

INDIA FOUNDATION JOURNAL



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India Foundation Journal

Vol. VIII
Issue No.4

July-August 2020

Editor
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Publisher
India Foundation
New Delhi

E-mail
journal@indiafoundation.in

Website
www.indiafoundation.in

for private circulation only

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India Foundation is an independent research centre focussed on the issues, challenges and opportunities of the Indian polity. The Foundation believes in understanding contemporary India and its global context through the civilizational lens of a society on the forward move. Based on the principles of independence, objectivity and academic rigour, the Foundation aims at increasing awareness and advocating its views on issues of both national and international importance.

With a team of dedicated professionals based at its office in New Delhi, the Foundation works with partners and associates both in India and overseas to further its stated objectives.

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The India Foundation Journal, India Foundation's flagship publication, has been in circulation since 2013. The journal is led by an Editorial Board of eminent scholars and leaders from various spheres of Indian public life. The bi-monthly journal covers a wide range of issues pertinent to the national interest, mainly focusing on international relations, national security, legal and constitutional issues and other issues of social, religious and political significance. Over the past few years, the journal has cultivated an expansive readership creating awareness on issues impacting the Indian society and has contributed towards policy formulation. The journal seeks articles from scholars with the intent of creating a significant body of knowledge with a nationalist perspective and establish a recognised forum for debates involving academicians and policymakers.

Future Contours of the India-China Relationship

Maj. Gen. Dhruv C. Katoch*, SM, VSM

The brutal assault by Chinese troops on Indian soldiers on the night of 15-16 June 2020 is an inflexion point in the relationship between the two countries with long term implications. Military actions carried out by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) may be tactical and localised, but they are orchestrated at the political level and are designed to deliver a message which has strategic ramifications. It is not by accident but by design that a series of border violations took place in Eastern Ladakh and in Sikkim in the month of May.¹ That Nepal also put up claims at this time for a stretch of Indian territory that was clearly not in dispute also points at a possible Chinese hand, though the Nepalese context has been driven by local political considerations.

What could be the cause of Chinese belligerence? There is an opinion currently being expressed within the strategic community of India that Chinese actions are a result of internal dissidence, so an external threat environment is being created to keep the country united, or perhaps to enable the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to continue its vice-like grip on the country and to perpetuate one-party rule. This may not be wholly untrue. China has not just opened up a front with India, but also with Japan and Taiwan, and with some of the ASEAN countries over claims in the South China Sea. With Japan, China has a dispute over the Senkaku Islands. China also claims sovereignty over Taiwan, a position which the

Taiwanese government does not agree with. As of now, it has a trade dispute with the US, which has been ongoing for the last two years. So, are Chinese actions in opening up multiple fronts at the same time, a bid to establish China as the sole competitor to the United States? Is China throwing a gauntlet to the US and to the world? This possibility cannot be ignored.

In February, the Chinese Air Force (PLAAF) flew fighter jets and bombers around Taiwan as part of what it claimed to be an exercise to test "air-ground assault and fire support drills to further refine and test their multi-service joint combat capabilities." The PLA's air intrusions continued in March and April as well.² Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence has stated that in the month of June, Chinese military planes had crossed over the outer reaches of Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ), eight times.³ In April, a naval flotilla of five warships, led by China's aircraft carrier Liaoning, sailed through the Miyako Strait between Japan and Taiwan,⁴ apparently signaling Chinese naval might in the region. And in the South China Sea, where China has laid claim, through its 9 dash line, to all of the waters therein, a Chinese vessel hit a Vietnamese boat near the Paracel Islands in April and captured its eight crew members along with two boats which came to its rescue.⁵ The Chinese lay claim to the Spratly Islands that are also claimed by Taiwan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Brunei and have established military and industrial outposts on the artificial islands that

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they have constructed in these disputed waters. Increasing unilateral actions by China indicates a disturbing trend which needs detailed analysis.

Post the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world, an ever-increasing clamour is gaining ground to make China accountable for the spread of the virus, as the Chinese government suppressed data about the origin and spread of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan, the capital city of the Hubei province of China. The pandemic has impacted on the Chinese economy too, adversely affecting the livelihood of millions of workers. This has been further compounded by deteriorating relations between the United States and China, which has both economic and strategic implications. Chinese claims to its unilateral nine-dash line in the South China Sea and its claims over territories like the Senkaku Island are being resisted as this impinges on free and open navigation on the seas. Towards this end, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD, also called QUAD), an informal strategic forum between the US, Japan, Australia and India, is viewed with concern by China as it increases Chinese vulnerability along the sea lanes of communication where a major part of China's energy needs passes through the narrow Malacca Strait. Chinese aggressive behaviour is thus not merely to create an external threat to suppress internal dissension but has other dimensions too.

In China's strategic calculation, it posits that India is exploiting Chinese vulnerability and leveraging China's weakness to make territorial gains in the disputed region. China claims the Line of Actual Control (LAC) on the basis of the positions held on 7 November 1959, whereas India

claims the LAC based on the positions held on 8 September 1962.⁶ China has since then built robust infrastructure with a network of roads coming up to the forward areas. The Indian response was muted, with hardly a road being built in the difficult mountainous region. This asymmetry has been consistently exploited by China. India's attempts to bridge this gap since 2014 has made China uncomfortable, especially the construction of an all-weather road from Darbuk to Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO), the 255-km long Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie (DSDBO) road. Lying at altitudes ranging between 13,000 to 16,000 feet the road took almost two decades to construct, but its completion has great strategic significance as the Karakoram Pass is barely 15 kilometres to the Northwest of DBO and is connected by a road. China has constructed the G219 Highway, running East to West, and connecting Xinjiang via Tibet. The G219 Highway passes through India's Aksai Chin, which was illegally occupied by China in the 1950s. From the Karakoram Pass, the G219 Highway is just over 100 km to the North, and so, the completion of the DSDBO by India is viewed by China as a potential threat to the G219 and thereby to Chinese control over its restive Xinjiang region.

Aggressive moves by China in Eastern Ladakh could perhaps be tactical manoeuvres to gain positions of advantage to dominate the DSDBO road. This, of course, begs the question as to why China should seek to make some tactical gains which would antagonise India and are thus a strategically unwise decision, especially at a time when China is facing multiple challenges across the world. But China believes it has to stand up to

India, whatever the cost.⁷ China does not seek clarity on the LAC, as the view from Beijing is that the two sides do not share the same historical records or perspectives and thus attempts to clarify the LAC will only result in more discord. The Chinese believe that a settlement of the issue can only be a political one,⁸ but they are in no hurry to do that either as ambiguity on the LAC has given China the leverage to continue advancing their claims, based on the ‘salami-slicing’ tactics they have refined over the years.

India’s complete integration of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), through the abrogation of the operative provisions of Article 370 and the splitting of the state into two union territories—the Union Territory of Ladakh (without a legislature) and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (with a legislature) in August 2019 also came as a rude shock to both Pakistan and China. Pakistan created terrorist groups such as the Jaish-E-Mohamed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Hizbul Mujahidin (HuM) on its soil and continues to nurture them as strategic assets and as instruments of its foreign policy to create terror and havoc within Kashmir and in other parts of India. However, with Article 370 becoming inoperative, many linkages through which Pakistan’s ISI operated within India stand broken, thus considerably degrading the potential of these terror groups to create unrest within Kashmir. This has left Pakistan extremely worried and flustered. In addition, statements emanating from the Indian political leadership that India will wrest back Gilgit-Baltistan and Mirpur Muzaffarabad from Pakistan’s illegal control has come as a further shock to Pakistan as far from regaining the Kashmir Valley,

they now fear losing their illegally occupied territories. China too is concerned as it has the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—an over 60 billion dollar project running through Gilgit-Baltistan which would be in jeopardy if India wrests back that area. China is also concerned about claims made by Indian leaders to wrest back all territories of the erstwhile state of J&K which includes the Aksai Chin. That, of course, would cut China’s Xinjiang province as the G219 Highway passes through Aksai Chin. This too has perhaps emboldened China to seek positions in Eastern Ladakh which could dominate the Indian road axis leading on to the Karakoram pass.

China also feels it is in its interest to keep India bogged down in South Asia and thus undermine its global potential. What China seeks from India is neutrality in the US-China strategic competition. India demands a permanent settlement of the border, which perhaps could have as a first step, the demarcation of the LAC. However, in China’s conception, a permanent settlement of the border would be irreversible, but would not bind India to a neutral stance when Chinese interests are ranged against the US. China would hence not relinquish the leverage it has, for a strategic gain which is fungible.⁹ We can thus expect tensions to simmer between India and China in the years to come.

In such a scenario, what are India’s options? As India seeks to find its rightful place in the world, to include a seat at the high table, it cannot subordinate its interests to Chinese concerns. China, on the other hand, would do all that it can to keep India tied down to the backwaters of South Asia. In its quest for global dominance, it would not like to see a fellow competitor within Asia and

so would continue to use its proxies such as Pakistan to keep India embroiled in low level-conflict on its western borders, while China keeps India engaged on the LAC. The default condition in the India-China relationship will thus remain a mix of wariness and suspicion at one end to subdued hostility at the other. This is what has to be managed, without getting into a full-scale conflict which will benefit neither country at this time.

For India, it is important to get its act together and use all the instruments of state power to keep China in check, whilst also addressing the constant needling and pinpricks emanating from Pakistan. The present crisis, which is still ongoing in Eastern Ladakh may spill over to other sectors in Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. India will have to handle each challenge with firmness of resolve as was displayed in Doklam. The nation's armed forces must thus be mentally prepared to ward off any threats that may come from land, sea or air and must be deployed accordingly.

On the diplomatic and political front, it is perhaps time to revisit some of the legacy policies in relation to China. There is a need to speak out against China's human rights violations against the people of Hong Kong and the Uyghur of East Turkestan (Xinjiang). India also needs to revisit its stance on Taiwan and build a more robust relationship with that country. India's policy on Tibet also needs to be tweaked. China should not get away with the idea that it can promote dissent within India and not face the consequences of such action. China's use of psychological operations as part of its 'Three Warfares Strategy,' encompassing psychological warfare, public opinion warfare and legal warfare also needs to be countered with

a well-structured perception management campaign, which should also target the Chinese population. In addition, India needs to further bolster its partnerships with like-minded countries for a regional security architecture and organisations like the QUAD need to be strengthened to ensure free navigation on the high seas.

Chinese attempts to capture vital segments of the Indian market also need to be countered with appropriate legislation as well as with sensitising the masses on the pitfalls of using Chinese goods. The key sectors of concern are telecommunications and power, where no Chinese entry should be permitted on national security concerns. Such policies need to be announced upfront, leaving no ambiguity of interpretation, either within India or abroad. Alongside, India must make a determined push in future technologies through well-funded research projects, especially in Artificial Intelligence and chip manufacturing capability. The private sector also has to be co-opted in a big way to exploit the talent India has in multiple fields. This would give the necessary impetus for technological advancement, but a suitable environment would have to be created for the same, through the framing of legislation which is compatible with the needs of the corporate sector.

In terms of security, the nation needs to gear up its defence manufacturing capability. The public sector needs a total overhaul, especially the defence ordnance factories (OF) and the Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU). The OF is being corporatised but the management has to be freed of control by non-specialists and rules have to be framed which gives management adequate leeway to perform in line with the private sector.

It is not talent that is in short supply but archaic rules and working procedures which inhibit both thought and growth. If India can produce a world-class space and missile programme, there is no reason why it cannot produce a state of the art fighter jets, warships, submarines, guns and tanks. India needs to be unshackled for its talent to flow and the private sector needs to come in, in a big way to support the defence effort.

Finally, on issues of national importance, the nation must stand up as one. Bipartisan support to vital national issues must be the norm, rather than the exception. But that perhaps is a big ask. There is equal danger from the spoilers within the system as there are from enemies outside. How this challenge is addressed will also determine the pace of India's rise as a leading power in the comity of nations.

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- 1 *A scuffle took place between Indian and Chinese troops at Naku La in Sikkim on 9 May 2020, an area with a settled border. Earlier, Chinese helicopter's violated Indian air-space on April 11 and April 20 at Sumdo on the border of Himachal Pradesh. In Eastern Ladakh, face-offs have taken place in May and June in the Depsang Plains, Pangong Tso and area of Hot Springs, in addition to what happened in the Galwan Valley.*
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Strategic Cultures: Pax Sinica versus Pax Indica

Mohan Malik*

Editor's Note: This article is reproduced from the book by the author, CHINA AND INDIA: GREAT POWER RIVALS (Lynne Rienner and Viva Books, 2011). Chinese belligerence on its border with India and indeed at the borders with all its other neighbours is a recurring feature in Chinese history, which arises from a worldview that places China at the centre of the world. This article is extremely relevant today, as it was when it was written nearly a decade ago, to understand the Chinese behaviour and policies toward India.

As ancient civilisations, China and India coexisted in peace and harmony for millennia. As postcolonial modern nation-states, however, with the exception of a very short period of bonhomie in the early 1950s, relations between the two Asian giants have been marked by conflict, containment, mutual suspicion, distrust, and rivalry. Just as the Indian sub-continental plate has a tendency to constantly rub and push against the Eurasian tectonic plate, causing friction and volatility in the entire Himalayan mountain range, India's bilateral relationship with China also remains volatile and friction- and tension-ridden. Most observers of China-India relations believe that factors such as the border dispute, the Cold War alignments, power asymmetry, mutual distrust, and more recently, nuclear and resource security issues are the major causes of tortuous and uneasy relations between the two Asian giants. I maintain, however, that there is a fundamental clash of interests between China and India that is rooted in their strategic cultures, history, geo-economics, and

geopolitics. The biggest obstacle to Sino-Indian amity is that both countries aspire to the same things at the same time on the same continental landmass and its adjoining waters.¹

To understand the roles China and India want to play on the international stage in the twenty-first century, we first need to return to history to gain an understanding of their roles and relationship several millennia ago. Both China and India have gone through regular periods of decline and resurgence. In China's case the period of decline lasted for nearly two centuries, while in India's case, it lasted for a millennium. Much like China in eastern Asia, modern India has inherited, and recognises, a long historical and cultural tradition of Indic civilisation in southern Asia. Therefore, it is important to consider the influences of history and culture as well as the physical facts of geography and demography upon the Chinese and Indian governments' views of the world and of their own roles in the international system.

