

## CHINA AND INDIA: AWKWARD ASCENTS<sup>1</sup>

Shashank Joshi (Department of Government, Harvard University)

### INTRODUCTION

In the modern age, great power aspirants have rarely shared a border.<sup>2</sup> The liberalizing reforms of first China, and then India, unleashed the prospect of their demographic and economic destiny unfolding in uncomfortable proximity.<sup>3</sup> Thus it may surprise few that their rekindled territorial dispute has been characterized as the crux of a new Cold War in Asia.<sup>4</sup> A flurry of reports have documented rising Chinese incursions across the sprawling Himalayan borders. Nearly a half-century ago, conflict over the demarcation and transgression of those borders precipitated a war in which the Red Army quickly humiliated India<sup>5</sup> and expunged Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's dreams of a pan-Asian political renaissance under Sino-Indian leadership.<sup>6</sup>

Today, the perceptions of Chinese probing at the border come amidst widespread Indian fears of diplomatic and maritime encirclement by an ambitious, qualitatively stronger and nuclear-armed neighbor. This has prompted New Delhi to accelerate and recalibrate its military modernization,

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald L Tammen et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 2000), 67; Robert Gilpin, *War and change in world politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 200.

<sup>3</sup> Arvind Panagariya, *India: The Emerging Giant* (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2008); Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See, *inter alia*, Bruce Sterling, "The New Cold War: India and China are picking up where the US and Soviet Union left off," *Wired*, May 2003, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.05/view.html?pg=4>; Jyoti Thottam, "China Vs. India: Will Rivalry Lead to War?," *Time*, November 2, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1931739,00.html>; Jeremy Kahn, "Why India Fears China," *Newsweek*, October 19, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/217088>; Jeremy Page, "Tension grows between China and India as Asia slips into cold war," *The Times*, November 12, 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6913250.ece>.

<sup>5</sup> On the reports of incursions, see Sudha Ramachandran, "China toys with India's border," *Asia Times Online*, June 27, 2008, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/JF27Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JF27Df01.html); Brahma Chellaney, "China's next India war: growing Chinese assertiveness against India," *Covert*, July 2008, <http://chellaney.spaces.live.com/Blog/cns!4913C7C8A2EA4A30!648.entry>; Edward Wong, "China and India Dispute Enclave on Edge of Tibet," *The New York Times*, September 4, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/world/asia/04chinaindia.html?pagewanted=all>; Ben Arnoldy, "Growing number of China incursions into India lead to a strategy change," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 29, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/0929/p06s06-wosc.html>; Jim Yardley, "China Intensifies Tug of War With India on Nepal," *The New York Times*, February 18, 2010, sec. International / Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/18/world/asia/18nepal.html?scp=1&sq=India%20china%20border&st=cse>; Dan Blumenthal, "Opinion Asia: India Prepares for a Two-Front War," *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 2010, sec. Opinion Asia, [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704240004575085023077072074.html?mod=WSJ\\_latestheadlines](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704240004575085023077072074.html?mod=WSJ_latestheadlines).

<sup>6</sup> On the 1962 war, see Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, 1st ed. (New York: Ecco, 2007), 15; Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India: a strategic history of the Nehru years* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), 7-8.

fret over the faltering entente with the United States, and fix its gaze much farther east than its accustomed focus, Islamabad, to Beijing. 1962 is not 2010, and war is a truly remote possibility – but China and India look set to coexist, not cooperate.

Vikram Sood, a former head of India's foreign intelligence service, has discerned a 'gradual and disturbing shift in the Chinese attitude towards India in the past few years'.<sup>7</sup> Bharat Karnad, a member of India's first National Security Advisory Board and a co-author of India's first draft nuclear doctrine, perceives 'India involved in a subtle strategic tussle to thwart China's plans to establish dominance in the extended region'.<sup>8</sup>

These views are increasingly held in the government, bureaucracy, military, and intelligentsia.<sup>9</sup> Reciprocally, China has sharply renewed its claim to an Indian province twice the size of Switzerland.<sup>10</sup> After New Delhi announced the prospective deployment of two divisions to the disputed territory, the *Global Times*, a newspaper controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, warned that India 'needs to consider whether or not it can afford the consequences of a potential confrontation'.<sup>11</sup> There remains a range of perspectives on each side, but these views flag an important shift.

What happened to the '10 years of mostly uninterrupted progress in their political, economic, and security relationship'?<sup>12</sup> Do the supposed border tensions indicate a freeze in the already glacial progress made in relations between the two countries in recent years? Could 'armed coexistence', to invoke Mao's phrase, give way to armed conflict? Outright conflict, however limited, would have profound consequences for the credibility of China's doctrine of a 'peaceful rise', India's hitherto benign image amongst the smaller pivot states of Asia, and the United States' own finely balanced regional interests.

This article surveys the key loci of Sino-Indian tension, situating them within the context of a classical if uneven security dilemma. It lays out the various dimensions of that dilemma, including diplomatic and energy competition, the maritime and nuclear balance, and the net effect of this condition. It then examines the sources of stability within the relationship, arguing that the scope and intensity of conflict is attenuated by a series of military, political, economic and ideological factors. Lastly, the article discusses the implications of the analysis for external powers, and the possible trajectories of the relationship.

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<sup>7</sup> Vikram Sood, "Frozen Smiles, Limp Handshakes: The India-China Relationship," *Asian Age*, October 28, 2009, [http://soodvikram.blogspot.com/2009\\_10\\_28\\_archive.html](http://soodvikram.blogspot.com/2009_10_28_archive.html).

<sup>8</sup> Bharat Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2008), 108.

<sup>9</sup> John W. Garver, "Sino-Indian Security Relations," in *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Security Studies*, ed. Sumit Ganguly, Andrew Scobell, and Joseph Chinyong Liow (London: Routledge, 2010), 135.

<sup>10</sup> Sujit Dutta, "Revisiting China's Territorial Claims on Arunachal," *Strategic Analysis* 32, no. 4 (2008): 549.

<sup>11</sup> "India's unwise military moves," *Global Times* (Beijing, June 11, 2009), <http://opinion.globaltimes.cn/editorial/2009-06/436174.html>.

<sup>12</sup> J. Yuan, "The Dragon and the Elephant: Chinese-Indian Relations in the 21st Century," *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2007): 131.

## THE SINO-INDIAN TRAJECTORY

India and China became neighbors only after 1950, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) annexed Tibet a year after vanquishing the Chinese Nationalist Party of Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>13</sup> And so appeared, as elsewhere on the crumbling fringes of the British Empire, another dispute borne of half-baked topographical diplomacy. In the east, the McMahon Line supposedly demarcated the Indo-Tibetan border – and thus, argued India, now separated the two young republics. In the west, at the northwesterly edge of the Tibetan Plateau, India lackadaisically claimed the entire high altitude desert of Aksai Chin without ever really gaining much of a foothold. Throughout the 1950s, India pursued a policy of benign neglect. It ceded its rights to Tibet and inked a seminal treaty of friendship with China, but assiduously avoiding any mention of the border.<sup>14</sup>

This policy began to fray over the years and, in 1959, collapsed in acrimony after a Tibetan rebellion culminated in the Dalai Lama being granted sanctuary in India – fleeing via Tawang, which lay on the disputed McMahon Line. Documents show that Beijing was convinced not only of Indian designs on Tibet as a colony, but also that the latter was abetting American subversion there (both were misperceptions).<sup>15</sup>

After growing armed clashes – including a weeklong siege – India came to see its 'honor and self-respect' as well as 'integrity and independence' at stake,<sup>16</sup> even though it privately admitted the weakness of its claims on Aksai Chin, through which China had built a road connecting Xinjiang and Tibet. Under intense domestic pressure from press and parliament, India instituted a 'forward policy' in which patrols would extend deep into disputed territory. These were without the requisite military support and, after Mao's domestic position strengthened in the latter half of 1962, the PLA was ordered to 'liquidate the invading Indian army', which it duly did. India received what Nehru was to later call 'a permanent piece of education', with the Indian plains to the south spared only by a unilateral Chinese ceasefire amidst Nehru's pleas for American support.<sup>17</sup>

That status quo holds today, with India controlling Arunachal Pradesh in the east (claimed by China), and China controlling Aksai Chin, as well as tracts of Kashmir transferred to it by Pakistan in 1963 (both claimed by India), in the west. In the

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<sup>13</sup> Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A history of modern Tibet, 1913-1951: the demise of the Lamaist state* (University of California Press, 1991), 638-698.

<sup>14</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, Princeton studies in international history and politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 72.

<sup>15</sup> Robert J. McMahon, "U.S. Policy toward South Asia and Tibet during the Early Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 141; Chen Jian, "The Tibetan Rebellion of 1959 and China's Changing Relations with India and the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 3 (July 1, 2006): 80-88.

<sup>16</sup> Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India*, 257.

