing an unparalleled compatibility of interests.

Af-Pak: Shared Interests and Common Problems

It is in consideration of these shared interests that the increased regional instability from Af-Pak becomes pertinent for both India and China. This instability threatens the two countries not only directly through exported insurgency and terrorism but also via increased regional volatility that threatens their continued economic growth.



With both India and China focused upon fiscal development as a pathway to a greater global role and heightened future international influence, such threats become more important. Both countries also have direct interests in Afghanistan, in particular concerning investments in energy, raw materials and infrastructure. As they begin to challenge US and western hegemony over the coming decades, the legitimacy of both India and China will be bolstered by showing the world that they can manage and sustain a stable neighbourhood. Solving regional issues would also be a mark of great power status, and given the current challenges of reaching such a goal concerning Afghanistan and Pakistan, may be better achieved collectively than individually.

Trade is a predominant concern for both China and India concerning their current ties with Afghanistan. In particular, Chinese-Afghan links are based upon economic links rather than direct security help or contributions in terms of geographic access or a physical troop presence. These links are personified by China's recent \$3.5 billion investment in Afghanistan's copper mines in Aynak near Kabul. Chinese investment has also been evident concerning access to iron-ore, and the construction of electricity plants, railways and telecommunication systems. Reports of rising and untapped gas and oil reserves in Afghanistan's north-east have heightened these ties. China's Afghan interests are also linked to its investments in Pakistan, (such as the Gwadar port in Karachi), pipelines from Kazakhstan to Xinjiang (in north-western China) and energy contracts with Iran. Often, Pakistan is the key conduit for these projects, especially energy transportation, and makes achieving stability in both countries more important.

Indian interests in Afghanistan follow much the same pattern. A major donor (over \$1.2 billion since 2001), India has helped with scores of infrastructure projects. These have included Afghanistan's new \$25 million parliament building, the 218 kilometre Zaranj-Delaram highway, power transmission lines and a dam in Herat. As with China, residual Af-Pak problems are also a logistical obstacle for India concerning securing the transit of energy supplies from across Central Asia but also from Iran. Greater regional stability is needed to guarantee these supplies, and is a long-term, high maintenance interest concerning the energy security and economic success needs of both sides. As such, plans for a shared Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline have flagged in recent years due to Pakistan's internal instabilities (most notably in Baluchistan bordering Iran), and questions over their ability to prevent a pipeline being attacked, sabotaged or simply switched off.

These trade and energy interests are threatened by insecurity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in the form of insurgency and nascent civil war, which also serve as direct challenges to both the Indian and Chinese homelands through exported terrorism. For India, the Af-Pak conflagration has been the crux of major threats against India for the last twenty five years. During the Kashmir insurgency that began in the late 1980s, anti-India militants were trained (often by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) secret service) in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Historical Pakistani support of the Taliban underpinned such linkages, and continues to do so - such as alleged ISI complicity in the bomb attacks on India's embassy in Kabul in 2008. India's long history of insurgency (in Punjab and Kashmir to Assam and beyond) emphasises the demonstration effect of these threats. Additionally facing an ongoing (and often uphill) struggle against the Maoist Naxalites, New



Delhi would not want another wave of imported terrorism as it experienced in the 1990s.

China too faces its own internal difficulties - most notably concerning the Uighurs in the province of Xinjiang. China has already suspected Al Qaeda of training separatists in Xinjiang and again fears the export of terrorism (and associated techniques) from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although, Beijing remains an effective all-weather friend of the Pakistani government, their mutual influence over terrorism in Pakistan (and Afghanistan) is limited as the groups perpetrating it are often by their very nature external to mainstream state influence. With Pakistani policy towards their own separatists (in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan) frequently beset by tangled internal political differences, China's fear of overspill is effectively as high as in India. An additional threat from Afghanistan (and to a lesser degree from Pakistan) comes from the increased smuggling of drugs into China, which - like the export of militancy - threatens to destabilise Chinese society. As is also the case for India, any internal unrest could threaten current political reforms and (more critically) tarnish China's peaceful international rise.