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Strategic Culture

The way a country's interests are conceptualised, defined, and defended is influenced by its unique historical and cultural experiences.² Strategic culture consists of widely shared beliefs—including worldviews, traditions, attitudes, symbols, myths, self-image, and identity—related to a nation's self-representation and its "proper" role in world politics. Political and military elites socialised in different cultural contexts may behave in different ways and make different choices, even when placed in similar situations. For example, as a result of "beliefs" about "historic role," "self-image," and "identity," there is a powerful elite consensus in both China and India that as the two oldest civilisations and once-great powers which were subjected to centuries of European domination, they must acquire the *full* spectrum of economic, technological, and military (conventional, nuclear, information, and space) capabilities in order to be dominant regionally and influential globally. What eludes the Western understanding of Asia is the sense of national destiny that drives China and India's ambitions. Many maintain that there was no "India" or "China" before the twentieth century. Whether we can speak of an India or a China in the past or not, the fact is that China and India's strategic cultures are a function of historical experiences and perceptions of their appropriate roles in the world. Strategic culture is not a trivial variable in the description or explanation of strategic behaviour. There is a degree of continuity in pre-modern strategic cultures of China and India into the modern age. It is the lack of understanding of Asian

history and strategic cultures before the arrival of Europeans that has left many observers confused and perplexed as to what India is up to. Many analysts opine that India behaves as if it were the successor to the British Raj. While true, this does not take into account the fact that India (like China) had also existed both as an ancient civilisation and as an empire (albeit, for much shorter periods than China) in southern Asia for centuries before it became a British colony. India's traditional historical and cultural ties with Central and Southeast Asia *do* influence Indian perceptions of, and more importantly, its ambitions for, its future role in Asia. It was this lack of understanding of India's strategic culture that led Therese Delpech to wonder why it is "poor and weak India," not rich Japan that is challenging China's role in the post-Cold War Asia.³

Before discussing the history of China-India relations and their strategic cultures, it is useful to point out that this approach does not assume that strategic culture is the sole determinant of decisions in national security policy, but that it is an important determinant. The future has a past but the future does not necessarily resemble the past. Also, this approach does not imply that domestic political and ideological variables or structural factors (such as relative power capabilities, alliance patterns, and external threats) do not explain Chinese or Indian foreign policy behaviour. Finally, it does not follow that strategic culture is so unchanging and rigid that it is insusceptible to change over time in the face of conflicting reality and experience. This approach, however, does assume that strategic culture is powerful in influencing national roles,

capabilities, interests, and ambitions. Alastair Johnston's study of Chinese strategic culture suggests that strategic culture is a key variable in the explanation of China's strategic behaviour. There is, at least in the Chinese case, "a long-term, deeply rooted, persistent, and consistent set of assumptions about the strategic environment and about the best means of dealing with it."⁴ And George Tanham's study of India's strategic culture shows that this is true of India as well.⁵

From Civilisations to Nation-States

China and India are two of the world's oldest continuing civilisations, each with the quality of resilience that has enabled it to survive and prosper through the ages and against all odds. In contrast, several other ancient civilisations either disappeared or were subsumed by others. During the past 3,000 years, every one of the Asian countries—some situated on the continental landmass, others being islands off the mainland Asia—has at some stage been directly influenced by one or both of these two great civilisations. Much like China in eastern Asia, modern India has inherited, and recognises, a long historical and cultural tradition of Indic civilisation in southern Asia. As the future originates in the impulses of the past, it is appropriate to consider some of the influences which that history and culture, and the physical facts of geography and demography may have upon the Chinese and Indian governments' worldviews and their roles in the international system. The burden of history indeed weighs very heavily on China and India. Observers of China and India generally agree that the discourse of

civilisation is critical for the construction of Chinese and Indian identities as modern nation-states. Much like China, during the feudal age, India was divided into many states often at war with one another. These states maintained diplomatic relations with each other as if they were foreign countries. Both have a long, rich strategic tradition: both China's *Sun Zi Bingfa* (Sun Tzu's treatise on *The Art of War*) and Kautilya's *Arthshastra* in India (a treatise on war, diplomacy, statecraft, and empire) were written over 2000 years ago.

If China and India had coexisted peacefully for over 2,000 years, it was mainly because they were distant neighbours. The mighty barrier of the Himalayas and Tibet separated the two countries and made political contacts few and far between. In the cultural sphere, it was mostly a one way street—from India to China. From India, Hindu and Buddhist religious and cultural influence spread to China (and Korea and Japan) around the second century CE. Chinese scholars were sent to Indian universities at Nalanda and Taxila. Buddhism enriched and transformed Chinese thought, science, medicine, literature, and fine arts. Ancient India was the object of China's admiration, respect and awe.⁶ A seventh-century Chinese commentary on India described it as a "Middle Kingdom":

Lying in the south of the snow mountain (Himalayas) is the Central State (*Zhong guo* in Chinese or *Madhyadesa* in Sanskrit). Her land is plain, her weather temperate regardless of winter or summer. Trees and flowers grow exuberantly all year round. The land is never visited by flowing frost. How can a peripheral state (like China) be comparable to her!⁷

During this period in history, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kandahar (in Afghanistan) to Kamrup (Assam), India was one civilisational entity.⁸ The Hindu Kush mountain ranges in the northwest and Himalayas in the north that acted as the northern frontiers—Indian civilisation’s Great Wall—constituted the “sacred geographical limits of the Indian nation.” B. K. Sarkar, in his stimulating work *Chinese Religion through Hindu Eyes*, wrote of the “Indianization of Confucianism” and the “Indianization of China” from the seventh to the tenth centuries.⁹ Liang Jizhao told Nobel laureate, Rabindranath Tagore, in the 1920s: “India and China are like twin brothers. Before most of the civilised races became active, we two brothers had already begun to study the great problems which concern the whole of mankind ... India was ahead of us and we, the little brother, followed behind.”¹⁰ The Chinese image of India was not just as a Buddhist paradise (*xi tian*) but also as a source of scientific learning.¹¹ In the 1930s, Dr. Hu Shih, the leader of the Chinese intellectual renaissance, said: “When China was brought face to face with India, China was overwhelmed, dazzled, and dumbfounded by the vast output of the religious zeal and genius of the Indian nation. China acknowledged its defeat and was completely conquered.”¹² On the whole, in the realm of ideas, the impact of India on China has been much greater than vice versa.

The texture of the Chinese-Indian relationship underwent a major transformation between the seventh and the fifteenth centuries. The religious exchanges of the first millennium (the years 0 to 1000) gave way to mostly commercial exchanges

in the first half of the second millennium (1100 to 1500). As historian Tansen Sen points out: “While in the first millennium the sacred Buddhist sites in India were the pivot of Sino-Indian interactions, the lucrative markets of China and the expanding intercontinental commerce emerged as the main stimuli for the bilateral relations since the early eleventh century. In other words, the relations between India and China were realigned from Buddhist-dominated to trade-centered exchanges.”¹³ Furthermore, whereas the process of Buddhist religious-cultural interaction between China and India occurred overland in the first millennium, “communications between the two during the Song-Yuan-early Ming period took place primarily through the maritime routes” in the second millennium.¹⁴ Apparently, the closure of the silk route (following the wave of Islamic invasions throughout Central Asia) and of the overland route via Tibet (by a powerful and expansionist Tibetan kingdom) to India and the West stimulated China’s maritime trade and commerce with India through seaborne trade. In addition, Christopher Wake identifies three other factors that contributed to significant growth in overseas maritime trade:

- The southward shift in the demographic and economic centre of gravity of China underway at the beginning of the second millennium;
- the Song dynasty’s decision to increase government revenue through import duties; and
- significant advances made in shipbuilding technology.¹⁵

A combination of these geopolitical,

technological, and economic developments saw Chinese ships sailing all the way to Indian ports on the Malabar coast by the end of the eleventh century. It was at the ports of Kolam (Quilon), Cochin, Calicut, and Coromandel, which emerged as major transit points in the Indian Ocean region, that goods from Africa, Arabia, and other places were transferred onto Chinese vessels for shipment to Quanzhou.¹⁶ The second millennium also saw India faced with internal disunity, internecine warfare, and repeated Islamic invasions. The ancient Indic civilisation on the subcontinent lay in ruins.¹⁷ China, in sharp contrast, emerged as a stronger military, political, and economic power under the Song, Mongol (Yuan), Ming, and Manchu (Qing) rulers.

The Chinese and Indian civilisations had also existed in close juxtaposition in Southeast Asia, greatly modifying the indigenous cultures of the region. These two great strains of culture flowed side by side and intermingled in many areas, but did not fuse in any major way. In fact, they represented two distinct attitudes of mind and conflicting worldviews and exerted very little influence on one another. One extended in the direction of the material and practical, the other in the direction of the philosophical and intangible. To the Chinese mind, “this-worldly,” practical, materialistic, and pragmatic—the commonsense of Confucius still had a far greater appeal than the metaphysical “other-worldliness” of Buddhism. The influence of the former is evident in Vietnam, which came under Sinic cultural influence, whereas the latter is more dominant in Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, which still trace

their Buddhist-Hindu religious roots directly to the Indic civilisation.

Many scholars have long argued that neither Han nor Hindu rulers were territorially expansionist. Both seemingly lacked “martial” imperialist instincts. Both China and India were ravaged by foreign nomadic tribes that established “foreign” dynasties. In China’s case, most threats to Chinese security certainly originated from the interior. Some China-watchers contend that “China’s real cultural achievements historically had little to do with militarism and imperialism and that Chinese civilisation reached its qualitative peaks during the relatively peaceful and culture-oriented (albeit small) Song and Ming Chinas.” They claim that the Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties and Nationalist China represented the real China, unencumbered as they were by the martial spirit or messianic zeal of the Mongols, Manchus (Qing), and Communists.¹⁸ This line of argument maintains that it was primarily non-Han dynasties—the Mongols and the Manchus—who conquered China and expanded traditional China’s territories into central, south, southeast, and northeast Asia. Until the Chinese and Russian Empires met in Central Asia in the nineteenth century and China created the province of Xinjiang (New Territories), China could not subdue the nomadic armies on the Central Asian steppe. As Alastair Johnston pointed out: “So persistent was the nomadic threat that during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) a strategic culture developed regarding relations with the Mongols, in which Beijing eschewed all thought of diplomacy and limited victories, seeking total annihilation of its nomadic adversaries.”¹⁹ In other words, it was

Han contact with martial Mongols that brought about the culture of violence and martial spirit and whetted the Chinese appetite for territorial expansion. Likewise, Indian historians stress that most of their expansion in their extended neighbourhood (whether in Central Asia or Southeast Asia) was mostly in the mercantile, cultural, and religious realms and was by and large peaceful.²⁰ They point out that Hindu India's empire building—with the exception of southern India's Chola dynasty, the Srivijaya Kingdom on the Malay peninsula, and the Kamboja empire—was undertaken mostly by Moghuls from Central Asia and the British from Europe.²¹

Many historians, however, criticise the view that “empire building in both China and India was undertaken mostly by foreign rulers” as historically and factually inaccurate. Based on new archaeological research and historical sources, Nicola Di Cosmo's *Ancient China and its Enemies* questions the traditional Sino-centric interpretation of Chinese history as a contest between barbarous “martial” north (Hsiung-nu nomads) and the civilised south (Shang and Chou China).²² Recent scholarship has shown that the Han dynasty clearly had an expansionist agenda when dealing with the Central and Inner Asians and the same was true with the Tang dynasty, not only in Central Asia but also in Tibet and Korea.²³ Even Nationalist China under Chiang Kai-shek was plenty martial, Chiang himself saying he saw fascism as a model for China. He did not have the opportunity to be expansionist because the Japanese had him on the defensive.²⁴ The expansion of Han Chinese rule to Manchuria,

Mongolia, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan over the last 2,000 years has been largely achieved through conquest, absorption, assimilation, and large-scale migration.²⁵

Similarly, major territorial expansion in Southwest Asia, Kashmir, and Central Asia was undertaken during the reigns of Emperors Ashoka and Kanishka in India. At its greatest extent, the Mauryan Empire (322–185 BCE) stretched to the north along the natural boundaries of the Himalayas and to the east stretching into what is now Assam. From the tenth through the thirteenth centuries, several of the Pallava and Chola kings assembled large navies and armies to overthrow neighbouring kingdoms and to undertake punitive attacks on the states in the Bay of Bengal region. They also took to the sea to conquer parts of what are now Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia. George Tanham observes: “In what was really a battle over the trade between China and India and Europe, the Cholas were quite successful in both naval and land engagements and briefly ruled [dominated] portions of Southeast Asia.”²⁶ Suffice it to say, nearly all kingdoms and empires behaved in a more or less expansionist manner whenever strength allowed and an opportunity arose.

No people are more history-conscious than the Chinese. The Chinese leadership nowadays pays rich tribute to the outward-looking policies of the Ming dynasty during the fifteenth century when Admiral Zheng He's (also spelt as Cheng Ho) voyages of exploration in 1405–1433 led to the exchange of knowledge and goods as far afield as the east coast of Africa, thereby suggesting that today's commercial engagement is in the same

spirit of trade and openness, and that China's extension of its maritime power into Southeast and South Asia and the Indian Ocean region should not be feared or resisted. A growing body of evidence, however, questions the portrayal of Admiral Zheng He's seven voyages to Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and Africa as benign missions of peace and friendship.²⁷ Many scholars argue that Zheng He's expeditions 600 years ago, which followed lesser ones by the Mongol Yuan dynasty, began a southward Chinese expansion that was driven as much by commercial as political hegemony motives.²⁸ This southward expansion, which paralleled China's territorial expansion in the north and west, had huge consequences not only for the geopolitics of the region but also for its demographics, the region having hitherto been more subject to Indian than Chinese cultural influence.