<sup>17</sup> Steven A Hoffmann, *India and the China Crisis*, International crisis behavior series v. 6 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); D. K Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (London: Hurst, 1991); Lorne J Kavic, *India's Quest for Security; Defence Policies, 1947-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Neville Maxwell, *China's "aggression" of 1962 and the Unresolved Border Dispute* (Oxford: Court Place Books, 1999); Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "Re-collecting Empire: "Victimhood" and the 1962 Sino-Indian War," *Asian Security* 5, no. 3 (2009): 216.

decades since 1962, a solution has seemed to depend upon the same compromise discernible before the war: each state would drop its claims on the territory *de facto* controlled by the other, India abandoning Aksai Chin and China ceding areas south of the McMahon Line. Although the dispute has never seemed as intractable as that with Pakistan over Kashmir, progress has been desultory.

[Insert map documenting territorial dispute, if possible]

### FRICION ON THE FRONTIER

In the last four years, the status quo appears to have fractured. In 2006, the Chinese ambassador to India insisted, a week prior to a visit from President Hu Jintao, that ‘the whole of the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory’. He added that ‘Tawang is only one of the places in it. We are claiming all of that’.<sup>18</sup> For India, this flew in the face of a painstakingly formulated 2005 agreement, which had specified that ‘in reaching a boundary settlement, the two sides shall safeguard due interests of their settled populations in the border areas’.<sup>19</sup> In June 2007, the Chinese foreign minister again insisted that the ‘mere presence’ of Indians would not dissuade China from claiming territory.

In March 2009, the dispute shifted a gear upwards, when China attempted to block a \$2.9 billion loan to India from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the grounds that it was destined for development in Arunachal Pradesh. This almost certainly precipitated India’s announcement, some months later, of its intention to reinforce its theater military posture: a deployment to the northeast of two divisions of mountain units (roughly 60,000 troops, comprising a doubling of the regional numbers)<sup>20</sup> and a squadron of Sukhoi 30MKI fighter jets (roughly 18 aircraft),<sup>21</sup> and acceleration of roads and airstrips. ‘The idea’, according to an Indian official, was ‘to tell the Chinese that we know they’re there and that we’re there as well’.<sup>22</sup> In November 2010, India declared that it had raised a new battalion, the Arunachal Scouts, in the Assamese garrison city of Shillong.<sup>23</sup> It did so only days before the 14<sup>th</sup> round of border talks was due to begin, indicating the dissuasive intent of the announcement.

The wider context to these moves has been a sustained period of Chinese modernization. China’s two military regions bordering India harbor 400,000 troops (a fifth of the country’s total) and Tibet’s military infrastructure has undergone dramatic improvement over the last decade to the point where Indian planners assume two Chinese divisions could be mobilized in less than three

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<sup>18</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, “Indian might met with Chinese threats,” *Asia Times Online*, July 10, 2009, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/KG10Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KG10Df01.html).

<sup>19</sup> “Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question,” April 11, 2005, <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/nic/0041/indiachinatxt.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Saurabh Joshi, “India to double troops in Arunachal,” *StratPost*, June 8, 2009, <http://www.stratpost.com/india-to-double-troops-in-arunachal>.

<sup>21</sup> Saurabh Joshi, “IAF ups focus on China,” *StratPost*, May 27, 2009, <http://www.stratpost.com/iaf-ups-focus-on-china>.

<sup>22</sup> Saurabh Joshi, “India to double troops in Arunachal.”

<sup>23</sup> James Lamont, “India rattles sabre ahead of Chinese talks,” *Financial Times* (New Delhi, November 1, 2010), <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/416a2f62-edb7-11df-9612-00144feab49a.html#axzz15HQq1BCK>.

weeks, rather than the old 90-180 days.<sup>24</sup> India's shift would result in similar numbers of Indian troops in the region as are now stationed along the Indo-Pakistani line of control in Kashmir, and roughly ten times as many as fought in 1962 – but far below Chinese numbers.

These developments also took place amidst proliferating reports that China had 'stepped up military pressure ... through frequent incursions'.<sup>25</sup> In the year after 2007, these reportedly doubled from 140 to 280, and there were over 2,000 instances of 'aggressive border patrolling' by Indian military accounts.<sup>26</sup> Brahma Chellaney, an Indian defense analyst, has also argued that 'forays into Indian-held territory are occurring even in the only area where Beijing does not dispute the frontier – Sikkim's 206-kilometer border with Tibet' – which, if true, would represent an escalation of sorts.<sup>27</sup>

Accounts of incursions are deeply unreliable owing to the terrain and imprecision of the putative boundary.<sup>28</sup> The former Indian Army chief, General Deepak Kapoor, acknowledged that intrusions were 'a matter of perception', adding in February 2010 that 'there have been no major issues of Chinese transgressions so to say' and insisting that there had been 'no occupation of Indian territory' as was widely reported in the Indian press.<sup>29</sup>

His successor, General V.K. Singh, maintained that:

I think at times things get unnecessarily blown up. There are no intrusions. There are transgressions. Transgressions are in areas where a certain alignment is disputed between the two countries. You feel that the alignment should be at a particular place and you go up to that place. They feel that alignment should be at a particular place, so he comes up to that place. Therefore, for him you have transgressed and for you, he has transgressed. That is what all is happening. There is nothing very alarming about it. As a person who heads the Army, I find there is no problem on our borders.

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 6 (2009): 823.

<sup>25</sup> Brahma Chellaney, "Obama should speak up for India in Beijing," *Financial Times*, November 13, 2009, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8ad9b826-cff3-11de-a36d-00144feabdc0.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Wong, "China and India Dispute Enclave on Edge of Tibet"; Saurabh Joshi, "India to double troops in Arunachal."

<sup>27</sup> Brahma Chellaney, "Sino-Indian border tensions: Let the Facts Speak For Themselves," *Daily News & Analysis (DNA)*, October 5, 2009, <http://chellaney.spaces.live.com/blog/cns!4913C7C8A2EA4A30!1114.entry>.

<sup>28</sup> Srinath Raghavan, "Chinese incursions a matter of perception," *Deccan Chronicle*, September 18, 2009, <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/dc-comment/chinese-incursions-matter-perception-173>.

<sup>29</sup> "Chinese incursions due to different perception: India," *Express India*, February 23, 2008, <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Chinese-incursions-due-to-different-perception-India/276320/>; "Chinese troops have not occupied Indian territory, says army chief," *Rediff News*, February 23, 2010, <http://news.rediff.com/interview/2010/feb/23/indian-territory-not-occupied-by-chinese-troops.htm>.

He hedged only that 'intentions in this case can change as the capabilities grow'.<sup>30</sup>

The mixed evidence is unsurprising, since – unlike nearly every other disputed border in the world – there is no agreed 'Line of Actual Control'. Nor do we have any sense of Indian incursions, given China's greater caution in invoking a transgression. This basic ambiguity, and its repeated acknowledgement by Indian officials, is important to note when evaluating sensationalist accounts. However, there is little reason to assume that the unreliability of media accounts was greater *after* 2006 than *before*. India's former National Security Advisor, Brajesh Mishra, is correct to suggest that 'the Chinese claims on Arunachal Pradesh have acquired a stridency that was never there before'.<sup>31</sup> Is this a change in foreign policy?

### WHY HAS CHINA'S STANCE HARDENED?

John Garver concedes that 'the exact reasons for Beijing's reluctance to close the territorial issue with India remain a mystery'.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps so, but hypotheses abound. Four explanations are considered below.

In the first place, a rise in perceived incursions could be the innocuous result of increased Chinese activity – such as patrol frequency and infrastructure development – of the sort that has occurred on many of China's borders, and not indicative of a change in Chinese policy.<sup>33</sup> In this interpretation, China has embarked on a defensively oriented and general improvement of its previously neglected border defenses. In other words, India has picked up more noise than signal. Of course, patrol frequency can be a proxy for assertiveness, and infrastructure can enable both defensive and offensive actions. Similarly, one can point to Chinese territorial activity elsewhere, particularly in the maritime domain, as evidence that there has been a qualitative rise in its assertiveness over such disputes.<sup>34</sup>

Second, China's anxiety over territorial integrity has sharpened in recent years. In 2008 and 2009, severe ethnic riots occurred in the supposedly autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Aksai Chin offers a line of communication between the two. China also labels Arunachal Pradesh 'South Tibet', underscoring the symbolic importance of articulating a claim on that territory as part of a firm

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<sup>30</sup> VK Singh, "Army Chief stands up for AFSPA," October 16, 2010, <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20101017/main1.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> Ravi Velloor, "India feels chill wind from China," *The Straits Times*, November 7, 2009, <http://www.asianewsnet.net/news.php?sec=2&id=8563>.

<sup>32</sup> Garver, "Sino-Indian Security Relations," 131.

<sup>33</sup> "Interview with M. Taylor Fravel, on China's border disputes," *Rediff News*, October 13, 2009, <http://news.rediff.com/slide-show/2009/oct/13/slide-show-1-china-has-settled-all-land-border-disputes-except-with-india-and-bhutan.htm#contentTop>.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Landler, "U.S. Works to Ease China-Japan Conflict Over Islands," *The New York Times*, October 30, 2010, sec. World / Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/31/world/asia/31diplo.html>.

assertion that Tibet is an integral part of China, at a time when unrest has raised questions over just that.<sup>35</sup>

Against this, Taylor Fravel has argued that it is 'regime insecurity' that 'best explains China's pattern of cooperation and delay in its territorial disputes'. Fravel suggests that 'China's leaders have compromised when faced with internal threats to regime security'.<sup>36</sup> If correct, insecurity on the periphery should have led to Chinese caution, not assertiveness.