Apart from common trade, energy and anti-terrorism interests, India and China also share similar characteristics within the international system. Although at different rates and stages, the two countries are developing into major poles of influence within the international system. With rapidly expanding economies and vast populations, their influence is also growing (and increasingly being flexed) in international fora concerning trade regulations, energy security and climate change. As they mature into great power roles as part of an emergent multi-polar international system (most probably along with the US, Russia and potentially the EU), they will have to take increasing steps to legitimise and validate their positions. The Af-Pak issue is important not only for securing a peaceful neighbourhood (with commensurate trade and internal stability benefits) but also for taking the lead on important contemporary issues such as international terrorism (and especially when it is within a nuclear capable state such as Pakistan). The shared benefits realisable via taken a shared approach on Afghanistan and Pakistan would thus be mutually profitable for both sides, particularly concerning the long-term strategies of both India and China.

India-China Relations – a Primer for Regional Security?

Entering a phase of renewed, close and mutually beneficial ties, India-China relations are increasingly being driven by the same interests and concerns. A shared drive for continued and stable economic growth to facilitate their international rises is underpinned by common economic, energy and internal security needs. These interests (and threats to them) are personified by the growing conflagration of instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has serious potential negative consequences for the two large neighbours. While for major external actors, Af-Pak represents a regional issue with possible global consequences, for China and India it is first and foremost a regional issue which threatens their global futures. Furthermore, India and China stand to gain more unwanted and mounting problems if the regional situation deteriorates further. Proactively looking for a regional-engendered solution to a regional problem



concerning what is now a worsening situation is therefore in both their short and long term interests.

While the UK, US and NATO are currently looking for viable exit strategies, India and China could do well to look for their own strategy for regional stability. Although issues still remain between the two countries concerning border issues, the Dalai Lama and Tibet, Chinese criticism over the Indo-US nuclear deal and China's continued "string of pearls" strategy^v, India and China must take control of their own neighbourhood. Despite both sides explicitly refusing to send in troops to Afghanistan (India for fear of escalation with Pakistan, and China for wishing to maintain a non-threatening global stance concerning intervention), increased aid and infrastructure donations could be one step to help instil further stability. More intrinsically, by showing a shared front, both countries can put their resources together to powerfully collaborate with each other (in the same way they have done with joint oil deals in the Middle East, for example). Joint infrastructure and reconstruction projects could be an initial route to achieving, and building, a successful partnership.

Another viable pathway could be for India and China to initiate a wider regional solution. This could consist of multiple participants (such as Turkey, Iran and Russia) constituting a regional council or "Council of Neighbours". Many of these participants would share India and China's common focus on ensuring energy security and avoiding the export of terrorism and insurgency to their territories. Such arrangements would also present India and China as leaders of a collaborative rather than bilateral effort, which would assuage regional fears of their potential dominance and hegemony. Either on their own or with others, by sharing both the burden and the risks as new partners, China and India can facilitate a common image of being responsible powers - an image which would aid global perceptions of both countries as dependable, mature and nascent. More importantly, as two countries with a perpetual interest in lasting regional stability, India and China taking a greater role in regional affairs concerning Af-Pak appears almost as a *prima facie* case for legitimate intervention.

May 2010

ⁱ Bajpai, K. (1998) 'India: Modified Structuralism' in Alagappa, M. (ed.) *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, (Stanford: Stanford UP), 157-97; Das, Pushpita (2007) 'India-China Relations: Agreements Signed (2000-2005)', in Rasgotra, M. (ed.) *The New Asian Power Dynamic* (New Delhi: Sage), 180; Huibao, Wen (2003) 'Interview with Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee', in *Visit of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to the People's Republic of China*, June 20-26, 2003 (Delhi: External Publicity Division, Ministry of External Affairs), 66; Godemont, Francois; Dompierre, Yann; Voita, Thibaud; Duchatel, Mathieu (2009) *China and India: Rivals Always, Partners Sometimes* (Paris: European Council on Foreign Relations), 5.

ⁱⁱ MEA (2009) 'India-China Bilateral Relations - Political Relations', *Embassy of India*, Beijing. Viewed on October 28 2009 at <http://www.indianembassy.org.cn/PoliticalRelations.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ See Gandhi, P. Jegadish (ed.) (2007) *India and China in the Asian Century: Global Economic Power Dynamics* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications).

^{iv} Quoted in Ruisheng, Cheng (2007) 'Prospect of China-India Relations after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Visit', *China Report*, 44 (1): 58.

^v Bhattacharjea, Mira Sinha (2001) *China, the World and India* (New Delhi: Samskriti), 433.