On land this included the annexation of Yunnan, a partially successful attempt to control Vietnam and interference in the affairs of Burma. By sea it took the form of expeditions to achieve "regime change" among the small political entities of Southeast Asia, including detaching the trading states of Sumatra from allegiance to the Java-based Majapahit empire. The military forces of Zheng He and others overthrew rulers as far away as Sri Lanka who would not submit to Ming hegemony, installing puppets in their place ... Ming policy expanded China's geographical and tributary claims. These are found in its claims to the whole of the South China Sea, used to justify its seizure of islands from Vietnam, and Ming-era assumptions of the superiority of Chinese civilization over its Malay and Indian counterparts.²⁹

Admiral Zheng He's naval expeditions to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean in the fifteenth century not only demonstrated the might of the Chinese empire but also ensured Chinese imperial domination of the trade routes linking the Middle East and East Asia. The Yuan and Ming rulers forced many Southeast Asian kingdoms to pay tribute to China's emperors as a precondition for preferential trade treatment, thereby achieving a *Pax Sinica* throughout the known world. Southeast Asian states that regularly sent tributes included Annam (North Vietnam), Siam (Thailand), Sulu (South Philippines), Burma, and Laos. Sinologist Geoff Wade argues that these military missions had strategic aims, and thus amounted to "what might be called maritime proto-colonialism: that is, they were engaged in that early form of maritime colonialism by which a dominant maritime power took control (either through force or the threat thereof) of the main port-polities along the major East-West maritime trade network, as well as the seas between, thereby gaining economic and political benefits."³⁰ Given this historical backdrop, it is not surprising that China's re-emergence as a great power is causing regional unease and discomfort in East Asia where the memories of the tributary state system or "the Middle Kingdom syndrome" have not completely dimmed.

Maritime Asia (Southern China, Annam, Srivijaya, Sumatra, Siam, and Southern India) in the first half of the second millennium was bound by economic interdependence and seaborne trade and saw the establishment of preferential trade-cum-tributary arrangements and trading diasporas at major ports in Southeast and South Asia. Despite

trade and tributary arrangements, this region was neither peaceful nor conflict-free. For example, despite strong religious and cultural ties, the desire to control lucrative maritime trade between China and the Indian Ocean region is said to have caused the Cholas to launch punitive raids on the Srivijayan ports on the Malay peninsula.³¹ Does the conduct of Ming rulers' maritime strategy or the linkage of tribute with trade have any bearing upon the state of China-Southeast Asia and China-India relations in the third millennium? The Ming voyages are now an inextricable part of Chinese nationalist lore—and its populist claim to the Indian Ocean. Imperial hubris or nostalgia for a return to the past can have unpredictable consequences. As noted earlier, trade and maritime exchanges between China and the kingdoms along the southern Indian coast saw dramatic growth in the first half of the second millennium. While promoting trade and maritime linkages, the Yuan and Ming court officials also became involved in dispute resolution involving feuding kingdoms in Calicut, Cochin, and Bengal. Even the mighty kingdom of Vijayanagar in southern India sent an embassy to China in 1374 to serve as a warning to the Tughluq Sultanate of Delhi against any further Muslim intrusions into the Hindu South. (This was not the first time an Indian ruler had sent an embassy to China to seek support. The Indian diplomatic mission of 720 specifically mentioned the threat from the Tibetans and Muslim Arabs as the main reason for seeking help from the Tang Court. Apparently, this was so because northern India had fallen to the Muslim invaders. In contrast, China's Tang dynasty had successfully defeated and repulsed the Islamic armies.) Tansen

Sen's study on Chinese maritime networks to southern Asia outlines the politico-strategic nature of China-India interactions during the first half of the second millennium:

For the Ming court, the expeditions of Zheng He, the tributary missions that ensued, the granting of titles to or writing imperial proclamations for the local rulers, and the involvement in the political disputes, all formed an integral part of its ideology to underscore the leadership of the Ming emperor in the known world. Moreover, the Ming court through these actions wanted to demonstrate its supremacy over previous Chinese dynasties in regard to controlling and civilizing foreign states. The activities of the Ming emissaries in the Indian subcontinent suggest that the region was considered an integral part of the "Great Unified [Empire]" doctrine ... The Yuan court, under Qubilai Khan, explored the Indian coast to establish tributary, commercial, and strategic relationship as part of his imperialistic endeavor. The early Ming rulers, on the other hand, tried to use their superior naval force to bring the Indian kingdoms within the folds of the rhetorical Chinese world order.³²

In short, the period between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries in the second millennium witnessed a major transformation in India's relations with China. The predominantly commercial exchanges of the second millennium brought about a shift in Chinese perceptions of India, which were markedly different from Chinese views of India in the first millennium when religion and culture ruled the roost. Direct trade between China's Quanzhou and India's west coast ceased sometime around the middle of the fifteenth century

due to a shift in regional trade patterns and internal political upheavals. It may not be an oversimplification to argue that if the first millennium was the age of *Pax Indica*, the second millennium was the age of *Pax Sinica*. In the first millennium (during the years 0 to 1000), India was the world's pre-eminent economic power, closely followed by China. In the first half of the second millennium (1100 to 1500), China overtook India as the world's largest economy, relegating India to second place. This is corroborated in economic historian Angus Maddison's pioneering study, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, which shows that India was the world's largest economy with a 32.9 percent share of the worldwide GDP in the first century and 28.9 percent in the eleventh century. During the years 1500–1600 as well, India was second only to China in terms of world GDP share and remained among the top until as late as the seventeenth century.³³ Even as recently as 1820, China and India accounted for 49 percent of the world economy.

Until the fifteenth century, China and India were still far ahead of Europe in almost all aspects of life, and the flow of manufactured goods and technological know-how was mostly from East to West. Before the age of European colonisation, China accounted for about 33 percent of the world's manufactured goods and India for about 25 percent. China under the Song (960–1267) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties was the world's greatest power. Under the Guptas (320–950 CE) and Moghuls (1526–1857), India's economic, military, and cultural prowess was the object of envy. Then in a complete reversal of fortune, the

mighty Asian civilisations suddenly declined and disintegrated, and were eventually conquered by European powers. While India's experience of threats from European maritime powers occurred in the seventeenth century, China's came only in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, by increasing its hold over India, the British East India Company managed to squeeze most of its European rivals out of the trade with China. Initially, the company's chief line of trade was selling raw cotton from India and importing silk from China. In the early nineteenth century, it began to engage in opium smuggling in a big way, growing the opium in India and selling it in China, culminating in the two Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars in 1840 and 1857, which broke the back of the Manchu China.³⁴ In the last three centuries of the second millennium, first India and then China were reduced to mere economic appendages of the industrialised West. After a hiatus of nearly 300 years, both are once again on their growth trajectories, and the economic contest between China and India has resumed once again in the third millennium.

Hierarchy: Tribute and the Doctrine of *Mandala* (“Concentric Circles”)

Whereas modern nation-states need clearly *defined* and *demarkated boundaries*, pre-modern states, empires and kingdoms existed within *temporary* and *undefined frontiers*. Just as in any traditional hierarchical society, rulers and the ruled have assigned places; in international society, the big and powerful and small and weak have their assigned places. Imperial China had regulated its relations with other states by a tribute system,

under which foreign rulers were treated like vassals of the emperor. When China was weak, tribute ceased; when strong, it was resumed. A tributary relationship did not necessarily imply a Chinese military presence or direct administrative control. Strategically, the tributary system was essentially a defensive measure insofar as it created a zone of buffer states on the empire's periphery. It also helped identify potential allies in the event of a conflict against common adversaries. Economically, it was profitable because the tribute bearer would invariably receive from the benevolent emperor gifts worth more than the tribute given to the emperor. The Song Court's decision to link maritime trade to the tributary system was one of the key reasons for the increased competition among foreign traders who outdid each other in paying obeisance to China's rulers in order to win preferential trade concessions.³⁵ The skilful use of economic carrots in return for an acceptance of suzerain or subordinate status seems to be at work today in China's liberal trade arrangements with countries that strictly abide by the "One China" policy and toe Beijing's line on global issues.

The tributary system was based on power asymmetry or an institutionalised inequality in relations between the Middle Kingdom and the tributaries, which served to reinforce the belief in the superiority of Chinese civilisation amongst its neighbours. This power asymmetry was intrinsic to the stability of the Sino-centric tributary system for many centuries before the arrival of more advanced European powers in Asia.³⁶ Other empires in history have employed similar measures. While the Chinese nationalist view recollects the

Chinese sphere of influence in territories from the Russian far east across Southeast Asia and the Tibetan plateau into the Himalayas, the Indian nationalist worldview counts among India's tributaries peoples and states variously influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions and languages (Pali and Sanskrit) stretching from Afghanistan to Indonesia.³⁷ This hierarchical way of conceptualising foreign relations dominated Asian people's thinking at least until the late nineteenth century. So the Westphalian state system based on the concept of legal equality or state sovereignty distinguished itself not only from the old feudal system in Europe, but also from other forms of suzerainty that existed at that time in Asia—in China, India, and the Arab Islamic world.

The traditional Chinese concept of international relations was also based upon concentric circles from the imperial capital outwards through variously dependent states to the barbarians, which stands in sharp contrast to the theory of equal sovereign states developed by the West.³⁸ As Rafe de Crespigny notes: "The relationships may be described in an intimate style, as father and mother, elder and younger brother, or even lips and teeth, but there is a hierarchy, and the relationship may be confirmed by force. In this respect, natural Chinese interest in East and Southeast Asia is influenced not only by a sense of good order but also by expectations of control and guidance."³⁹ This theory of international relations based on concentric circles resembles the concept of *Mandala* as outlined in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* more than 2,000 years ago. Inter-state relations in Ancient India were of the most Machiavellian

character. Much as in Imperial China, the rightful fruits of victory in ancient India were tribute, homage, and subservience, but not annexation. The basic concept which governed the relations of one king with another was the doctrine of the “circles” (*Mandala*), which postulated that a king’s neighbour is his natural enemy, while the king beyond his neighbour is his natural ally. As noted Indologist A. L. Basham observed: “The working of this principle can be seen throughout the history of Hindu India in the temporary alliances of two kingdoms to accomplish the encirclement and destruction of the kingdoms between them.”⁴⁰ The Chinese dynasties had followed a similar policy of encircling and “attacking nearby neighbour and maintaining friendly relations with more distant kingdoms” (*yuan jiao jin gong*).

The Concept of Centrality: “The Middle Kingdom Syndrome”

Before the nineteenth century, “China can reasonably be considered to have been ‘more equal’ than the other countries of East Asia; in South Asia, the same applied to India under the Moghuls” (and much earlier, under the Guptas and Mauryas).⁴¹ When Chinese and Indian elites speak of restoring their country’s rightful place in the world, they give expression to a concept of “centrality” in Asia and the wider world. This concept reflects their perception that as the foundation of regional cultural patterns, their rightful place is at the apex of world hierarchy. The notion of Chinese supremacy is illustrated by the manner in which alien rulers once in power, including the Mongols and the Manchus, invariably

adopted Confucian culture and institutions.⁴² Both China and India, wrote Austin Coates, “share the same concept of their own centrality.”⁴³ Apparently, the diffusion of Chinese culture in East Asia and Indian religions and culture throughout Asia supports their perceptions of “centrality”. Since there was not much interaction between the two Asian centres of civilisations and power despite their proximity, each had developed, by and large, in its own isolation, with its own sphere of influence and worldview regarding its place in the wider world. Historically and as a civilisation, China in eastern Asia and India in southern Asia enjoyed supremacy, thereby reinforcing their notion of “centrality.” Coates further notes that:

“The concept of centrality is politically—in the widest sense of that word—the most fundamentally important fact about these two countries, since it is the basis of their entire outlook on life, toward themselves, toward their neighbors, toward other lands, toward the world, and toward the universe. *Without understanding and taking account of the concept of centrality, no harmonious and profitable economic and political relations with these two countries are possible....* Chinese and Indians, individually and en masse, think and speak from a position of absolute centrality.... Viewing the world and all human activity from this standpoint of centrality inevitably brings with it a certain sense of superiority.... *Where the Indian centrality is of the mind, the Chinese centrality is material and terrestrial*, personified in the Chinese race, and supremely embodied in former times by kings, later by emperors.... The truth is that each centrality has known of the other’s

existence for considerably more than two thousand years. Yet neither has ever realized that the other is a centrality similar to itself, with the same comprehensive, changeless, and absolute view of itself, the world, and the universe.... *The concept of centrality is itself responsible for the blindness China and India exhibit in regard to each other's nature.* The concept is enormous and noble, it is the roots and trunk of a great tree of civilization. Yet in a certain sense, it can be compared with pride, which similarly contains an unusual measure of blindness.... Whenever the concept is damaged, one may expect reactions similar to those of a man of excessive pride when the myth of his cleverness or power is exploded.”⁴⁴

Whenever China has been ascendant in its history, its emperors as well as discreetly assenting rulers of neighbouring small states have assumed the country to be a kind of “universal” centre. The small-state rulers were expected to and did offer tribute and homage. This notion of centrality, however, which lies at the heart of the concept of “Middle Kingdom” (*Zhong guo*) in China, was “damaged” severely as it came in contact with other non-Chinese civilisations. As Martin Jacques notes: “China lives in and with its past to such an extent that it is tormented by its failure during the late twentieth century to stay at the top of the international system.”⁴⁵ This largely explains the CCP’s obsession with “catching up with the West” or “leapfrogging” to emerge as Number One Power in the world (*Zhongguo di yi*) so as to restore China to its lost grandeur. Anyone who has lived in China and reads Chinese language sources is well aware of this great patriotic national obsession.⁴⁶ Its roots go back to the late nineteenth

century “Self-Strengthening Movement” (*ziligengshen*), to Mao’s “Great Leap Forward” in the late 1950s (which sought to displace Britain as the world’s largest steel producer but ended in a disastrous famine that took millions of lives), and to Deng Xiaoping’s “Four Modernisations” strategy outlined in 1978 (which finally succeeded in beating the West at its own game). As in the past, China’s re-emergence as the fulcrum of the world economy in the twenty-first century is meant to restore its traditional supremacy in the world.