Srinath Raghavan offers an alternative interpretation, suggesting that 'China's assertive stance on the ground is evidently intended to buttress its position on the bargaining table', after progress made in earlier rounds of negotiations made it appear that a settlement could be within reach.<sup>37</sup> In other words, success bred strife.

Lastly, the pressure could be less innocuous. Irked by India's growing closeness to the United States and other powers such as Japan, China may be looking to keep the parvenu off balance by virtually costless means.<sup>38</sup> China was especially angered by India's participation in the Quadrilateral Initiative war games of 2007, which brought together US, India, Japan and Australia.<sup>39</sup> This would be a straightforward strategic rationale, although it has ironically strengthened hardliners in India.

### **THE SUBCONTINENTAL SECURITY DILEMMA**

It is important to note that none of these three explanations necessarily imply that Beijing has lowered the threshold for using force in pressing its claims. But the apparent friction on the frontier is significant not because it necessarily presages Chinese adventurism, but because of its interaction with a much wider set of geopolitical dynamics taking place in South Asia. The mutual pressing of claims on the border generates opportunities for clashes, which can escalate to crises or worse.<sup>40</sup> That is more likely in the prevailing milieu of mistrust, where the 'strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity' declared in 2005 seems quite remote.

A security dilemma stems from the impossibility of gauging with certainty the intentions of another state.<sup>41</sup> Supposedly defensive measures by one state, being perceived as offensive in nature, result in a spiral of protective measures by another state, such as arms buildups and other efforts at balancing. This results

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<sup>35</sup> Srinath Raghavan, "Resolving the Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute," *Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania*, July 5, 2009, <http://casi.ssc.upenn.edu/iit/raghavan>.

<sup>36</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation: Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (October 1, 2005): 81.

<sup>37</sup> Raghavan, "Chinese incursions a matter of perception."

<sup>38</sup> Harsh Pant, "China tightens the screws on India," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 2009.

<sup>39</sup> "New 'strategic partnership' against China," *BBC*, September 3, 2007, sec. South Asia, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/6968412.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6968412.stm).

<sup>40</sup> Kanti P. Bajpai et al., *Brasstacks and Beyond: Perception and Management of Crisis in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995); Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 310-317.

<sup>41</sup> For the classic statement, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (1978): 167-214.

in a mutual diminishment of security. The looming and uncertain shadow of future growth, opacity in military planning, lingering historical grievances and the prevalence of mixed signals all sharpen the Sino-Indian dilemma, leading to the border dispute being refracted – most clearly in New Delhi – through a prism of acute mistrust.

In at least three areas, Sino-Indian rivalry has unfolded with speed unimaginable two decades ago, when India teetered on the cusp of default and China labored under the post-Tiananmen arms and economic embargoes. The contours of this competition are, by now, well known and will be outlined only briefly.<sup>42</sup>

### **Diplomatic and energy competition**

Diplomatically, Beijing has moved deftly to consolidate its influence in the Indian periphery. The core of this approach remains the Sino-Pakistan axis. ‘For China, Pakistan is a low-cost secondary deterrent to India’ argued Pakistani ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani, and ‘for Pakistan, China is a high-value guarantor of security against India’, indeed its largest source of weaponry.<sup>43</sup>

A congressional briefing reports that ‘China’s continuing role as a major arms supplier for Pakistan began in the 1960s and included assistance in a number of arms factories in Pakistan, as well as supplying complete weapons systems’.<sup>44</sup> These systems included knock-offs of Chinese ballistic missiles, nuclear warhead designs, and a full 50 kilograms of weapons grade uranium that dramatically accelerated Pakistan’s nuclearization.<sup>45</sup> China’s ongoing assistance to Pakistan’s plutonium production will ‘allow development of warheads with greater yield-to-weight ratios’, paving the way for miniaturization and hence more potent tactical nuclear weapons of the sort that paralyze India’s conventional options on its western front.<sup>46</sup> This is alongside the extensive transfer of aircraft, including two squadrons of advanced J-10 fighters, which have blunted India’s traditional

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<sup>42</sup> The best analytical survey is John W Garver, *The Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); see also Derek Mitchell and Chietigj Bajpae, “China and India,” in *The China Balance Sheet in 2007 and Beyond*, ed. C. Fred Bergsten et al. (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007); Srikanth Kondapalli, “Policy Perspectives on India-China Interaction,” *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 2, no. 1 (March 2007): 75-87; Swaran Singh, “India-China Relations: Perception, Problems, Potential,” *South Asian Survey* 15, no. 1 (2008): 83-98; Sankhya Krishnan, *India’s Security Dilemma vis-à-vis China: A Case of Optimum or Sub-Optimum Restraint?*, RCSS Policy Studies (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Jamal Afridi, “Background: China-Pakistan Relations,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 20, 2009, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10070>.

<sup>44</sup> K. Alan Kronstadt and Kenneth Katzman, *India-Iran Relations and U.S. Interests* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, August 2, 2006), 47.

<sup>45</sup> “China’s Nuclear Exports and Assistance to Pakistan,” *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, November 14, 2003, <http://www.nti.org/db/china/npakpos.htm>; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Threat of Pakistani Nuclear Weapons* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 8, 2001). For the claim regarding uranium transfers, see R. Jeffrey Smith and Joby Warrick, “Pakistani nuclear scientist’s accounts tell of Chinese proliferation,” *The Washington Post*, November 13, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/12/AR2009111211060.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Vipin Narang, “Posturing for Peace? Pakistan’s Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability,” *International Security* 34, no. 3 (January 1, 2010): 58.



air superiority.<sup>47</sup> K. Subrahmanyam, a former civil servant and India's most prominent defense analyst, judges that 'Islamabad derives its capability to threaten India from China'.<sup>48</sup>

There is also evidence that Beijing's stance on Kashmir, which had shifted towards neutrality over the last decade, is changing. China has begun issuing irregular visas for residents of Indian-administered Kashmir and, in 2010, shocked India by denying a visa for the Indian Army officer general in charge of the northern areas; both were apparent discontinuities in Chinese policy, and appeared to re-open an issue that had appeared moderately settled.<sup>49</sup>

Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka have also deepened their ties with China significantly. All are perceived by India to be within its traditional sphere of influence.<sup>50</sup> In these states (though less so in Bangladesh) India has typically wielded considerable influence in domestic politics and demonstrated hostility to extra-territorial powers' involvement.<sup>51</sup> Take the example of Nepal, which shares an intentionally porous border with India. China's concerns over Tibetan activism rose after significant protests in Kathmandu during 2008. Trade and travel links between China and Nepal mushroomed, and political and military links between have been carefully strengthened by Beijing.<sup>52</sup> The former head of counterterrorism for India's foreign intelligence service has concluded that 'India will find itself in Nepal in a situation not dissimilar to the situation in Myanmar', in other words, 'all the time having to compete with China for political influence and economic benefits [having] monopolized the strategic playing field'.<sup>53</sup>

Myanmar illustrates this dynamic in the realm of energy. For instance, despite reversing its policy and moving closer to the military junta in Myanmar, India has lost access to resources even from projects in which it has a commercial

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<sup>47</sup> Animesh Roul, "India, Pakistan: Quest to control the skies," *International Relations and Security Network*, April 12, 2007, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=53111>.

<sup>48</sup> K. Subrahmanyam, "Beyond cold war paradigms," *Business Standard*, November 14, 2010, <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/bk-subrahmanyamb-beyond-cold-war-paradigms/414742/>.

<sup>49</sup> Shashank Joshi, "Kashmir: Three is a Crowd," *The World Today - Chatham House* 66, no. 10 (October 2010).

<sup>50</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 237-241.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 232-255; Teresita C Schaffer, *India and the United States in the 21st Century: Reinventing Partnership* (Washington, D.C: CSIS Press, 2009), 128-129; Michael Brecher, "International Relations and Asian Studies: The Subordinate State System of Southern Asia," *World Politics* 15, no. 2 (January 1963): 213-235; Rajiv Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi, India: SAGE Publications India, 2009); Robert Stewart-Ingersoll and Derrick Frazier, "India as a Regional Power: Identifying the Impact of Roles and Foreign Policy Orientation on the South Asian Security Order," *Asian Security* 6, no. 1 (2010): 51.

<sup>52</sup> Jim Yardley, "China Intensifies Tug of War With India on Nepal," *The New York Times*, February 18, 2010, sec. International / Asia Pacific, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/18/world/asia/18nepal.html?scp=1&sq=India%20China%20nepal&st=cse>.

<sup>53</sup> B. Raman, "Rise of Maoists in Nepal: Implications for India," *Raman's strategic analysis*, August 10, 2008, [http://ramanstrategicanalysis.blogspot.com/2008\\_08\\_10\\_archive.html](http://ramanstrategicanalysis.blogspot.com/2008_08_10_archive.html).

stake.<sup>54</sup> This desire to consolidate overland energy routes has also driven competition in Bangladesh, whose largest source of arms is now China.<sup>55</sup> Nor is the phenomenon limited to India's periphery. Delhi has been repeatedly outmaneuvered by China across Central Asia and Africa.<sup>56</sup>

### **Maritime and nuclear competition**

There is a crucial maritime dimension to this contest. The 'string of pearls' – supposedly 'a nexus of Chinese geopolitical influence or military presence' along its stretched sea lines of communication<sup>57</sup> – is a now ubiquitous concept in the Indian strategic community, though its usage is frequently confused or exaggerated. Its popular currency reflects concerns that the Indian Ocean, once imagined as an 'Indian lake',<sup>58</sup> could be used as source of power projection against India, and that Indian sea lines could themselves be severed in the event of a war.<sup>59</sup> Since more than 95 per cent of Indian exports are seaborne, and 70 per cent of Indian hydrocarbons are drilled in offshore blocks, this is deemed a vulnerability of strategic proportions.<sup>60</sup> The most prominent development is Gwadar, a Chinese-built port in the restive Pakistani province of Balochistan, but the list includes facilities or projects of varying scale at Marao in the Maldives, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Sittwe in Myanmar, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and in the Burmese Coco Islands.<sup>61</sup>

Jonathan Holslag argues that 'the so-called string of pearls thus far appears to be more a chain of commercial ventures rather than military stepping-stones'. There are other similarly skeptical accounts.<sup>62</sup> Although this interpretation is

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<sup>54</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "China secures Myanmar energy route," *Asia Times Online*, April 3, 2009, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/KD03Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KD03Df03.html); Simon Robinson, "India's Burma Silence Says Volumes," *Time*, September 29, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1666859,00.html?xid=feed-cnn-topics>; R. Swaminathan, "India-Myanmar Relations: A Review," *South Asia Analysis Group*, October 30, 2009, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers35%5Cpaper3480.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, "China-Bangladesh Relations and Potential for Regional Tensions," *China Brief, The Jamestown Foundation* 9, no. 15 (July 23, 2009), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35310&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=f6f3b100c9](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35310&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=f6f3b100c9).

<sup>56</sup> Schaffer, *India and the United States in the 21st Century*, chap. 3, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher J. Pehrson, *String of pearls: meeting the challenge of China's rising power across the Asian littoral* (US Army War College: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), 3; Robert D. Kaplan, "Center Stage for the 21st Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean," *Foreign Affairs* (April 2009). The term appears to have originated in a report by defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton for the Pentagon.

<sup>58</sup> Emrys Chew, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: The Indian Ocean and the Maritime Balance of Power in Historical Perspective*, Working Paper Series (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, October 25, 2007), 7 footnote 17.

<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, Raja Menon, "Turfed out of our own backyard," *Indian Express*, November 2, 2009, <http://www.indianexpress.com/story-print/536033/>.

<sup>60</sup> Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," 825.

<sup>61</sup> Vikas Bajaj, "India Worries as China Builds Ports in South Asia," *The New York Times*, February 16, 2010, sec. Business / Global Business, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/16/business/global/16port.html?scp=9&sq=India%20china%20border&st=cse>.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Selth, "Burma, China and the Myth of Military Bases," *Asian Security* 3, no. 3 (2007): 279; Michael S. Chase and Andrew S. Erickson, "Changes in Beijing's Approach to Overseas Basing?," *China Brief, The Jamestown Foundation* 9, no. 19 (September 24, 2009),

correct (and overlooked in the hyperventilation of some Indian accounts), it understates the inherently dual-use nature of naval facilities and the impossibility of precluding a future military function. The nature and scale of influence acquired by China is likely much more diffuse (in the sense of 'non-fungible') than observers have suggested, and India's local maritime preeminence far greater.<sup>63</sup> But this has not lessened India's long-term fears, and its nuclear and naval modernizations are both directed squarely at Beijing.

In 2008, India's navy chief announced that 'by 2022, we plan to have a 160-plus ship navy, including three aircraft carriers, 60 major combatants, including submarines and close to 400 aircraft of different types', constituting 'a formidable three dimensional force with satellite surveillance and networking'.<sup>64</sup> Walter Ladwig has suggested that with a second landing platform and the appropriate air power, 'India would be on the verge of possessing Asia's only viable expeditionary naval force', an obviously Sinocentric aspiration buttressed by burgeoning ties to Japan, Australia, Singapore, and the United States.<sup>65</sup>

These ambitions are instantiated in a series of documents produced by the Indian Navy. The 'Indian Military Maritime Strategy' of 2007 noted that 'freedom to use the seas will become crucial if India is to attain her "manifest destiny"', a statement with obviously Mahanian overtones.<sup>66</sup> Another analyst goes as far as to conclude that 'Indian strategists are staking an explicit claim to the legacy of the British Empire as the natural boundaries of India's influence'.<sup>67</sup> These Mahanian visions are of some pedigree. The scholar and diplomat K.M. Panikkar

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[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35469&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=255e0ccfe7](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35469&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=255e0ccfe7); Gurpreet A. Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications," *Strategic Analysis* 32, no. 1 (January 2008): 1-39.

<sup>63</sup> Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," 830; Walter C. Ladwig, "Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, "Look East," and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific," *Asian Security* 5, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>64</sup> James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Strongman, Constable, or Free-Rider? India's "Monroe Doctrine" and Indian Naval Strategy," *Comparative Strategy* 28, no. 4 (2009): 332; Shashank Joshi, "Sixty-five thousand tonnes of ambition," *Royal United Services Institute*, December 2009, <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4B20EF703EDFF/>.

<sup>65</sup> Ladwig, "Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, "Look East," and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific," 10. The presence of such potent offensive platforms belies the occasional suggestion that non-state actors, such as pirates, are the primary targets. And for all the talk of protecting the global commons, China is virtually the only state that India sees as presenting a threat to this nebulous concept. To be sure, the memory of 1971 – when the US was perceived to have engaged in nuclear coercion of India after sending the USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal during the Bangladesh War – is a lingering resentment, and has been explicitly invoked in discussions of the nuclear deterrent. But China is the most salient concern in India's naval circles, all the more so after nuclear weapons have tightly circumscribed the scope of any Indo-Pakistan war.

<sup>66</sup> Indian Navy, *Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy* (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defense, May 2007), 130.

<sup>67</sup> Ladwig, "Delhi's Pacific Ambition: Naval Power, "Look East," and India's Emerging Influence in the Asia-Pacific," 90.

insisted, two years before Indian independence, that 'the Indian Ocean must therefore remain truly Indian'.<sup>68</sup>

A similar mentality characterizes the nuclear realm. Bharat Karnad, who participated in the writing of India's first draft nuclear doctrine, affirms that India has set 'the aim eventually of achieving near or at least notional parity with China as the basis for equitable security' and that its nuclear submarine and long-range missile projects are configured to this end. He adds that the imports of 'American capital weapons and surveillance platforms are meant to beef up the Indian military for the coming strategic competition with China'. 'In time', observes Karnad, 'Pakistan will become a sideshow'.<sup>69</sup> To be sure, Karnad is an unusually hawkish voice amongst present and would-be decision-makers, but such perspectives are not without influence.

### **The persistence of competition**

China has assumed centre stage for a simple reason. Its policies furnish tomorrow's rulers in Beijing with a repository of coercive levers. These would, in the event of a conflict, render India vulnerable to commercial, diplomatic, and perhaps military pressure on the most sensitive points of the country.<sup>70</sup>

Many see these fears as overblown. The preponderance of China's rapid military buildup and attendant diplomatic moves are, after all, unambiguously directed eastwards to Taiwan and the looming Sixth Fleet of the US Navy.<sup>71</sup> China's embryonic maritime infrastructure, over which India frets, is a response to the former's own vulnerabilities to US capabilities: 62 per cent of its own exports are seaborne, and 90 per cent of its oil travels through the Indian Ocean, where the Malacca Straits constitute a severe choke point.<sup>72</sup> Protecting these flows from disruption is critical to Chinese growth and with it, regime legitimacy.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, the sea-denial, anti-access naval posture cultivated by the PLA Navy over the years is aimed at suppressing any US intervention across the Straits.<sup>74</sup> (Some scholars caveat this by arguing that the navy intends to turn south, rather than east into the Pacific<sup>75</sup>). Iain Johnston observes that 'on the Chinese side,

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<sup>68</sup> Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, *India and the Indian ocean: an essay on the influence of sea power on Indian history* (G. Allen & Unwin, 1945), 84. I am grateful to Walter Ladwig for pointing me to this reference.

<sup>69</sup> Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy*, 90, 133.

<sup>70</sup> For a concise summary of this perspective, see Pant, "China tightens the screws on India," 39.

<sup>71</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Search for Military Power," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 125-141.

<sup>72</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "China's pearl in Pakistan's water," *Asia Times Online*, March 4, 2005, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/GC04Df06.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/GC04Df06.html).