A strong and powerful Imperial China, much like Czarist Russia, became expansionist in Inner Asia as an opportunity arose and strength allowed. This gradual westward expansion over the centuries extended Imperial China’s control over Tibet and parts of Central Asia (now Xinjiang). Modern China is, in fact, an “empire-state” masquerading as a nation-state. The People’s Republic of China’s present geographical limits reflects the frontiers established during the spectacular episode of eighteenth-century Qing (Manchu) expansionism, which were then hardened into fixed national boundaries (except outer Mongolia) following the imposition of the Westphalian nation-state system over Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership consciously conducts itself as the heir to China’s imperial legacy, often employing the symbolism and rhetoric of empire. From primary school textbooks to television historical dramas, the state-controlled information system has force-fed generations of Chinese on a diet of nationalist bluster and imperial China’s grandeur. The writing and rewriting of history from a nationalistic perspective to promote

national unity and regime legitimacy has been accorded the highest priority by China's rulers, both Nationalists and Communists. The Chinese are firm believers in the notion that those who have mastered the past control their present and chart their own futures along with those of others. In its diplomacy as well, Beijing places a very high value on "the history card" (often a revisionist interpretation of history) for achieving its foreign policy objectives, especially to extract territorial and diplomatic concessions. As Martin Jacques puts it: "Imperial Sinocentrism shapes and underpins modern Chinese nationalism."⁴⁷

It was only as a result of the extension of Imperial China's borders to Tibet and Xinjiang (a.k.a. Eastern Turkestan) that the modern nation-states of China and India came in close physical contact. Unlike Imperial China, however, India never developed a pro-active defence of its strategic frontiers. A case in point is the building of the 1,500 mile- long Great Wall by successive Chinese dynasties to keep out nomadic invaders from the north. Despite the fact that nearly all of India's invaders—Alexander of Macedonia, the Scythians, Mohammed of Ghori, Mahmud of Gaznavi, Tamurlane, Nadir Shah, Babur the Moghul—came down the same Khyber and Bolan mountain passes to loot, rape, and pillage every few years or so, no attempt was made to erect impenetrable defences (i.e., a Great Wall of India). Therein lay a key difference between the strategic cultures of China and India: the former's preference for clearly defined and protected hard borders versus the latter's acceptance of undefined and unprotected, soft frontiers.

In contrast with China, India also lacked central

authority and did not engage in the physical subjugation of neighbouring countries. As China moved south, some races vanished altogether, while others were subjected to a process of absorption and assimilation into the broader Chinese identity. As John Garver observes, "China's history has seen a process of gradual expansion in which more numerous, richer, and better-organised Han settlers have assimilated lesser non-Han peoples."⁴⁸ This process of expansion, assimilation, and pacification mainly via demographic penetration of nearby lands and buffer states accelerated in Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet during the twentieth century. Today the homelands of China's old conquerors, the Mongols and Manchus—"the barbarians from the north"—are both overwhelmingly Han. This Sinification process is now reportedly underway in northern Burma, Laos, Central Asia, and the Russian Far East. In India, on the other hand, no deliberate attempt could be made to change the demographic balance either in Kashmir or the northeastern states. Coates offers a philosophical explanation: "The Indian centrality is of the mind, [whereas] the Chinese centrality is material and terrestrial." The concept of India as a political entity was as hazy as ideas of what lay beyond its borders. India's capitulation to invaders has historically been ascribed to the fractious nature of its polity. That tradition holds true of India today. Unlike the Chinese, Indians are not known for thinking and acting strategically.⁴⁹ India's territorial boundaries shrank following the 1947 partition that broke up the civilisational unity of the subcontinent going back 2,000 years to the first Mauryan Empire. Soon thereafter, the occupation of Tibet in 1950 allowed

China to extend its reach and influence into a region where it had, in terms of culture and civilisation, previously exercised little or no influence in the past. Whereas India is non-status-quoist in terms of *status*, power and influence, China remains non-status-quoist in terms of *territory*, power and influence. It is well known that the idea of national sovereignty goes back to the sixteenth century Europe. However, the idea of maritime sovereignty is largely a mid-twentieth century American concoction that has now been seized upon by China and others to extend their maritime frontiers in the South China Sea. Beijing reportedly claims around 80 percent of the South China Sea as its “historic waters” and has now elevated it to “core interests” (along with Taiwan and Tibet).⁵⁰ The continued reinterpretation of history to advance contemporary political, territorial, and maritime claims coupled with the CCP’s ability to turn “nationalistic eruptions” on and off like a tap during moments of tension with the United States, Japan, India, and Vietnam makes it difficult for Beijing to reassure its neighbours that China’s peaceful rise does not require balancing or hedging strategies.

It was the task of conversion of the *undefined frontiers of ancient civilisations* into clearly *defined and demarcated boundaries of modern nation-states* that brought about the armed clashes in the late 1950s. China-India relations have been tense ever since a border dispute led to a full-scale war in 1962 and armed skirmishes in 1967 and 1987. Several rounds of talks held over more than a quarter of a century (since 1981) have failed to resolve the disputed claims. An unsettled border provides China the strategic leverage to keep India uncertain about its intentions and nervous about

its capabilities, while exposing India’s vulnerabilities and weaknesses and ensuring New Delhi’s “good behaviour” on issues of vital concern to China. More importantly, unless and until Beijing succeeds in totally pacifying and Sinicizing Tibet as it has Inner Mongolia, China is unlikely to give up the “bargaining chip” that an unsettled boundary vis-à-vis India provides it with.

Chinese strategic thinkers perceive the emerging multipolar world similar to that of the Warring States era (475–221 BC), which was characterised by power rivalries, conflicts, shifting alliances, and betrayals, with some states competing to become a hegemon and others forming alliances to prevent any state from attaining that dominant status. This outlook necessitates distrust of strong, powerful neighbours (e.g., India) and preference for small, weak, and subordinate or client states. John Garver in his *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* reaches the same conclusion:

China’s long-term security interests and the long-term growth of Chinese prominence in Asia would be best served by having more, smaller states rather than one larger state on China’s southern border. Thus, Chinese policy has sought to prevent the possibility of Indian domination or unification of the South Asian region. An Indian-led South Asian bloc would be far more dangerous (because it would be more powerful) if it pursued policies antithetical to Chinese interests.⁵¹

Historically, China sits as the equal of no one. The Middle Kingdom does not *see* others as equal.⁵² The Chinese refer to their nation as “*Tian-xia*,” or “all-under-heaven,” implying a belief in cultural superiority based on virtue (*de*).⁵³ It

reinforces belief in China's greatness and supposedly unique place in international relations. To imply equality with China is to offend the Chinese sense of what is "right." During a speech in the Parliament on November 25, 1959, India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru noted: "From fairly early in history, they [Chinese] have had a sense of greatness. They call themselves the 'Middle Kingdom,' and it seemed natural to them that other countries should pay tribute to them. Their thinking was that the rest of the world occupied a lower grade. That has made it difficult for us to understand the working of their mind, and what is more to the point, for them to understand the working of our mind."⁵⁴

Classic Chinese statecraft dictates that there is no such thing as friendly foreign powers. "All states are either hostile or subordinate."⁵⁵ Subordinate states (North Korea, Burma, Cambodia, Pakistan) are allies and dependents who need to be protected and provided with economic, diplomatic, and military support, whereas hostile states, who either do not kowtow to the Celestial Emperor or have close military ties with foreign powers (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, India, and Vietnam), are enemies who need to be subdued by involving them in troublesome embroilments and/or by "teaching them a lesson." Whether Imperial, Nationalist or Communist, China has long sought either to install buffer states or to cultivate friendly, and preferably pliant, regimes or tributary states along its periphery. As Austin Coates states:

The fact is that since 1949 [Beijing] has dictated a border policy identical with that which has been pursued at all times in the imperial past, whenever the country was in an internally strong

position.... Actually, it is a very old story. The aim of Chinese imperial policy (as of Communist policy) was that neighbour states must be respectful, obedient, and in areas immediately adjacent to the Chinese lands, preferably impotent [and] sufficiently weak.⁵⁶

Beijing's preference for friendly, pliant regimes all along the maritime chokepoints in the Indian Ocean sea lanes is not much different from the Ming Court's past attempts to dominate the maritime lanes by changing political regimes at various places (in Malacca, Sumatra, and Sri Lanka) so as to facilitate free trade and maritime commerce. Old attitudes remain well-entrenched. China's future power projection capabilities are likely to be influenced by ancient Chinese statecraft, in particular, the strategic tradition of punishing those who fail to pay tribute and show respect and deference to the Middle Kingdom. Apparently, politically subservient and compliant regimes on its borders add to Beijing's sense of security because "most Chinese strategists believe that China is more secure if other states are weaker and thus less secure."⁵⁷ A survey conducted in China in 2005 revealed that most interviewees thought that "a stronger China will try to restore its traditional vassal system." Once China emerges as an "unrivalled regional power and a major global actor, it will use its enhanced power to grant assistance and protection to 'the faithful countries,' in return for their alliance, obedience and inevitable submission and compliance."⁵⁸ It is true that all great powers (democratic or authoritarian) tend to behave in a similar hegemonic fashion once they reach the pinnacle of power. Nonetheless, China has a long historical track record of this behaviour.

Two sinologists have succinctly summed up Chinese attitudes toward interstate relations, war, and strategy, based as they are on Chinese strategic tradition:

“In Chinese eyes, the values of this cultural framework describe Chinese identity and reflect a self-perception of cultural superiority over China’s lesser neighbours. The Chinese not only want to restore China’s dominant role at the centre of Asia, but seek to establish their country as one of the major poles—second to none—in a multipolar world.... This conceptualisation of interstate relations based upon a hierarchical system with China at the top is ingrained in their cultural worldview. *Today, this sense of hierarchy is expressed in notions of comprehensive national power based on culture, economics and organisational power and military power...* The Chinese generally employ their military for limited purposes, usually to strengthen the credibility of Chinese power, shore up their status as the natural leader of Asia, test their opponent’s will and intentions opportunistically, or teach a political lesson. Forces are employed at a time and place of Beijing’s choosing, assuring surprise and overwhelming force. Moreover, *this strategy also reinforces the point that China’s interests cannot be ignored, and emphasises that China’s role in regional issues must be recognised as essential to their resolution. In this way, China assumes a dominant role in relation to its neighbours....* Although abjuring ‘hegemonic’ ambitions, Beijing’s growing power in the region raises fears among its neighbours that it will inevitably pursue hegemonic ambitions at their expense.”⁵⁹

Having said that, it is worth noting here that the much-talked-about “Middle Kingdom syndrome” is not essentially Sino-centric or unique to China alone. All great centers of civilization and great powers have at times displayed elements of the Middle Kingdom: that is, a belief in universalism, a civilising mission, and a sense of superiority. Even in the modern world, there is an element of the Middle Kingdom in the attitude of the United States. This was true of Britain in the age of *Pax Britannica*. Before the age of the national territorial state and international law, non-egalitarian inter-state relations were not uncommon. As one observer points out: “The world order of Rome, Christendom, India, and the various Islamic empires of West Asia all shared unequal interstate relations.... Even in the most modern period of international law, the categories of less than sovereign states and vassal states have been recognised.”⁶⁰

Fundamentally, the key point is that historically and civilisationally, while China was the “Middle Kingdom” of eastern Asia, India sees itself as the “Middle Kingdom” of southern Asia. Much like the Chinese, the Indians’ view of society as a hierarchy serves as a basis for their view of the world. India’s elite sees “a hierarchical layering of nations according to wealth and power,” and believes that “India should be in the top ranks of the world hierarchy—a Brahmin idea of the world.”⁶¹ Indian leaders since independence have believed that India was once a world power and therefore it *should* be the preeminent power in the South Asian/Indian Ocean region even though it lacks a clear strategy, determination, and many of the resources needed to achieve that objective in the future.

Furthermore, it is in China's and India's dealings in their immediate neighbourhoods that the patterns and perceptions of the past appear most obvious, and provide contradictions and conflicts for the present and future. Both China and India have sought to establish a sort of Monroe Doctrine in their regions with mixed degrees of success. Both claim that their attitude toward their neighbours is essentially benevolent while making it clear that they must not make policies or take actions, or allow other nations to take measures in their countries that would impinge on, respectively, Chinese or Indian interests and security. If they do so, China and India are willing to apply pressure in one fashion or another to bring these neighbouring states into line.⁶² Both are, however, unable to reassert their traditional suzerainty over their smaller neighbours in East and South Asia respectively, as any attempt to do so encounters resistance from regional and extra-regional powers.

Geopolitical Shifts

Clearly, China and India are as much "civilisation-states" as pre-modern "empire-states" and modern "nation-states." Their strategic cultures require both to regain the power and status their leaders consider appropriate to their countries' size, population, geographic position, and historical heritage. Their common desire to regain lost greatness has created grandiose ambitions, but geopolitical shifts, historical patterns, and contrasting perceptions have brought those ambitions into conflict. More importantly, the historical reference points for nationalist narratives in both capitals are different. The Indian nationalist narrative harks back to "the golden age" in the

first millennium—between the second and eighth centuries—when religious, linguistic, and other cultural influences emanating from the subcontinent had fostered a wide sphere of influence that "extended from the Himalayan Mountains in the north to the seas in the south, into Southeast Asia on the east, to Persia in the West, and into Central Asia in the northwest."⁶³ This was the period when "India found itself occupying a unique place in the Chinese world order: a foreign kingdom that was culturally and spiritually revered as equal to the Chinese civilisation."⁶⁴ In contrast, is the modern Chinese nationalist narrative, wherein China's traditional tributary system encompassed large parts of Inner and Central Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and parts of South Asia (Nepal, Kashmir, Bhutan, Sikkim, Bengal, and Burma) prior to "the century of humiliation." In Chinese dynastic histories, "India is presented as one of many far-away regions that occasionally sent tribute missions to China and, thereby, acknowledged her status as a vassal state."⁶⁵ Stated simply, while India's elite looks back in history to the first millennium, the mandarins in Beijing have their country's superior position in the second millennium on their minds when they deal with India.