<sup>73</sup> Minxin Pei, "Will the Chinese Communist Party Survive the Crisis? How Beijing's Shrinking Economy May Threaten One-Party Rule," *Foreign Affairs* (March 12, 2009), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64862/minxin-pei/will-the-chinese-communist-party-survive-the-crisis>.

<sup>74</sup> Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, "Command of the Sea with Chinese Characteristics," *Orbis* 49, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 677-694; L. Goldstein and W. Murray, "Undersea Dragons: China's Maturing Submarine Force," *International Security* 28, no. 4 (2004): 161-196.

<sup>75</sup> Marc Lanteigne, "China's Maritime Security and the 'Malacca Dilemma'," *Asian Security* 4, no. 2 (2008): 143-161; James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "China's Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 3 (2008): 367-394. I am grateful to Walter Ladwig for noting this viewpoint.

internal circulation publications on PLA operational doctrine mostly seem to posit – without saying so directly – that the main military adversary the PLA needs to plan against is the United States. Much of China's recent acquisitions of military technology from Russia appear aimed at developing capabilities to deter or hinder U.S. military operations in defense of Taiwan'.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, the most recent strategic trends emerging from within Chinese military circles – particularly the stress on network-centric warfare and unconventional operations and tactics – are obviously configured to combat post-RMA American, much more than Indian, forces.<sup>77</sup>

And yet, China's policy cannot but reduce India's security any more than, say, American efforts at theater missile defense can avoid raising hackles in Moscow and Beijing.<sup>78</sup> That, of course, is the essence of a security dilemma and the essential context in which one ought to understand the border dispute.<sup>79</sup> Indian insecurity and Chinese responses are superimposed on a preexisting flashpoint that is characterized by what one recent study sees as an 'acutely strong sense of victimhood and its corollary, a sense of entitlement and recovery' on both sides.<sup>80</sup> Worse, this is conditioned by defeat in war (for India) and negligible interaction. Despite the explosion in trade and institutional links, A Pew survey from late 2010 found that 52 percent of Indians held an unfavorable opinion of China; 42 percent viewed China as a 'very serious threat' and another 28 percent as a 'somewhat serious threat'. 44 percent termed China an 'enemy', compared to only 23 percent in 2009, and 56 percent deemed China's growing economy 'bad for India'.<sup>81</sup> One overview of opinion polls, publications and official documents appropriately concludes that 'mutual perceptions are marked with ambivalence and distrust', in contrast to the governments' generally conciliatory rhetoric.<sup>82</sup>

### ANXIETY MULTIPLIERS

A handful of other recent geopolitical shifts darken the picture further.

First, India has developed no effective answer to the problem of state-sponsored and state-sanctioned terrorism prosecuted from behind Pakistan's hair-trigger

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<sup>76</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 52.

<sup>77</sup> James C. Mulvenon et al., *Chinese Responses to U.S. Military Transformation and Implications for the Department of Defense*, Product Page (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), chap. 7, <http://www.rc.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG340/>.

<sup>78</sup> Kier A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The rise of US nuclear primacy," *Foreign Affairs* (April 2006).

<sup>79</sup> Krishnan, *India's Security Dilemma vis-à-vis China: A Case of Optimum or Sub-Optimum Restraint?*, 75.

<sup>80</sup> Miller, "Re-collecting Empire."

<sup>81</sup> *Indians See Threat From Pakistan, Extremist Groups*, Pew Global Attitudes Project (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, n.d.), chap. 2, <http://pewglobal.org/2010/10/20/indians-see-threat-from-pakistan-extremist-groups/>.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Holslag, "Progress, Perceptions and Peace in the Sino-Indian Relationship," *East Asia* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 41-56. For a more sanguine view, see Andrew Shearer and Fergus Hanson, "Not unpopular in China," *Pragati: The Indian National Interest Review*, January 2010, <http://pragati.nationalinterest.in/2010/01/not-unpopular-in-china/>.

nuclear shield.<sup>83</sup> Diplomatic pressure from the United States is thwarted by the superpower's reliance on Islamabad. Pakistan is of value as a 'major non-NATO ally' because it serves as a staging post for Afghanistan. Pakistan's precarious internal stability also renders it 'too big to fail', meaning that it is deemed too vulnerable to coerce.<sup>84</sup>

Indian efforts to craft a flexible military response allowing for rapid thrusts under the nuclear threshold and before diplomacy can kick in – the 'Cold Start' doctrine – have floundered, both for reasons of institutional lethargy (efficient procurement is frequently crippled<sup>85</sup>) but also Pakistan's aggressive nuclear force posture, a stance that credibly threatens the first use of tactical nuclear weapons against even a limited Indian conventional attack.<sup>86</sup> India's impotence in the face of an adversary that continues to maintain extensive ties to terrorists and insurgents, including the growing Lashkar-e-Taiba, creates substantial domestic costs for any governmental inaction, imposed by a vibrant media and vocal middle class.<sup>87</sup> These pressures only fuel military concern over a two-front war in which India would be forced to adopt a South Asian *Schlieffen Plan* of sorts, for which it is woefully ill equipped.<sup>88</sup> Preparation for a two-front conflict is not a new development, but its invocation by officials indicates a sharper focus on its possibility.

Second, the entente with the United States has lost momentum since the high-points of the defense and nuclear agreements in 2005.<sup>89</sup> This began with the Obama administration's (quickly stifled, though not entirely jettisoned) willingness to intervene in what India regards as the bilateral Kashmir dispute.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> C. Christine Fair, *U.S.-Pakistan Relations: Assassination, Instability, and the Future of U.S. Policy*, 2008; Ashley J. Tellis, *Bad Company - Lashkar e-Tayyiba and the Growing Ambition of Islamist Militancy in Pakistan*, 2010, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=40330>; Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (University of Washington Press, 2005); Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: Crisis Behaviour and the Bomb*, Asian security studies (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 34-35, 44-47, 64-65, 101-102, 187, 285, 328.

<sup>85</sup> Anit Mukherjee, "The absent dialogue," *Seminar* (July 2009), [http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/599/599\\_anit\\_mukherjee.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2009/599/599_anit_mukherjee.htm); Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2010), 31-33.

<sup>86</sup> Narang, "Posturing for Peace?"; Walter C. Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (January 1, 2008): 158-190.

<sup>87</sup> On the growing pressure for a military response to a future crisis, see Daniel Seth Markey, *Terrorism and Indo-Pakistani Escalation*, CPA Contingency Planning Memorandum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, January 2010), [http://www.cfr.org/publication/21042/terrorist\\_attack\\_sparks\\_indopakistani\\_crisis.html?bread\\_crumbs=/bios/10682/daniel\\_markey](http://www.cfr.org/publication/21042/terrorist_attack_sparks_indopakistani_crisis.html?bread_crumbs=/bios/10682/daniel_markey).

<sup>88</sup> Ali Ahmed, "Ongoing Revision of Indian Army Doctrine," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, January 6, 2010, [http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/OngoingRevisionofIndianArmyDoctrine\\_aahmed\\_060110](http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/OngoingRevisionofIndianArmyDoctrine_aahmed_060110).

<sup>89</sup> S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Transformation of U.S.-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future," *Asian Survey* 47, no. 4 (August 2007): 642-656.

<sup>90</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "How Obama Can Get South Asia Right," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2009): 174-177.

The tension continued with a poorly phrased joint Sino-American communiqué in November 2009 that seemed to encourage a Chinese role in South Asia.<sup>91</sup> And it was inflamed further by anxiety that the United States has been apathetic towards Pakistan-backed efforts to evict India from Afghanistan, where it has staked major political capital in backing the Karzai regime, and where the recent emphasis on negotiation with the Taliban looks to empower Pakistani proxies and embolden affiliated anti-Indian militants.<sup>92</sup> What frightens New Delhi the most is the prospect of a G2, a Sino-American condominium that would dilute American efforts to balance with India and ease the way for hegemony 'with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>93</sup>

Third, this last concern is amplified by the sense that India and China are on divergent growth paths that will compound China's fifteen-year lead in double-digit growth and highlight the plethora of obstacles – governance, human capital, and internal security – that blight the former. China's dominance in low-end manufacturing is fading quickly. William Overholt observes that 'the production of socks and towels has moved over the last half century from South Carolina to Osaka to Seoul/Taipei to Java/Malaysia/Thailand to China and now on to Sri Lanka and Vietnam' such that 'China's manufacturing job losses have already been great'.<sup>94</sup> The Chinese economy also faces well-known problems of asset bubbles, nonperforming loans, excessive domestic savings, a glut of bad loans, declining exports and worsening dependency ratio.<sup>95</sup> But the Indian economy faces equivalent weaknesses, even if its comparatively lesser openness spared it the brunt of the global crisis. Each clash on the border, each squadron of aircraft shipped to Pakistan, and each announcement of a new Chinese port development interact with one another to calcify a security dilemma that confounds the largely cooperative rhetoric emanating from public officials. The challenge for India is to ensure that the steps it takes to moderate its vulnerabilities do not induce tit-for-tat responses that would herald a spiral in which India could only come off the worse.