Both countries are focusing on increasing comprehensive national strength on a solid economic-technological base. The domestic political and economic developmental processes of India and China have tended to reinforce the competitive aspects of their relationship. Both suffer from a siege mentality borne out of their elites' acute consciousness of the fissiparous tendencies that make their countries' present political unity so fragile. To a considerable extent,

this drive explains China's and India's national security policies and their competitive or conflictual relations with each other. Since India is one of the oldest civilisations and former world power, the Indian elite believes their country has as much, if not more, right to great power status as China. Since the days of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, independent India has entertained hopes of joint Sino-Indian leadership of Asia as a counter to Western influence, but the Chinese have shown no enthusiasm for sharing leadership of Asia with anyone, least of all India. For the main objective of China's Asia policy is to prevent the rise of a rival to challenge its status as the Asia-Pacific's sole "Middle Kingdom." As an old Chinese saying goes, "one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers." Checkmated in East Asia by three great powers—Russia, Japan, and the United States—Beijing has long seen South and Southeast Asia as its sphere of influence. Recognising that strategic rival India has the size, might, numbers, and, above all, the intention to match China, Beijing has long followed a "*hexiao, gongda*" policy in southern Asia: "supporting and uniting with small (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) to fight the big (India)." The "strategic space" in which India traditionally operated has become increasingly constricted due to Beijing's forays into Burma and the Indian Ocean region since the 1990s. From New Delhi's perspective, much of Beijing's penetration deep into the South Asian region in the second half of the twentieth century has been primarily at India's expense—a bitter pill to swallow as ancient India did not play second fiddle to China historically and civilisationally. This is one of the root causes of volatility and strain in the relationship.

If the past is a guide to the future, one can argue that the China-India rivalry has its roots in the desire of each for the restoration of its historic status and influence (which prevailed before the arrival of European powers in Asia) and China's determination (albeit, for reasons mostly of India's own making) to deny India a role on the world stage commensurate with its size, population, military capability, economic potential, and civilisational attributes.⁶⁶ When Indian observer Rakshat Puri lamented in the late 1990s the fact that a sound "appreciation, and knowledge about each other's histories, traditions and cultures do not at present seem to exist in the policy-making circles of either the Chinese or the Indians,"⁶⁷ he was, in fact, echoing Austin Coates' view that "neither has ever realised that the other is a centrality similar to itself.... The concept of centrality is itself responsible for the blindness China and India exhibit in regard to each other's nature." Puri's view that "real peace between China and India can come only when relations between them are founded on equality," laudable as it is, may however be unrealistic. The Chinese have a deeply hierarchical view of the world and insist that India's growth must be "conducive to the equilibrium of the current international order" (translation: India must not equal or surpass China).⁶⁸

There have been numerous occasions in history when China and India were simultaneously weak; there have been occasional moments of simultaneous cultural blossoming. But for more than half a millennium, Asia has not seen the two giants economically and militarily powerful and pursuing a policy of expansion at the same time. As Austin Coates pointed out: "This [expansion]

... is intrinsic to both in their relations with each other... Each essentially exerts pressure on the other, China because she simply *does*, India because she simply *must*... What would happen if both these civilisations were ever to become anything like equally powerful at the same time?”⁶⁹ Well, that time is now approaching fast, and it is likely to result in significant new geopolitical realignments. Both China after a “century of humiliation” and India after a millennium of decline are keen to assume the great power roles they believe to be their historical and civilisational right. Both want a new international status that is commensurate with their growing strength. Both remain suspicious of each other’s long-term agenda and intentions, and both see themselves as newly rising great Asian powers whose time has finally come. The rise of Han nationalism is matched by the rise of Hindu nationalism. As India combines its potential economic might with strategic might, its foreign policy is becoming increasingly assertive. This means that a resurgent India will face a rising China, which will ensure a conflict of interests between the two giants unless their power competition is managed carefully. It is not so much a clash of civilisations as a clash of the two “Middle Kingdoms” which had historically dominated in southern Asia and eastern Asia respectively—a clash of identical worldviews, similar aspirations, and interests. All the indications point to a geopolitical contest between China and India over domination of South, Southeast, and Central Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Just as Sino-Indian interactions invariably affected the intermediary kingdoms in Central and Southeast Asia in the first and second millennia, the state of Sino-Indian

relations will inevitably affect small and middle powers in the third millennium as well. The emergence of China and India as economic giants undoubtedly will throw a huge new weight onto the world’s geopolitical balance. The nature of the rivalry will be determined by how domestic political and economic developments in these two countries affect their power, their outlooks, and their foreign and security policies.

Future Tense

All great powers are shaped by their own histories, values, and experiences and behave in distinct ways. The burden of history weighs heavily on Chinese and Indian elites. A desire to regain the lost glory and status, a sense of superiority and the linkage between domestic and external security are common to both. For India, a fractious polity and the lack of strategic thinking continue to bedevil foreign policy-making. China confronts the historical problem of holding together a geographically large empire, as evident from the present government’s attempt to create the sense of a united Chinese nationality in the face of perceived threats of internal unrest and foreign aggression (*nei luan wai huan*). The old tradition of stratagem and deception in strategic policy remains in vogue. The preceding analysis of Chinese and Indian strategic traditions indicates that as the preeminent and pivotal power in southern Asia, India perceives itself much as China has traditionally perceived itself in relation to eastern Asia. As in the past, the strategic cultures of China and India continue to influence their bilateral relations and how each handles its growing power and relates to other nations.

There exists a sharp political and cultural chasm between the two civilisation-states. India embraces heterogeneity, accommodation, and pluralism. China worships homogeneity and uniformity. Its sense of superiority is based on a combination of cultural, political, and economic hubris. As China's power grows, a millennia-old sense of superiority will manifest itself in Chinese foreign policy behaviour as it seeks to impose its will and leave its imprint in different parts of the world. Their underlying power rivalry and their self-images as natural great powers and centres of civilisation and culture continue to drive them to support different countries and causes. Asia has never known both China and India growing strong simultaneously in such close proximity with overlapping spheres of influence. New economic prosperity and military strength is reawakening nationalist pride in India, which could bring about a clash with Chinese nationalism, if not handled

skillfully. The existence of two economically powerful nations will create new tensions as they both strive to stamp their authority on the region. In the short to medium term, their priority on domestic stability, economic development, and pragmatism in foreign policy would keep ambitions in check. It is possible that economically prosperous and militarily confident China and India will come to terms with each other eventually as their mutual containment policies start yielding diminishing returns, but this is unlikely to happen for a few decades. Since China and India have often shown an uncanny knack of being their own worst enemies, it is also possible that the two Asian Goliaths may not make it and instead break up into several independent states. After all, much of Chinese and Indian history is made up of long periods of internal disunity and turmoil when the centrifugal forces brought down even the most powerful empires.

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Tracing China's Policy towards the erstwhile state of Jammu & Kashmir

Namrata Hasija*

China's Kashmir policy is an interesting aspect of its foreign policy the trajectory of which can be traced right from 1947 to the recent turbulent times. China has had a special interest in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as through it lay the easiest route to Tibet. In later years it started specifically claiming Ladakh as part of its territory, calling it 'Little Tibet'.

One can classify China's Kashmir policy in several phases with one of being neutral in the 1950s, supporting Pakistan after 1962, and third of advocating peaceful settlement between India and Pakistan. However, if one close reads the Chinese leaders' statements and letters written even in the 1950s, their policy cannot be justified as neutral but is found to be deliberately ambiguous to be used in later years to advocate China's own claims in Ladakh and Aksai Chin. An official Chinese map published in 1954, still used in Chinese school textbooks, depicts territories it claims to have been taken by 'imperialist' powers and which China says it would 'recover'. Ladakh is a part of these territories along with Arunachal Pradesh and even the Andaman Islands. This is a clear indication of Chinese designs in the 1950s, which many analysts naively term as a 'neutral or pro-India' stance by Chinese.

China's position in 1947 was non-partisan as it was under the KMT rule and Dr Tsing, the

Chinese representative was the Chairman of the Security Council which prepared the draft¹ together with India and Pakistan. The draft proposal allowed Indian forces to remain in Kashmir and ordered Pakistani tribesmen to withdraw from Kashmir. The draft, however, was revised after the interference of US, UK and France. The regime in China with the Communists in helm after 1949 saw a further change in the dynamics.

The Indian government became the first non-communist country to recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC), even though Sardar Patel and C. Rajagopalachari wanted to wait and then take a call.² Nehru however, debated in the parliament in favour of recognising the new government in mainland China and also strongly supported its entry in the UN. Kashmir factor contributed majorly towards Nehru's policy towards China as India was looking for support in the international community. Nehru, in his letter to Mohan Sinha, Ambassador of India to Pakistan dated 20.09.1952 wrote that India is only threatened by Pakistan and he (himself) is not the least worried about China and he has also been advised that China could be a major support to India's stance on Kashmir in the coming years.³

This thought also contributed to the fact that India followed a policy of appeasement towards China after it annexed Tibet in 1951 and supported China's claim on Formosa. However, in return,

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India did not gain any support for Kashmir and received a major snub when a Chinese cultural delegation refused to visit Kashmir in 1951. The agenda of the delegation included a visit to Kashmir however, the Chinese refused to visit at the last minute after which Nehru expressed displeasure in a letter to his secretariat and wanted them to inform Kaul⁴ in Peking regarding the same.⁵

China, however, maintained total silence on the matter and in fact on the entire Kashmir issue other than a statement in Sri Lanka by Chou En-Lai stating that China and Sri Lanka hoped Kashmir issue could be resolved peacefully by India and Pakistan. The Chinese government continued to give only oral assurances regarding support to India which was highlighted in a note by India's External Affairs Minister to Indian Ambassador in Peking, RK Nehru in 1956 that Zhou En-Lai had said that people of Kashmir had expressed their will (Accession to India had been accepted by the people of Jammu and Kashmir)⁶.

After the 1962 war with India, China finally responded to Pakistan's offer to settle the occupied Kashmir's boundary, which it had initiated in 1959. Foreign Ministers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Chen Yi, respectively signed their boundary agreement on 3 March 1963 in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, in the presence of the Chairman of the People's Republic of China and Premier Zhou En-lai (The American, Journal of International Law, 1963). Pakistan recognised Chinese sovereignty over hundreds of square kilometres of land in Northern Kashmir and Ladakh (Sino-Pakistan Frontier Agreement and Sino-Pak Boundary Agreement of 1963 between the governments of Pakistan and China).

This deal between China and Pakistan paved the way to a new policy of Chinese government towards Jammu & Kashmir and China declared in the agreement that there was no document to prove that Chinese government ever acknowledged the entire Jammu & Kashmir region as part of India. This stand was published in an article in Peking Review on 25 February 1964 covering Chou En-Lai's visit to Pakistan where he said that his government never recognised the Indian stand on Kashmir. This was followed by a series of propaganda articles especially in Renmin Ribao, which was published in the Survey of the China Mainland Press in 1965. This document carries the most detailed Chinese position on Kashmir where it clearly supports Pakistan, calls for self-determination of Kashmiri people along with calling India an expansionist power, which had annexed Kashmir. In the same survey, statements of Chou En-lai and Chen Yi have been published supporting Pakistan for the "just support" to Kashmiri people.

The opening up of China in the 1980s and the visit of Rajiv Gandhi, which tried to normalise India-China relations, saw a new phase in China's stance on Jammu & Kashmir. However, its support for Pakistan did not change and China itself continued its claim on Ladakh as part of China, while the way of dealing with it changed. It followed Deng Xiaoping's statement that Kashmir issue is a bilateral issue left over from history between India and Pakistan and thus, is to be resolved bilaterally.⁷ Even though this remained Chinese official line, China consolidated its position in South Asia surrounding India by neighbours influenced by it and kept supporting Pakistan on all issues.

In February 1994, Chinese Foreign Minister

Qian Qichen visited Pakistan and described China-Pakistan relations as time-tested⁸ and “beneficial for the people of both the countries and for regional peace and stability.” In contrast, the Pakistani media sought to project that during the visit Qian had joined Pakistan in expressing concern “at the gross violation of human rights in Indian held Kashmir.” An official Pakistani statement⁹ pointedly asserted that he had described Indian media reports regarding the implications of troop removal from the Sino-Indian border as “played up” in order to give rise to apprehensions, and that “China would never let any such situation take place where India could have the benefit of the relaxation of tension against Pakistan.” At a press conference in Dhaka in February 1994, while on the second leg of his tour to Bangladesh, Qian responded to questions on the Kashmir issue and asserted that “China’s position on the issue remains unchanged and that India and Pakistan could settle the dispute left over by history through peaceful negotiations, taking into account the UN resolutions and the relevant agreements between the two countries.”

China’s position revealed a desire to overtly interfere in the affairs of J&K and coincided with the tacit agreement between Washington and Beijing to cooperate in a bid to jointly resolve contentious issues in South Asia, including Kashmir.

Beijing continued to exert pressure on international organisations such as the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, to accept its claims, which has resulted in these organisations ceasing to give financial assistance to development projects in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh or to even specifically mention Arunachal Pradesh or J&K in their reports. In addition to this, China

and Pakistan started joint exercises at the border and some sources claimed that up to 10,000 People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops were in Pakistan. In 2011, the Indian Army’s Chief of Army Staff, General V.K. Singh, referred to the presence of nearly 3,500 PLA personnel in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir¹⁰.

From August 2010, China designated the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir as ‘disputed’ and began to issue ‘stapled visas’ to residents of the state, aimed at downplaying the Indian citizenship and nationality of the passport holder. Subsequently, *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* (China Youth News), the influential high-circulation official mouthpiece of the Communist Youth League (CYL), published a lengthy article claiming that the Ladakh region “has been part of Tibet since ancient times” and that “Ladakh was under the jurisdiction of the central government of China’s Qing Dynasty until the 1830s.”

In August 2014, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi at a press conference in New Delhi reiterated Beijing’s stand in a carefully worded statement asserting that issuance of stapled visas was a “unilateral,” “flexible,” and a “goodwill gesture” by China. In other words, the status of Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir remains disputed within the Indian union¹¹.