## SOURCES OF STABILITY

One speculative account of India's likely trajectory concluded that 'a renewed military conflict with China over the contested Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh cannot be ruled out', concluding with the prediction that 'India is set for

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<sup>91</sup> Manoj Joshi, "Obama's Beijing kowtow," *Mail Today*, November 24, 2009, <http://mjoshi.blogspot.com/2009/11/obama-kowtows-in-beijing.html>.

<sup>92</sup> James Lamont, "India tells Putin of Afghan fears," *Financial Times*, March 12, 2010, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/837849b2-2da4-11df-a971-00144feabdc0,dwp\\_uuid=a6dfcf08-9c79-11da-8762-0000779e2340.html](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/837849b2-2da4-11df-a971-00144feabdc0,dwp_uuid=a6dfcf08-9c79-11da-8762-0000779e2340.html); James Lamont and David Pilling, "India renews vow to stay in Afghanistan," *Financial Times*, March 7, 2010, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/8457ffce-2a13-11df-b940-00144feabdc0.html>; Shashank Joshi, "India's Af-Pak Strategy," *RUSI Journal* 155, no. 1 (February 2010): 20-29.

<sup>93</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "Singh in Washington: Making the Case for India," *Time*, November 24, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1942511,00.html>.

<sup>94</sup> William H. Overholt, "China in the Global Financial Crisis: Rising Influence, Rising Challenges," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 2010): 25.

<sup>95</sup> Eswar S. Prasad, "Is the Chinese growth miracle built to last?," *China Economic Review* 20, no. 1 (March 2009): 60-79; *Growth and Sustainability in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and South Africa* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010), 60-79.

interesting times'.<sup>96</sup> Another writer suggests that 'China may act to preempt, or respond to, an announcement of the Dalai Lama's chosen successor in India – particularly in Tawang – by deploying the People's Liberation Army to occupy contested territory along the Sino-Indian border, as occurred in 1962, creating a risk of military conflict between the now nuclear-armed Asian giants'.<sup>97</sup> One quantitative study concludes that 'once in a militarized dispute China will tend to escalate to a relatively high level of force. With doctrinal changes in recent years that stress the offensive, even pre-emptive, use of military power, and in the absence of alternative forms of crisis management, [China's] preference may well be to use this force in a militarily offensive manner and further beyond China's "gates" than in past disputes, even if for politically "defensive" purposes'.<sup>98</sup> Dangerously possibilities therefore inhere in the rivalry.

### **A pragmatic rivalry**

While pessimists have a strong case, the first point to note is that India and China are not, as is increasingly suggested, in a Cold War.<sup>99</sup> Central to this judgment is that there is almost no trace of ideological rivalry. The Indo-Pakistan and US-Soviet conflicts threatened the very identity of each state. Pakistan, as a home for South Asia's Muslims, could not be but threatened by secular India's ability to encompass large numbers of that minority; nor could the latter recognize the legitimacy of Pakistan's founding without acknowledging some deficiency in its own political philosophy.<sup>100</sup>

Analogously, Lawrence Freedman argues that the ideational conflict of the Cold War meant that 'ideology allowed each [side] to present itself as defining the path of human progress and gave each side confidence in the power of transformational ideas ... there could be no resolution until one side was transformed into something closer to the other. This danger was mitigated by each side's conviction that because it was on the right side of history, it could afford to be patient'.<sup>101</sup> As such, in both instances concessions of expedience became more costly and negative images of the adversary quickly hardened over time.

The same cannot be said of the Sino-Indian pairing, where both countries have known for decades that, to paraphrase Deng, it does not matter what color the cat is as long as it catches mice. India continues to shed its statist economic

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<sup>96</sup> "The Indian Century," *Financial Times*, January 3, 2010, sec. Lex, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/3/be90dd4c-f88a-11de-beb8-00144feab49a,s01=1.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Dan Twining, "Could China and India go to war over Tibet?," *Foreign Policy*, [http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/03/10/could\\_china\\_and\\_india\\_go\\_to\\_war\\_over\\_tibet](http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/03/10/could_china_and_india_go_to_war_over_tibet) et.

<sup>98</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "China's Militarized Interstate Dispute Behaviour 1949-1992: A First Cut at the Data," *The China Quarterly* 153, no. 1 (1998): 29.

<sup>99</sup> See the references in note 4.

<sup>100</sup> Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 1-2; Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge South Asian studies 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>101</sup> Lawrence D. Freedman, "Frostbitten: Decoding the Cold War, 20 Years Later," *Foreign Affairs*, April 2010, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66033/lawrence-d-freedman/frostbitten?page=show>.



legacy and China is, in many ways, amongst the most open economy in Asia.<sup>102</sup> A pragmatic tradition of foreign policy in India means that its government is indifferent towards the autocratic nature of Party rule in Beijing. China feels little threatened by India's chaotic and often dysfunctional political system.<sup>103</sup> Nor does either country's foreign policy exhibit a proselytizing streak.<sup>104</sup> Their enmity being strategic, and not ideological, is all the more tractable. Of course, the absence of grand ideologies does not preclude the malign influence of nationalism.<sup>105</sup>

Non-ideology also means that alliance dynamics are suppler, since third parties can align so as to create a balance of power without prejudice to their own identities.<sup>106</sup> It would have been unthinkable for a representative British government of the 1950s to freely ally with the Soviet Union. This raised the incentives to use force if the balance of power appeared to be shifting adversely. Though Asian states are enmeshed in many historical grievances, there is no overwhelming reason to suppose that they will inevitably line up alongside or against either India or China (if at all). This is particularly so, given that the latter are neither strong enough to maintain meaningful clients – as the United States was with, say, Japan – nor willing to form rigid alliances of the sort that India, in particular, shunned during the Cold War. To be sure, China possess a slew of outstanding (and recently inflamed) maritime disputes with Asian states, and its authoritarian political structure renders its policymaking opaque and therefore unpredictable.<sup>107</sup> Long-term regional threat perception of China is therefore greater than that of India.<sup>108</sup> But as the former Indian Navy chief has acknowledged that India has attempted to forge 'South-Asian and Indian Ocean Region (IOR) identities through [institutions], but 'unfortunately these initiatives

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<sup>102</sup> For the claim about openness, see William H Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics* (New York: Cambridge University Press and RAND, 2008), 90-91; for the details of pragmatism in Chinese economic management, see Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 101-105.

<sup>103</sup> K. Subrahmanyam dissents from this, arguing instead that 'China feels India's pluralistic, secular democratic values pose a challenge to its single-party oligarchy, which emphasizes harmony over individual human rights ... [t]hat appears to explain the direct and indirect pressures applied on India' – but the evidence for this view is scarce. See Subrahmanyam, "Beyond cold war paradigms."

<sup>104</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2008), 105-6, 156.

<sup>105</sup> Stephen Van Evera, "Hypotheses on nationalism and war," *International Security* 18, no. 4 (1994): 5-39; Jack L Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Cornell studies in security affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 283.

<sup>106</sup> John M. Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," *International Security* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1994): 87-125. On the other hand, there is a body of work arguing that the ease of switching allegiance, under a highly fluid multipolar system, can make war more, not less likely. See, for example, Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, Cornell studies in security affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 338; Kenneth Neal Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 621.

<sup>107</sup> Evelyn Goh, "Southeast Asian perspectives on the China challenge," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007): 809.

<sup>108</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, "Coping with strategic uncertainty: the role of institutions and soft balancing in Southeast Asia's post-Cold War strategy," in *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power, and Efficiency*, ed. J.J. Suh, Peter J. Katzenstein, and Allen Carlson, Studies in Asian security (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004), 172-206.

have languished, perhaps, due to fear of Indian domination, which our diplomacy has failed to dispel'.<sup>109</sup>

But this is at least partly balanced by the superior allure of economic exchange with its booming economy – India is a far less open and accessible economy. Nonetheless, the relatively 'open' regional security structure generates strong pressures for each state to be wary of alienating regional actors or taking precipitous action. Perhaps what is most unlike a Cold War is that the relationship is so lopsided. William Overholt pointedly writes that 'China pays so little attention to India that the subject doesn't arise in most foreign-policy or security discussions'.<sup>110</sup> This is exaggerated, but it reflects the asymmetry in mutual attention.

### **Economic buffers**

Equally important, a Sino-Indian war remains exceedingly unlikely. This is for a host of economic, institutional, and military reasons. In the decade after 1997, bilateral trade rocketed from 1.6 to 38.7 billion dollars (roughly 50 per cent annually).<sup>111</sup> In 2008, it surpassed 50 billion dollars.<sup>112</sup> This makes China the third largest export market for India and its single largest source of imports. Jairam Ramesh, a prominent Indian politician and former commerce secretary, coined the portmanteau term 'Chindia' to denote the degree of interdependence between the two economies.<sup>113</sup> Trade is highly skewed in China's favor, and India is low on the list of China's top trading partners, but the trend is largely positive.<sup>114</sup>

Near double-digit growth rates are deemed in India and China to underpin (respectively) electoral success and political legitimacy, and even the most limited of conflicts would place these at risk.<sup>115</sup> Even with high private savings rates in both countries (and trade accounting for just a fifth of Indian output), their economies are vulnerable to disruption. One academic also observes that 'large numbers of young Indian students in China [and] also an ever increasing number of small-time, small-town business travelers have lately emerged as a new pro-China lobby in India'.<sup>116</sup> Of course, the historical record clearly

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<sup>109</sup> Arun Prakash, *Reviving an Indian Ocean Identity* (New Delhi: National Maritime Foundation, 2010).