In an article on Sino-Pak relationship, Indian Sinologist Jayadev Ranade wrote ‘by announcing the construction of several major civil and military infrastructure projects as part of the CPEC in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and the areas of Gilgit and Baltistan, China has accorded de facto ‘legitimacy’ to Pakistan’s illegal occupation of Kashmir, Gilgit and Baltistan as well as Pakistan’s

illegal cession in 1963 of the Shaksgam Valley in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) to China'. This coincides with other overt gestures of support to Pakistan; massive propaganda against India in 2017 after Doklam crisis; blocking India in NSG; making deep inroads and facilitating anti-India propaganda in Nepal; maritime expansion in Indo-Pacific region; direct threat to India during the Maldives crisis and joint military exercise of Pakistan and China along the border.

The trigger to Kashmir issue came when 44 Indian personnel were killed with impunity in a terrorist attack on Pulwama, which was claimed by the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorist group that operates in Pakistan. China denounced the terrorist attack against India, with the Chinese ambassador also sharing a minute of silence for those killed at the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. However, it must be noted that on March 14, China again blocked a United Nations Security Council Committee from declaring JeM leader Masood Azhar a terrorist. This clearly demonstrated that though superficially China condemned the attack in front of the global community, it continues to strongly support Pakistan, irrespective of its support to terrorism. Though eventually after 10 years China changed its stance on Masood Azhar in April 2019, the Chinese and Pakistani military collaboration is getting stronger with each passing day.

The abolition of Article 370 in Kashmir resulted in Pakistan unilaterally downgrading diplomatic relations with India and suspending all bilateral trade. The Chinese reaction was initially guarded and somehow limited to only Ladakh but the current border skirmish which started on 6 May 2020 speaks loudly of China's intentions towards

Ladakh. Few publications from China after the abolition of Article 370 and China's moves clearly highlight the long term plan it had for Kashmir.

After the removal of Article 370, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said that China opposes India's inclusion of the Chinese territory in the western sector of the China-India boundary into its administrative jurisdiction. China urged India to exercise prudence in words and deeds concerning the boundary question, to strictly abide by relevant agreements concluded between the two sides and refrain from making moves that may further complicate the boundary question.

Yang Haisheng, an expert with the Collaborative Innovation Centre for Security and Development of China's Western Frontiers of Sichuan University, pointed out in an interview with Global Times on 15 August 2019 that India's move attempts to reduce its importance and sensitivity in the international arena by changing the political and geographical maps of Kashmir.¹² At the same time, it is hoped that this will promote the influx of migrants from other parts of India and change the current ethnic distribution in the region.

The Global Times published a strongly worded article on August 12, 2019, stating that the Kashmir issue is by no means an "internal matter"¹³. It is a violation of China's territorial sovereignty and damages China's interests. It violates the relevant agreements between the two countries on maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas, and the leaders of the two countries on the proper control of disputes. The Chinese stand is that Aksai Chin is located in Hetian, Xinjiang, China. It is the place where the Chinese Uygur and Kirgiz people have lived for generations. The

place-name itself is the meaning of the Uyghur language “White Rock Beach in China”¹⁴, which clearly shows that the place has been Chinese territory since ancient times. If the Indian side does not learn a lesson and continues to declare the so-called “sovereignty,” it will only worsen the border situation, aggravate the border dispute, endanger the peace and tranquillity of the border areas of the two countries, and will not help the proper resolution of the border issue and the healthy development of China-India relations.”

Pakistan’s new ambassador to China, Nagmana Hashmi, said in an exclusive interview with the *Global Times* on 19 September¹⁵ that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project will not be affected by India’s removal of Kashmir’s “special status” and Pakistan will remain close to China in cooperating and fully promote the completion of the project. She also said that unless India withdraws its legal amendments to Kashmir’s status and withdraws its troops, Pakistan will not return to the negotiating table.

Lin Minwang, a researcher at the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, said in an article published by *People’s Daily* on 27 August, that on the one hand, China must resist India’s violations and safeguard its own interests; on the other, it must play the role of China being a responsible big country on the international stage and actively play a coordinating role in cooling and stabilising the regional situation.¹⁶

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s visited Islamabad on September 7, 2019 to attend the third China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral foreign ministers dialogue held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 7 Sep 2019. In a veiled reference to Kashmir, Wang

Yi conveyed that in the face of uncertain international and regional situations, it is even more important to strengthen strategic communication and cooperation between China and Pakistan. China thanked Pakistan for its firm standing with the Chinese side on issues involving China’s core interests, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. ‘We will also continue to firmly support Pakistan in safeguarding national sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity and safeguarding its legitimate rights and interests’, said Wang Yi (another veiled reference to Kashmir).¹⁷

China’s Foreign Minister’s official website reported on 10 September that the two sides exchanged views on the situation in Kashmir. Pakistan conveyed the situation in the Kashmir region to the Chinese side, including Pakistan’s concerns, positions and urgent humanitarian issues. China indicated that it is paying close attention to the situation in Kashmir and reiterated that the Kashmir issue is a legacy of history and should be properly resolved peacefully in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements. China opposes any unilateral actions that may complicate the situation.

Even though Pakistan’s bid to internalise the Kashmir issue suffered a setback, China gave full support to Pakistan. On the other hand, China very clearly and strongly laid its claim in Ladakh which is highlighted in a very detailed article published in *Duowei news* on 18 May 2019¹⁸ before the abrogation of Article 370. The article clearly states that China is a stakeholder in Kashmir and quotes historical incidents including treaties during the British domination in India to reiterate their claim

on Ladakh (being linked to Tibetan culture) and Aksai Chin. The article states that China followed a non-intervention policy in Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan but changed its position after the 1962 Sino-Indian war.

The article piquantly lays claim on Ladakh but also calls for the three nations to work together against terrorism, clearly ignoring the fact that Pakistan is a terrorist nation. China's subtle support to Pakistan in front of the international community but strong support in form of Pakistani military personnel trained at Chinese institutions, sale of arms besides carrying out joint military and counter-terrorism exercises.

The visit of Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission Xu Qiliang to Pakistan after the announcement of abrogation of Article 370 was reported by the China-owned US-based news outlet Duowei News with the caption 'the situation in India and Pakistan is escalating'. He visited the Pakistan Naval Headquarters in Islamabad, Pakistan, on August 27, 2019, and met with Pakistan's Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi and discussed the escalating tensions.

The Chinese also raised objections on the issue of Ladakh during Indian External Affairs Minister's visit in August 2019 along with its implications on the India-China border issue. This, coupled with growing China-Pakistan nexus, was highlighted by Jayadeva Ranade in an article in Indian weekly *The Sunday Guardian* on February 2, 2019, where he said, "clear indicators that China is not only strengthening Pakistan to restrict India's growth by keeping it under direct military pressure but that it plans to use Pakistan as the outpost for its

extended global maritime reach". This was always a menace for India which only started unfolding this year in May 2020.

The recent border skirmish is an extension of PRC's policy on Kashmir but with a larger agenda this time. The skirmish that started on May 6 escalated on June 15 after which a statement issued by the PLA WTC on June 16¹⁹ expands China's territorial claims and asserts that China has for a "long time had sovereignty" over the Galwan Valley. This is the second time since the current confrontation began that China has extended its claims over the "entire Galwan Valley". The statement puts forth that the Indian forces repeatedly crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and warned India to "strictly restrain its front-line troops, immediately stop all provocative actions and return to the correct track of dialogue and resolve differences".¹²¹

Pertinent to note is that 1962 war has again been used to warn Indians by the Chinese media, the same way it was done in 2017, which happened after 3-4 decades. This time though, the articles have not directly targeted PM Modi, as they did in 2017. One such article was published on June 17 in *Global Times* which advised PM Modi to improve the economy to ease border tensions hinting that if the economy that he has failed to revive will be on track, people will not display such strong nationalist emotions²². He was however directly targeted in a tweet on June 19, 2020 by @Tangtianru (a Chinese female Army officer) who is followed by Chinese Consul Generals' of Karachi and Kolkata directly targeting PM Modi that the Indian media is not questioning the fact that Indian PM has hidden the number of Indian

soldiers who died on June 15th, 2020. She also posted a tweet on the same day that India should get out of Kashmir. The recent escalation of tensions has not stemmed out only because of China's claims on Ladakh and India's abolition of Article 370. It is definitely due to multiple factors along with the growing mistrust in the relationship starting from the announcement of CPEC by President Xi.

However, on the Kashmir issue after analysing China's position on Kashmir, its growing military

support to Pakistan, the recent escalation of border tension between India and China, stationing of Chinese defence personnel in POK, making Gwadar as a logistic base for Chinese army and moves in South Asia to undermine India clearly demonstrate that China could be a bigger threat in destabilising Kashmir rather than Pakistan. It might use Pakistan to reiterate its position in Kashmir. But Indian strategic circles must note that it is China and not Pakistan which might be a major factor in Kashmir for India in the near future.

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Analysing China's Arms Sales to South Asia

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It is not well known that 60 per cent of China's conventional arms exports in the last decade has been to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka; with Pakistan now the largest importer of Chinese arms¹. Exports to the region include fighter aircraft, warships, submarines, missiles, and tanks amongst others and have amounted to more than USD 9.6 billion between 2008 and 2018². This paper analyses the sale of Chinese arms to these neighbours of India and evaluates the objectives they could be driven by. It will also examine the security concerns this could have for India and the impact on the geopolitical balance in the region. In conclusion, the paper will argue that China has been using arms exports as a foreign policy tool to expand its influence in South Asia for two main reasons: primarily as a facet to ensure the success of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as all of the four countries are crucial outlets to the Indian Ocean for China to circumnavigate the Malacca Strait and ensure a smooth supply of energy resources from the Middle East, and secondly, by arming India's neighbours, Beijing has ensured that New Delhi is restricted in its ambitions to become a larger Asian power and a direct challenge to China.

China's Defence Industry

The People's Republic of China has been heavily investing in the modernisation of its arms

industry since the 1970s. One of the three pillars of the country's military modernisation which took place under Deng Xiaoping was the transformation of the defence industry. An important aspect of this was to become self-reliant in the production of weapons and technologies. Following this, for several decades, Chinese arms manufacturers produced low-cost weapons which were not able to compete with the more sophisticated weapons and market dominance of the Western arms manufacturers. Recent advances in technology and manufacturing, however, have enabled Chinese defence contractors to close the gap with Russian and Western companies to compete more effectively by providing lower prices—making Chinese arms an increasingly attractive choice worldwide³. Since then, “China's military modernisation has been striking for the speed of development and breadth of its ambition to modernise the People's Liberation Army by 2035 and create world-class forces by 2049”⁴. The volume of Chinese arms exports grew by 275 per cent between 2000 and 2017 while its arms imports decreased by 56 per cent⁵. A successful and thriving defence industry has not only allowed China to become increasingly self-reliant but has also enabled the country to become the fifth-largest arms exporter globally⁶.

Historically, there have been four major motivations for Chinese arms exports: ideological

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motivations through the 1950s and 1960s; geopolitical motivations through the 1970s and early 1980s; commercial motivations through the 1980s to the 2000s; and competitive motivations during the present-day⁷. To give an idea of how far China has come with its defence production, in 2019 the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), based on estimated arms sales placed the three largest Chinese arms companies, the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), China North Industries Group Corporation (NORINCO), and the China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC) in the top 10 largest defence companies globally⁸. This includes manufacturing weapons for China's own armed forces which had an enormous estimated budget of USD 181.1 billion in 2019, behind only the United States (U.S.)⁹. This successful military-industrial complex has enabled China to sell weapons globally, including in Latin America, albeit modestly, and across Africa. Between 2008 and 2018, China exported USD 15.7 billion worth of conventional weapons across the globe¹⁰. Chinese arms exports are only limited by the fact that four of the top ten arms importers between 2014 and 2018, India, Australia, Korea, and Vietnam do not procure Chinese weapons for political reasons¹¹. Chinese weapons have become even more appealing to countries with limited defence budgets since China is willing to finance arms sales with large loans along with few restrictions on the end-use of its weapons¹². Additionally, China has also made the most of market opportunities. With the U.S. restricting the export of its Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), China has made its UAVs available to countries which have traditionally

bought American or Russian weapons such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Serbia¹³. Looking at South Asia, most of China's exports are sold to countries closer to the mainland. These countries, with small military procurement budgets, have favourably viewed Chinese weapons and systems.

Pakistan

Founded on shared hostility with India, military relations between the 'all-weather friends' China and Pakistan go back to the 1970s when China was instrumental in enhancing Pakistan's nuclear programme. To effectively summarise China's relationship with Pakistan in the past, Andrew Small has stated that "if the military relationship lies at the heart of China-Pakistan ties, nuclear weapons lie at the heart of the military relationship"¹⁴. This statement accurately explains the importance of China helping Pakistan's nuclear programme and sets the stage for the flourishing relationship in conventional arms in the succeeding years. China not only provided highly enriched uranium, ring magnets for processing the uranium, and educating its nuclear scientists, but also provided Islamabad with nuclear-capable M-11 (Ghaznavi) missiles having a range of 290 km¹⁵. The underlying political objective behind China's bolstering of Pakistan was and continues to be to foil India's regional ambitions.

Furthermore, Pakistan is also an important part of China's ambition to become a global power through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With the Gwadar port being developed by China, the CPEC through Pakistan provides Beijing with a route to the Arabian Sea, thereby

extending its reach in the Indian Ocean. In effect, this has successfully kept India preoccupied with a nuclear Pakistan on its western border and a nuclear China to its east. Pakistan's relationship with China has been strengthened due to American sanctions which have caused Islamabad to lean closer to Beijing. Pakistan's souring relations with the U.S. has led to the Trump administration suspending USD 2 billion in security assistance which included a USD 300 million cut in military aid in 2018¹⁶. This makes China a natural partner to Pakistan to challenge American dominance in the region and replace American arms exports. Thus, close military ties between China and Pakistan have paved the way for the latter to become the largest importer of Chinese arms.