<sup>110</sup> Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 198.

<sup>111</sup> Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," 812.

<sup>112</sup> Peter Wonacott, "Downturn Heightens China-India Tension on Trade," *Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123749113639187441.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Jairam Ramesh, *Making Sense of Chindia: Reflections on China and India* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2005).

<sup>114</sup> Swaran Singh, "China-India Bilateral Trade: strong fundamentals, bright future," *China Perspectives*, December 2005, <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/document2853.html>; John Whalley and Tanmaya Shekhar, *The Rapidly Deepening India-China Economic Relationship*, CESifo Working Paper Series (Munich: Center for Economic Studies and Ifo Institute for Economic Research, September 29, 2010), [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1684446](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1684446).

<sup>115</sup> Pei, "Will the Chinese Communist Party Survive the Crisis? How Beijing's Shrinking Economy May Threaten One-Party Rule."

<sup>116</sup> Swaran Singh, "India-China Relations: Perception, Problems, Potential," 86.

demonstrates that neither economic costs nor the political fallout of economic disruption are by themselves sufficient disincentives to armed force.<sup>117</sup>

### Deng's lesson

The more important cost is likely that which would be incurred to the Chinese doctrine of 'peaceful rise'.<sup>118</sup> One study notes that 'China is perhaps the most self-aware and self-conscious rising power in history, and its leaders have intensively studied the lessons of the past in order to learn how to avoid it. The peaceful-rise paradigm was a direct outcome of this study'.<sup>119</sup>

Beijing's three-decade-old foreign policy of reticence would suffer irreparable damage in the event of hostilities. This would ease Asian distrust of Japan, and encourage a more overt balancing coalition to form. Almost nothing could be more corrosive to the state's grand strategy.<sup>120</sup>

Unlike in 1962, the Sino-Indian relationship is also overlaid with a set of institutional ties. Many of these were motivated by recognition of the possibility of miscalculation. After a standoff in the Sumdorong Chu Valley in 1987 involving 200,000 troops, both governments resumed negotiations on a more urgent footing.<sup>121</sup> Since 2005, there have been thirteen rounds of talks between special representatives. In 2006, these produced a 'far-reaching agreement that 'virtually spelt out the contours of a border settlement on the basis of a mutual exchange of claims'.<sup>122</sup> India's representative in 2009, who is now the country's National Security Adviser, stated that that 'round of talks ... was the best that I have had in the nine rounds that I have held'.<sup>123</sup> In 2006, the Nathu La pass connecting Sikkim and Tibet opened for trade over four decades after it was sealed.<sup>124</sup>

It is also of note that the Indian government is far more reticent about the border than local officials or the press, and is cognizant that if China were truly upping the ante, there is a great deal more that the latter could do. In 2009, the year in

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<sup>117</sup> Katherine Barbieri, *The Liberal Illusion: Does Trade Promote Peace?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). For an alternative view, see the nuanced Erik Gartzke, Quan Li, and Charles Boehmer, "Investing in the Peace: Economic Interdependence and International Conflict," *International Organization* 55, no. 02 (2001): 391-438.

<sup>118</sup> Bonnie S Glaser and Evan S Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise?'," *The China Quarterly* 190, no. 1 (2007): 291-310; Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's new diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (December 2003): 22; Kerry Brown, "China: between global responsibilities and internal transitions," in *America and a Changed World: A Question of Leadership* (London: Chatham House, 2010), 149.

<sup>119</sup> Krishnan, *India's Security Dilemma vis-à-vis China: A Case of Optimum or Sub-Optimum Restraint?*, 65.

<sup>120</sup> Glaser and Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy-Making in China."

<sup>121</sup> John W. Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 340-343.

<sup>122</sup> Manoj Joshi, "Narayanan's firing is a good time to ring in change," *Mail Today*, March 13, 2010, <http://mjoshi.blogspot.com/2010/01/narayanans-firing-is-good-time-to-ring.html>.

<sup>123</sup> Karan Thapar, "Interview with National Security Adviser MK Narayanan," *IBN Live*, September 20, 2009, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/devils-advocate-india-doesnt-have-china-complex-nsa/101823-3-p2.html>.

<sup>124</sup> "Historic India-China link opens," *BBC News*, July 6, 2006, sec. South Asia, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/5150682.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/5150682.stm).

which the border caught much public attention, a hotline was established between the Indian and Chinese premiers. This, along with high-level military exchanges and joint war games, somewhat insulates the dispute from misunderstandings or misperception, lowering the prospect of a crisis that might escalate.<sup>125</sup> Jonathan Holslag has written that 'both sides have made progress to allow the border zone to look less like a battlefield' and 'in the Eastern Sector, border meetings have become routine and less tense'.<sup>126</sup> It is an imperative for both governments to continue to develop this infrastructure of détente. It is equally important to use it intensively – in a well-known Indo-Pakistani crisis in the late 1980s, communications channels were either unused or manipulated, with near-disastrous consequences.<sup>127</sup>

Even though India perceives its nuclear capabilities against China to be still embryonic, the mutual possession of such weapons precludes anything other than a clash circumscribed in time, space, and scale.<sup>128</sup> Audience costs on both sides have only risen in recent decades, creating powerful and credible signs of resolve that would deter the initiation of force to capture disputed territory outright. That constraint that has only tightened for the Indian government after feeble responses to major terrorist attacks in 2002 and 2008, and Beijing surely knows it.<sup>129</sup>

Above all, the most likely theater of operations is not amenable to rapid or simple offensive operations.<sup>130</sup> Although China enjoys a superior position in many ways, holding higher and less punishing ground, and supported with more extensive and reliable lines of communications to the rear in both sectors, the balance is radically different to that which prevailed in 1962.<sup>131</sup> To be sure,

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<sup>125</sup> "India and China launch war games," *BBC News*, December 20, 2007, sec. South Asia, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/7153179.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7153179.stm); "India-China aerial war games in 2012: IAF chief," *Sify News*, February 22, 2010, <http://sify.com/news/India-China-aerial-war-games-in-2012-IAF-chief-news-National-kcwrOdbcejg.html>; Sandeep Dikshit, "India, China to set up hotline," *The Hindu*, August 9, 2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/2009/08/09/stories/2009080957300100.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," 817.

<sup>127</sup> Bajpai et al., *Brasstacks and Beyond*, 27, 38.

<sup>128</sup> Scott Douglas Sagan and Kenneth Neal Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2003); Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, Cornell studies in security affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Sumit Ganguly, "Nuclear Stability in South Asia," *International Security* 33, no. 2 (October 1, 2008): 45-70; S. Paul Kapur, "Revisionist Ambitions, Conventional Capabilities, and Nuclear Instability: Why Nuclear South Asia is Not Like Cold War Europe," in *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, ed. Scott Douglas Sagan (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Security Studies, 2009); Dinshaw Mistry, "Tempering Optimism about Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia," *Security Studies* 18, no. 1 (2009): 148.

<sup>129</sup> The argument that Indian risk-aversion was responsible for behavior in 2002 and 2008, and that the same factor will therefore constrain future responses, is partial at best. For evidence that India's behavior was equally conditioned by contingent non-readiness of the army and American pressure respectively, see Alex Stolar, *To The Brink: Indian Decision-Making and the 2001-2002 Standoff* (Washington DC: Stimson Center, March 2008), 13; Manoj Joshi, "We lack the military that can deter terrorism," *Mail Today*, November 26, 2009, <http://mjoshi.blogspot.com/2009/12/we-lack-military-that-can-deter.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Ashley J Tellis, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture: Between Recessed Deterrent and Ready Arsenal* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), 136-139.

<sup>131</sup> Vijay Sakhuja, "Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance," *China Brief, The Jamestown Foundation* 9, no. 18 (September 10, 2009),

regular 'incursions' emphasize the mobility of Chinese forces at high altitudes. The 13<sup>th</sup> Group Army – directed at Tibet and the border with Myanmar – 'has developed into a modern rapid reaction force with enhanced logistical capacity, mobile artillery, air defense, communication and intelligence, special forces and intensive training in warfare under exceptional conditions, such as high altitude combat'.<sup>132</sup>

This, and the associated 'extensive network of roads, railheads, forward airfields, pipelines and logistic hubs', contrasts sharply with India's own lethargic preparations.<sup>133</sup> These gathered pace only after 2005. Indian forces continue to maintain a firepower-reliant defensive strategy that is hampered by a long-standing lack of light artillery, inadequate logistics, limited airlift capacity, and a diversion of resources to worsening domestic insurgencies.<sup>134</sup> Road density on the Indian side of the disputed territories is amongst the lowest in the country, a legacy of a policy that deemed roads to be potential conduits of an invading force. But despite these weaknesses, the costs of anything beyond a skirmish have risen enormously. Whereas air power played no role in 1962, any major clash would likely find potent Indian Air Force assets involved in ground support and air-denial operations from a series of upgraded air bases stretching from Arunachal Pradesh, to Assam, to West Bengal.<sup>135</sup> As the military balance equilibrates, deterrence stability ought to rise accordingly.