Political objectives often underlie these transactions as growing cooperation between Beijing and Islamabad on counter-terrorism initiatives led to arms sales surging from USD 250 million in 2008 to USD 758 million in 2009¹⁷. Since 2009, sales to Pakistan have averaged USD 584 million annually¹⁸. In the largest arms deal to date between the two nations in July 2015, China is to provide eight stealth attack submarines to Pakistan in a USD 5 billion deal with four submarines expected to be delivered by 2023 and the remaining four to be built in Karachi by 2028¹⁹. This is crucial for Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and will enable Islamabad to have a limited sea-based deterrent. In March 2018, the sale of sophisticated optical tracking systems were announced that could be used for nuclear missiles with multiple warheads²⁰. Other deals have included the co-developed JF-17 aircraft, which the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has four squadrons of, China's ongoing construction

of the Type-054 AP class warship for the Pakistan Navy, Type-59 tanks, Type-531 armoured personnel carriers, and missile boats²¹. In the past decade, Chinese arms have accounted for almost 70 per cent of Pakistan's arms and ammunition²².

The JF-17 multirole aircraft has boosted the PAF's capabilities and China's instrumental help in developing the aircraft has also enabled Pakistan to triple its arms exports by exporting it to Myanmar and Nigeria. China has also provided A-100 Multiple Rocket Launchers, VT-1A tanks, and HQ-16 medium-range surface to air missiles (SAM) to the Pakistani military²³.

In addition to being Pakistan's largest arms supplier which has amounted to USD 6.4 billion between 2008 and 2018, China is using the flourishing relationship to enhance its strategic outreach in the region. By bolstering Pakistan over time through a continuous flow of weapons exports and technologies against India, China has kept New Delhi occupied within the region, constraining its aspiration to become a major power in Asia. From Beijing's perspective, if India were able to subordinate Pakistan, New Delhi's position would be strengthened against China thereby reducing its power and influence in South Asia²⁴.

Bangladesh

Similar to Pakistan, Bangladesh provides an outlet to the Indian Ocean through the Bay of Bengal for China and is also part of the BRI. In Beijing's wider geostrategic goals, growing ties and arms exports to Bangladesh play a dual role in revenue from sales, along with checking Indian ambitions in South Asia. China has provided 71.8 per cent of Bangladesh's military procurements

between 2008 and 2018 amounting to USD 1.93 billion²⁵. The main reason for China's dominance in Bangladesh's arms procurement is that Dhaka has been able to make these purchases supported by generous loans and competitive prices²⁶. With a defence budget of USD 3.87 billion in 2019-20, a budget arguably too low to procure arms from the wider global market, Chinese weapons are a lucrative option. All three arms of Bangladesh's military have benefited from Chinese weapons. The Bangladesh army has procured 44 Type-90-II (MBT-2000) tanks from China in 2011 and further signed a contract for 44 VT-5 light tanks in 2019. Anti-aircraft missiles, hand-held anti-aircraft missiles, and PF-98 anti-tank rockets have also been purchased²⁷. The Navy has procured two Type-056 corvettes which were commissioned in 2016 with another two being delivered and awaiting commissioning. The Navy has also acquired two anti-surface warfare capable Durjoy-class patrol vessels with five more under construction along with two used Type-035G Ming-class submarines for just over USD 100 million each in 2013²⁸. The submarines have antagonised India with analysts stating that their procurement, taking into consideration Bangladesh's economic situation combined with being surrounded by India on three sides is an act of provocation since submarines are offensive weapons of sea denial²⁹. On the other hand, China's ambassador to Dhaka stated that these submarines would help bring stability in the region³⁰. The Bangladesh Air Force has procured three squadrons of Chengdu F-7BGI fighter aircraft, 23 K-8W intermediate training jets, various radar systems, and in 2011 the air force inducted its first surface-to-air missile system, the

short-range FM-90³¹. China has also supplied Bangladesh with the majority of its small arms which has amounted to over 16,000 rifles and 4,100 pistols³². With 70 per cent of Bangladeshi procurements being Chinese from 2008-2018, Beijing has dominated the Bangladeshi arms market and the latter has invariably become dependent on China for supplies and spares in the future³³. Furthermore, China will also be involved in building a naval facility in Bangladesh by helping the country construct its first submarine base³⁴. This raises questions for India's national security as there is the possibility of the base being used by the Chinese Navy.

Myanmar

China's relationship with Myanmar goes back to 1949 when Burma was the first non-communist country to recognise the People's Republic of China. In January 2020, the country deepened its ties with China signing 33 agreements as part of the BRI³⁵. In an attempt to reduce dependence on the Strait of Malacca for energy supplies, Myanmar's geographic location plays an important role for China and is thus important for Beijing to gain more influence in the region. The two countries have signed the development of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor which will link the Yunnan province in China to Kyaukpyu on the Bay of Bengal where the co-developed deep-sea port project has been under construction. Once completed, this will provide China with direct links to oil supplies from the Middle East as Kyaukpyu is at one end of an oil and natural gas pipeline running to the Yunnan province³⁶. Therefore, access to Myanmar's ports provides China with

strategic influence in the Bay of Bengal and the wider Indian Ocean region.

Going by China's strategic ambitions, providing Myanmar with arms is an important aspect of the warming relations between the two countries which pre-date the BRI. Since the 1990s, Myanmar's armed forces have "attempted to develop limited conventional-warfare capabilities, and have brought into service new armoured vehicles, air-defence weapons, artillery, combat aircraft and ships procured mainly from China and Russia"³⁷. Additionally, China began to supply Myanmar with arms as a way to win allies following the crackdown in Tiananmen Square, since Myanmar at the time was also internationally condemned for its human rights record³⁸. Arms exports since then have only increased with Beijing selling USD 1.2 billion worth of weapons between 2008 and 2018. Most of Myanmar's weapons are Chinese and the country is China's third-largest market having imported USD 720 million since 2013³⁹.

Since 1989, China has supplied the country with fighter jets, armoured vehicles, and naval vessels apart from training all three arms of the Burmese armed forces. Till date, the Myanmar army has procured the VT-1A, Type-69-II, and Type-62 tanks and the Type-85, Type-90 AFV, and WZ551 armoured personnel carriers from China⁴⁰. Procurements also include the Type 84 and Type 653 armoured engineering vehicles. The SY-400 and Norinco SH1 artillery guns are also part of the Myanmar army along with the KS-1A air defence medium-range surface to air missiles and the HN-5A portable surface to air missiles⁴¹. The Myanmar Navy which started its modernisation programme in 2001 procured two Type-053H1

class frigates from China which were significantly upgraded with new missiles and sensors⁴². The navy also operates Hainan-class naval patrol boats and radar equipment from China. The Myanmar Air Force's combat aircraft are predominantly Chinese, operating multiple squadrons of the Nanchang Q-5, Chengdu J-7, Shenyang J-6, and the JF-17 which was jointly developed by China and Pakistan. Additionally, the air force operates the Shaanxi Y-8 and Harbin Y-12 transport aircraft from China along with the Hongdu JL-8 trainer aircraft⁴³. Thus, in its entirety, between 1990 and 2016, China provided 120 aircraft, 696 armoured vehicles, 125 artillery units, 21 naval vessels, and 1,029 missiles to Myanmar⁴⁴. China has also provided Myanmar with numerous small arms and ammunition in addition to major weapon systems. Similar to Pakistan and Bangladesh, China's arms exports to Myanmar complicate the security scenario for India. Besides, with the development of the Kyaukpyu port, Beijing has made significant inroads into the country which could complicate India's maritime strategy for the Bay of Bengal since China's exports to Myanmar are often linked with the interest of establishing military bases in the country⁴⁵.

Sri Lanka

The island nation of Sri Lanka is an important pearl in Beijing's Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), the maritime arm of the wider BRI. The country's position just above the major sea lines of communication and only 50 km away from the Indian mainland provides sufficient geostrategic and geopolitical incentives for China to cultivate relations with Sri Lanka. President Mahinda

Rajapaksa's tilt towards China during his tenure between 2005 and 2015 is a success of the Chinese strategy. China has been the largest supplier of arms to Sri Lanka since the 1950s which has seen the transfer of small arms, ammunition, landmines, naval vessels, tanks, and aircraft. Cooperation was intensified during Sri Lanka's bloody civil war and in 2007 a presidential visit to China yielded a USD 37.6 million deal to purchase six Chinese J-7BS/G fighter jets, anti-aircraft guns, JY-11 3D air surveillance radars, armoured personnel carriers, and other weaponry⁴⁶. This was the result of an arms embargo by western nations and India who refused to sell weapons to Sri Lanka due to accusations of human rights violations by the country's military against the Tamil minority population during the civil war. Beijing, making the most of the situation capitalised on the market opportunity and filled the void left by the traditional arms exporters, providing USD 1 billion worth of military equipment⁴⁷.

Continuing the exports of weapons to the island nation, China has helped the modernisation of the Sri Lankan armed forces and in July 2019 gifted a Type-053 frigate to Sri Lanka to enhance the Sri Lankan Navy's surveillance capabilities. Beijing has also agreed to provide USD 14 million for the procurement of Chinese-made counter-insurgency equipment along with providing the Sri Lankan police force with 150 vehicles⁴⁸. The Sri Lankan army has procured the Type-69, Type-59, and Type-63 tanks, and Type-89, Type-85, and Type-63 armoured personnel carriers from China⁴⁹. Amongst the artillery provided by Beijing, the Type-56 field gun, Type-66 howitzer, and Type-60 howitzer are also used by the army⁵⁰. The navy,

apart from the frigate gifted by China, operates Haizhui class and Shanghai II class fast gunboats, and Yunnan class amphibious warfare vessels. The island nation's air force over the years has procured the Chengdu F-7 fighter aircraft, the Harbin Y-12, and Xian MA60 transport aircraft, and the Hongdu JL-8, Nanchang CJ-6, and Chengdu J-7 trainer aircraft⁵¹. China's strategy of providing aid and loans for the procurement of arms is similar to the country's strategy in Bangladesh and other nations who are unable to directly afford weapons and systems. Taking into account Sri Lanka's limited defence budget of USD 2.5 billion, it would be difficult for Colombo to make substantial procurements without assistance. This approach has ensured a footprint in Sri Lanka and also allows for deeper penetration of the Sri Lankan military procurement market. Looking beyond military exports, China's other investments and projects related to the MSRI are also capable of having strategic angles. This includes the Hambantota Port which was handed over to China on a lease for 99 years due to the inability to repay loans and raises questions of the Chinese Navy (PLAN) having unrestricted access to it.

Security Concerns for India

The procurement of weapons always has a security impact on the surrounding nations. From an Indian perspective, Chinese arms exports to its neighbours are one of the facets of Beijing's wider strategic goal of furthering its footprint in the region and limiting India's position in South Asia. This results in a threefold security concern for India. Firstly, it leads to increased militarisation of the South Asian region. Secondly, the importing

countries become dependent on China for additional arms, training, and maintenance which can be used as leverage, and finally, the export of arms as a foreign policy tool has ramifications for India.

Taking into account the different weapon systems China has exported to India's neighbourhood over the years, there is no doubt that China has added to the militarisation of the region which has led to further instability to an already delicate region. Aiding Pakistan with its nuclear programme has not only bolstered Pakistan's resolve against India regarding Kashmir but has also contributed to an increase in cross-border violations under the threat of the nuclear umbrella. Similarly, the export of submarines to Pakistan and Bangladesh have added to New Delhi's maritime security concerns as they are offensive weapons of sea denial and enable Pakistan to have a limited nuclear deterrent at sea. Bangladesh's acquisition of submarines has also puzzled India as the country did not have a dire need for them and could hamper India's maritime efforts in the Bay of Bengal. China's arms exports to India's neighbours have thus increased the militarisation of South Asia, adding to an already contested space with new weapons systems. This has also led to a security dilemma, with the increased militarisation being a hindrance to peace in the region.

China's arms exports to South Asia have also enabled Beijing to use them as leverage over the recipient states. Although China does not dictate the use of weapons, it does hold a certain amount of leverage over future arms sales, supplies, and spares to countries that are dependent on it. A prime example is Pakistan not criticising China for

Beijing's treatment of its Muslim Uighur community in Xinjiang. Although drawn from the 'all-weather friendship' between Islamabad and Beijing, there is no doubt that arms exports to Pakistan were in the minds of its leaders when deciding not to criticise China⁵². China is, therefore, able to build up political leverage and weapons dependency through its arms exports. Arms exports also lead to dependence on China for training and maintenance of the weapons and systems. When China sells heavy arms like fighter aircraft and submarines to a country, the importing country becomes reliant on China for a long time for training, maintenance, repairs, and spares. This reliance inevitably results in a certain degree of influence on the importing country⁵³. Furthermore, it is expected that Chinese personnel are deployed along with the arms as trainers and field service representatives to the recipient countries, creating an additional strategic footprint on the ground. For India, this leverage can play out against it if China chooses to do so in either political or diplomatic scenarios.

Combined with China's arms exports, Beijing has also sought more intimate relations in both military and economic terms with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. Against the backdrop of China's increasing relations with South Asia, it is important to examine the link between the growing arms exports and the BRI as a way of securing greater geopolitical influence in the region. There is no doubt that China's BRI initiatives in South Asia have challenged India's strategic interests and national security. Coupled with China's growing arms industry and arms exports, the vital question is whether weapons sales have become a new foreign policy tool for China⁵⁴.

In South Asia, China has killed two birds with one stone as it not only provides a market for its products but also manages to check Indian ambitions by using arms exports to shift the balance of power by increasing the capabilities of India's neighbours. China has therefore successfully used arms transfers to strengthen countries against states that are Beijing's rivals⁵⁵. Thus, although these exports may not be a direct foreign policy tool, with the hostilities within South Asia, it inadvertently becomes a foreign policy tool against India compromising its national security; "China has been quietly checkmating India's regional dominance in South Asia through its arms sale in countries bordering India"⁵⁶. Additionally, from a Chinese strategic perspective, "it leverages strong client-state relationships and in the process bolsters Beijing's influence, particularly among neighbouring

states"⁵⁷. It, therefore, is easy to see how China's arms sales to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka indirectly act to contain India.