## IMPLICATIONS AND TRAJECTORIES

The Sino-Indian relationship comprises many moving parts. The likelihood of armed coexistence slipping into armed conflict or, conversely, that coexistence growing less armed and more cooperative, depends on a series of parameters.

First, Chinese policy is partly a function of developments within Tibet.<sup>136</sup> The strategist Raja Mohan argues that one of 'the iron laws of Sino-Indian relations' is that 'when there is relative tranquility in Tibet, India and China have reasonably good relations', and 'when Sino-Tibetan tensions rise, India's relationship with China heads south'.<sup>137</sup> India unequivocally recognizes Tibet's status as Chinese territory and places tight restrictions on the political activities of the Dalai Lama. The toleration of his visit to Tawang in 2009 came only after it was deemed that China's posturing on Arunachal Pradesh had spiked.

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[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35469&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=255e0ccfe7](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35469&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=25&cHash=255e0ccfe7); Krishnan, *India's Security Dilemma vis-à-vis China: A Case of Optimum or Sub-Optimum Restraint?*, 3. For details of 1962, see Daniel P. Marston; Chandar S. Sundaram and Daniel P. Marston, eds., *A Military History of India and South Asia: From the East India Company to the Nuclear Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), chap. 11.

<sup>132</sup> Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," 819.

<sup>133</sup> Sakhuja, "Military Buildup Across the Himalayas: A Shaky Balance."

<sup>134</sup> Cohen and Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming*, 68-75.

<sup>135</sup> *India's Security Dilemma vis-à-vis China: A Case of Optimum or Sub-Optimum Restraint?*, 48-50.

<sup>136</sup> We should be wary of extrapolating this claim to broader Chinese behavior. One quantitative study finds that 'there is no relationship between domestic unrest and China's use of force externally'. See Johnston, "China's Militarized Interstate Dispute Behaviour 1949?," 18.

<sup>137</sup> C. Raja Mohan, "India's Tibet ambiguity," *Indian Express*, November 27, 2008, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/India-s-Tibet-ambiguity/391206>.

India faces a painful choice between its support for the government-in-exile on the one hand, and going to extreme lengths to assuage Chinese apprehension. *In extremis*, this might entail 'some move by India to curb the Tibetan émigrés – possibly by dissolving the parliament-in-exile'.<sup>138</sup> This is certainly unacceptable to any Indian government. A middle ground, wherein India preserves the option to 'unleash' dissident forces in a time of crisis, is only superficially attractive.<sup>139</sup> Its use would likely prompt an impossible clash and do little to substantively weaken China's long-term grip over Tibet. India's fulsome reaction to flawed elections in Afghanistan and Iran, and its sensitivity to the Myanmar junta, demonstrate that its foreign policy is more than able to operate on firmly realist principles.<sup>140</sup>

It is not clear whether it is truly within India's means to prompt China to abandon its claim to Tawang, but India stands to gain the most from finding a settlement within the bargaining range. It remains an eminent possibility, though, that the fortunes of the borderlands – where China sees its reputation and integrity at stake – will be hostages to the status of Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet, in ways that neither India nor the United States can hope to control. What is important is divesting the dispute of symbolic value as much as is possible. This requires more coordinated Indian public diplomacy to correct the plethora of inaccurate and sensationalist media reports. It was only in the 1980s – after perceived Indian intransigence over an east-west territorial swap – that Tawang became a sticking point for China. Just how much of China's stance is tactical, to force Indian concessions in the more-valued west, will only be revealed through dialogue.<sup>141</sup> Particularly for India, progressing in that dialogue, and securing the constitutional deliberation that would be required for any settlement, requires a smoother handling of perceptions and sentiment at home, and a downplaying of Aksai Chin.

Second, the security dilemma is an uneven one. 'China is still perceived more suspiciously than the other way around'.<sup>142</sup> This is hardly surprising in light of the economic, political and military imbalance. The Indo-US rapprochement that began in 2005 and effectively legitimized India's nuclear arsenal was an important step in assuaging India's claim to be recognized as a peer of China rather than Pakistan, but, as demonstrated above, Indo-US ties have deteriorated under the Obama administration. This has not only pushed India towards Russia, both sharing major concerns about the trajectory of NATO's strategy in Afghanistan, but has also reactivated the Indian strategic establishment's

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<sup>138</sup> Raghavan, "Resolving the Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute."

<sup>139</sup> A more hawkish Indian policy on Tibet is advocated in Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy*, 101-111; Karnad, *India's Nuclear Policy*, 144.

<sup>140</sup> Jan Cartwright, "India's Regional and International Support for Democracy: Rhetoric or Reality?," *Asian Survey* 49, no. 3 (June 2009): 403-428.

<sup>141</sup> Raghavan, "Resolving the Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute."

<sup>142</sup> Jonathan Holslag, *China and India: Prospects for Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 815.

longstanding distrust of US intentions and perception of Washington as an unreliable partner.<sup>143</sup>

Extensive arms sales continue to lubricate the relationship, and India likely welcomed the short-term diplomatic fallout in 2010 of the US weapons sales to Taiwan and China's intensified maritime dispute with Japan. But Washington continues to place the Sino-Indian dyad at the inadvertent periphery of its Pakistan and Iran policies, running roughshod over India's interests for short-term gains in Afghanistan and tactically, but largely unsuccessfully, courting Delhi when the occasion demands.<sup>144</sup> It might be argued that stability in Kabul and containment in Tehran are the more pressing aims for US diplomacy, but this is myopic. It underestimates both the degree to which India will play an influential role in key present and future domains of US policy (as facilitator but also, it should not be forgotten, spoiler) and the implications of a Sino-Indian conflagration. What is at stake is not territory at the cusp of the Tibetan Plateau, but the strategic balance in Asia.

'America's military penchant towards the South Asian juggernaut', it has been argued, 'makes China very uncomfortable', generating 'strategic apprehension'.<sup>145</sup> This misunderstands the dynamic. It is China that has increased uncertainty on the border, even if inadvertently, whereas India has not vocally raised its claim to Aksai Chin. That is in spite of both an extant parliamentary resolution that demands the whole territory and piqued public opinion. As on its border with Pakistan, India appears the status quo power. It is also India that bears the bulk of apprehension. American reassurance – carefully calibrated – could pave the way for greater calm on the border and the temporary trust necessary for a settlement.<sup>146</sup>

Third, the most likely trajectory of Sino-Indian relations remains the perpetuation of armed coexistence. Recurrent crises – whether on the border or, as with the reported forced surfacing of an Indian submarine, at sea – will be managed through intensive dialogue and ample issue linkage, so as to emphasize the costs of employing force. The merits of this approach should not be underestimated: unlike Pakistan, neither side has in the recent period resorted to the use of non-state groups for subversive purposes. The last armed clash was nearly a quarter century ago. Each side's nuclear posture credibly declares no first use, and the maturation of India's nuclear triad will further dampen India's fears. Though imbalanced, Sino-Indian trade is growing rapidly. Unlike the regimes in Tehran or Islamabad, both governments remain pragmatic in style

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<sup>143</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, *The United States and India 3.0: Cave! Hic Dragones*, Policy Brief (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2009), <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=24058>.

<sup>144</sup> Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "The National Interest," *The National Interest Online*, March 16, 2010, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=23056>.

<sup>145</sup> Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," 836.

<sup>146</sup> Evan A. Feigenbaum, "India's Rise, America's Interest: the fate of the US-Indian partnership," *Foreign Affairs* (April 2010), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/65995/evan-a-feigenbaum/indias-rise-americas-interest>. China fiercely opposed the Indo-US nuclear deal. It is a matter of contention whether Sino-Indian relations since 2005 were adversely affected by the Indo-US rapprochement.

and developmental in their focus.<sup>147</sup> Areas of mutual concern – stability in Afghanistan, freedom of the seas, a diminishment of violent Islamist ideologies in Asia, and climate change – lie dormant as fruitful grounds for incremental cooperation.<sup>148</sup> Presently, this remains dulled by the considerable weight of mutual suspicion. As Robert Kaplan warns, ‘if Americans do not come to grasp India’s age-old, highly unstable geopolitics, especially as it concerns Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, they will badly mishandle the relationship’.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Admiral Raja Menon and Rajiv Kumar, *The Long View from Delhi: To Define the Indian Grand Strategy for Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2010), 1.

<sup>148</sup> E.g. N. Gopal Raj, “India-China cooperation vital to save environment: report,” *The Hindu* (Thiruvananthapuram, March 19, 2010), <http://beta.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/article257659.ece>.

<sup>149</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *South Asia's Geography of Conflict* (Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security, August 2010), 3.