China's arms exports to India's neighbourhood will only increase in the future. What India needs to pay attention to are the underlying factors that have driven these weapons exports and the effects they have on the regional geopolitical balance. China has been strategically limiting India's ambitions in South Asia by investing heavily in its neighbours under the BRI umbrella. Chinese weapons exports play a similar role in not only expanding Beijing's influence in the region as it creates a dependence on China and enables exports to be used as leverage, but also by strengthening India's neighbours to keep India occupied and not be able to focus on being a direct competitor to China in Asia and the wider Indian Ocean region.

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Status of One Country, Two Systems in Hong Kong

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Hong Kong continues to draw global attention for its tenacity to preserve and protect its democratic and liberal values under the shadow of the communist regime of the People's Republic of China.¹ The approval of the *Establishing and Strengthening the Safeguarding of the National Security for Hong Kong Special Administrative Region* which was submitted to the National People's Congress (NPC) on 28 May, 2020 has aroused a great deal of concern and anxiety in Hong Kong. The National Security Law aims at proscribing *actions to split the country, terrorism, and "subversion" of state power*. The legislature of Hong Kong, the Legislative Council was not consulted on the matter, although the deputies representing Hong Kong were present in the NPC meeting. The recently passed law would also prevent foreign political organisations from operation in Hong Kong.² There is widespread fear and anxiety that the national security law will further erode the autonomy and freedom pledged under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

To put the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong in perspective and the Chinese attempts to muzzle it through administrative and legislative action including the promulgation of the National

Security Law, it is pertinent to revisit the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law- the bedrock of 'one country, two systems', and some landmark pro-democracy developments in Hong Kong.

The Joint Declaration

After protracted parleys and hard negotiation the Joint Declaration on Hong Kong³ was signed between the Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang and the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on 19th December 1984 in Beijing in the Great Hall of the People. The Joint Declaration is registered with the United Nations and the two sides have the obligation to honour it in letter and spirit. The Joint Declaration, *inter alia*, stipulated that following the provisions of article 31 of the constitution of the People's Republic of China, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) would be established consequent upon the 'reversion of sovereignty over Hong Kong' from Great Britain to China with effect from 1 July 1997. The Joint Declaration stated that the HKSAR will enjoy a high degree of autonomy, except in foreign and defence affairs which are the responsibilities of the Central Government. It further stipulated that the HKSAR will be vested with executive, legislative and independent judicial power and the laws currently in force will remain unchanged.

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Concerning the government of HKSAR, it mentioned that a Chief Executive will be appointed by the Central Government based on the results of election or consultation to be held locally. The Joint Declaration further envisaged that a *Basic Law* would be enacted and promulgated by the National People's Congress of China for the governance and administration of HKSAR.

The Basic Law

The Basic Law which was adopted by the National People's Congress after five years of intense deliberation in April 1990 enunciated the principles and objectives of Joint Declaration in greater details. The Basic Law⁴ has all the attributes of an ideal liberal democratic polity and laissez-faire economy, however, under the watchful eye of a communist regime. Some important features of the Basic Law which have come under severe test are elucidated here. Article 5 of the Basic Law stipulates that the socialist system and policies shall not be practised in the HKSAR, and present (extant) capitalist system and way of life will remain unchanged for next 50 years. This is the only article in the Basic Law that mentions the time-period of 50 years. No other article in the Basic Law mentions that the extant system will be maintained for 50 years.

There are some recent developments in Hong Kong and China as well which have eroded the spirit, if not the letter, of provisions of some articles of the Basic Law. Article 14 of the Basic Law mentions that the government of HKSAR shall be responsible for the maintenance of public order in

the Region. It further says that military forces stationed by the Central People's Government in HKSAR for defence shall not interfere in the local affairs of the Region. The government of HKSAR may when necessary, ask the Central Government for assistance for the maintenance of public order and in disaster relief. This article should be read in conjunction with article 23 which says HKSAR shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of terrorism, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's government or theft of the state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organisation or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organisation or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organisation or bodies. The failure of the Hong Kong government to make enabling laws in this regard impelled Beijing to draft the National Security Law. Under the new Security Law, the Central Government at Beijing can establish the presence of its security forces in Hong Kong for the first time. China says the new law is aimed, as mentioned earlier, at throttling secession, subversion, terrorism, foreign interference or activities that threaten national security. The 'one country, two systems', the political edifice of Hong Kong and the source of its sustenance the 'Basic Law' have been subjected to severe stress in recent times. As such, it is worth a while to critically look at the post-1997 developments, both in China and Hong Kong and how they are eroding the provisions and intents of the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law and on the democratic aspiration

of the people of greater China including Taiwan in the post-COVID-19 period.

The Umbrella Movement 2014

It is of interest to note how the autonomy of HKSAR as enshrined in the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law is slowly getting eroded incrementally. Article 45 of the Basic Law provides that the Chief Executive of the HKSAR shall be selected by election or through consultations held locally and be appointed by the Central Government. It further says that the method for selecting the chief executive shall be specified ‘in the light of the actual situation in HKSAR’ and following the principle of gradual and orderly progress. Thus it is an open-ended provision. China on August 31, 2014, decided that Beijing would tightly control the nomination of candidates for election of the Chief Executive of HKSAR, a move that triggered mass protests and resentment in the territory, which came to be known as the ‘Umbrella Movement’. The Standing Committee of NPC had decided that the city’s next chief executive would be elected by popular vote in 2017, but only after each candidate was approved (pre-screened) by a majority of a 1,200 member election committee. The next election to the office of the Chief Executive is due in 2022 and election to the Legislative Council will be held in September this year.

The Aborted Extradition Bill June 2019

The National Security Law also needs to be seen in the backdrop of the attempts by HKSAR authorities to introduce an extradition bill in June

2019 which was subsequently withdrawn under popular protest. What prompted the Hong Kong government to draft the extradition bill was a murder committed in 2018 in Taiwan by a Taiwanese citizen, who had strayed into Hong Kong and was charged with the offence of money laundering in Hong Kong, who was to be extradited to Taiwan after the expiry of his imprisonment in Hong Kong. As Hong Kong has no extradition treaty, it was not possible to send the convict back to Taiwan for his trial in the Taiwanese court. It was in this backdrop that the Hong Kong government wanted to pass the extradition bill to agree with other countries including mainland China for the extradition of offenders of the law. It was feared in Hong Kong that the HKSAR authorities might invoke the extradition law to extradite offenders including pro-democracy leaders and activists in Hong Kong to mainland China. The colonial-era drafters of Hong Kong’s extant law excluded the mainland from extradition because its courts could not be trusted to deliver impartial justice.

The proposed legislation evoked resentment and strong protest in Hong Kong in June 2019. Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to annul the proposed extradition law. The movement took a violent turn including ugly clashes and suspension of flights. China said protest movement had reached “near terrorism” after a night of ugly clashes at the city’s airport on 14th June, where demonstrator’s detained two members they suspected of being government sympathisers. US President Donald Trump described the volatile

situation as ‘tricky’ and said China’s government had moved troops near the border with Hong Kong.⁵ Both the Houses of US Congress have passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act.

China warned that it could not tolerate protester’s efforts to threaten the central government’s authority in Hong Kong and suggested that it could, if asked, mobilise troops in the PLA garrison there to maintain order. The warning came as China released a new defence strategy that accused the United States of undermining global stability and identifies separatism as China’s most immediate security threat. In the case of Hong Kong, the chief Spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defence Senior Colonel Wu Qian cited the protest outside the central government liaison office in Hong Kong, which protesters painted with graffiti, suggested destructive behaviour that was straining Beijing’s behaviour. He pointed out the special article in law (Article 14 of the Basic Law) detailing relations between the city and Beijing that allows PLA to intervene when requested by Hong Kong government to maintain order or assist in case of natural disasters.⁶

Emergency Law, 1922

On 4th October 2019 Hong Kong Police shot and wounded a teenage boy as violent protests erupted after Carrie Lam, the chief executive invoked colonial era (1922) emergency power last used more than 50 years ago. The emergency powers give the Chief Executive to “make any regulation” in the event of an emergency. One of

the emergency measures was to ban face masks which the protesters were said to use to avoid being identified. The pro-democracy lawmakers appealed the Hong Kong High Court seeking an emergency injunction against the ban, arguing the emergency powers bypassed the legislature and contravened the Basic Law which is the mini-constitution. But the senior judge dismissed their injunction demand. Eventually, the Hong Kong legislature on 23rd October 2019 formally withdrew planned legislation that would have allowed extraditions to mainland China.

The District Council Elections

The District Council Elections in November 2019 which were held in the backdrop of the pro-democracy protests are a landmark event. In the first place, the fact that the elections were held on schedule despite the political turmoil was a clear message of the independence of the Hong Kong government. It was certainly not manipulated by the communist regime in Beijing. The elections were free and fair. A record 71 per cent of the 4.13 million citizens who registered to vote had cast their ballots. Pro-democracy candidates captured 389 of 452 elected seats, up from 124 and far more than they ever had. The government allies held just 56 seats, a remarkable decline from 300 in 2015. The election results were viewed as a referendum. ‘There has been a very deep awakening of Hong Kong People’, said Alan Leong, chairman of the Civic Party, one of the largest pro-democracy parties.⁷ *The South China Morning Post* commented, ‘The tsunami of disaffection among

voters was clear across the board, as pan-democrats rode the wave to win in poor and rich neighbourhoods, in both protest and non-protest afflicted districts and town areas as well as suburbs. Less immediately obvious was whether there was a generational divide in the way people voted, but ousted reestablishment district councils suggested that young first-time voters had been instrumental in dislodging them from their perch.⁸

Traditionally the District Council elections are never taken seriously politically as they are concerned with mundane civic issues such as transport, street lights, bus-stops etc. but this time around it acquired a serious political connotation given the circumstances in which the elections were held. The election results can have serious consequences for the election of the chief executive of HKSAR in 2022. The Chief Executive Carrie Lam was graceful enough to admit that public dissatisfaction with her government fuelled a landslide win by pro-democracy candidates in local elections. Ms Lam admitted that ‘the district council election result revealed public concerns over deficiencies in government, including unhappiness with the time taken to deal with the unrest.’

The Reaction to National Security Law

It was in this backdrop of the sustained pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong and the perceived failure of the Hong Kong government to assuage the protesters, that the central government of China promulgated the National Security Law. The passing of the National Security

Law has also created panic among a section of the netizens and some degree of erosion of confidence in the autonomy of the territory. Immigration consultancy firms and banks received several queries regarding emigration and transferring of money abroad. Some are accelerating their decision to buy property overseas, while others are holding back their purchase of local properties. The uncertain future of Hong Kong once touted as the Eldorado of East has impelled some high net worth individuals (defined as those having more than Hong Kong \$10 million/ USD 1.29 million of wealth) to diversify their assets into other cities like London, Singapore and Taiwan.⁹

The USA and the UK, the two major stakeholders in Hong Kong’s stability have severely criticised China for trying to impose the dreaded law. President Donald Trump threatened to order the removal of the special status accorded to Hong Kong since Hong Kong is no longer sufficiently autonomous to enjoy the privilege. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a very thought-provoking and compelling article which appeared both in *The Times* and *The South China Morning Post* bemoaned the imposition of National Security Law by China on Hong Kong. He wrote, ‘If China proceeds, this would be in direct conflict with its obligation under the Joint Declaration, a legally binding treaty registered with the United Nations. Britain would then have no choice but to uphold our profound ties of history and friendship with the people of Hong Kong.’ He further wrote, ‘Today, about 350,000 of the territory’s people hold

British National Overseas (BNO) passports and another 2.5 million would be eligible to apply for them. At present these passports allow visa-free access to the United Kingdom for up to six months. If China imposes its national security law, the British government will change our immigration rules and allow any holder of these passports from Hong Kong to come to the United Kingdom for a renewable period of 12 months and be given further immigration rights, including the right to work, which would place them on a route to citizenship.”¹⁰

The offer to grant the BNO passports to eligible Hong-Kongers flabbergasted Beijing. It accused Brittan of *colonial mentality* after Johnson promised to offer the citizenship rights to bonafide residents of Hong Kong if the situation so demands. Expressing strong dissatisfaction and opposition to the offer, the spokesperson of China’s foreign ministry Zhao Lijian said, ‘The UK has recklessly commented on Hong Kong and made the groundless accusation to interfere in Hong Kong affairs.’¹¹ Johnson’s offer has evoked a mixed reaction in Hong Kong. While the rich and the well-off residents have shown some interest, the younger generations who are spearheading the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong are not so enthused.

Conclusion

The pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong and China’s attempts to muzzle it through various means including the latest measure of National Security Law has certainly eroded the tenets of the ‘one country, two systems’, as pledged under

the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the Basic Law and in turn the efficacy of Hong Kong as an international business hub and financial centre. Hong Kong is the eighth largest exporter of goods in the world and is the fourth largest stock exchange in the world. Its banking system is seamlessly connected with the world; its currency is pegged with the US dollar. All these are at stake if stability in Hong Kong continues to be affected. Already ever since the reversion of Hong Kong to mainland China, some corporate houses have relocated themselves to other places including Singapore, Australia and Canada, and more will follow in due course of time. Taiwan has already started appealing students from Hong Kong for admission in its universities and colleges.

The pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong has polarised the Hong Kong society and polity. Broadly we can divide the citizens of Hong Kong into three categories, the Anglicised who co-opted themselves with the British and benefited from them in service or business, the immigrant Chinese who share deep loyalty to the motherland, and finally the younger generation, born during or after Hong Kong’s handover to China. These younger generations are spearheading the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong today. Yet students from mainland China who are studying in the universities and colleges of Hong Kong are loyal to China and they are looked upon with suspicion by their peers in Hong Kong. The pro-democracy movement has broken the political apathy or insularity of Hong Kong people. The unprecedented turn out in the District Board elections and the resounding victory

of pro-democracy parties have signalled the advent of electoral politics which Hong Kong has shunned all these years. Now onwards, the demand for direct election to Legislative Council for all seats will increase. Since the elected members of the District Board also have a voting share for the election to the Legislative Council, the number of pro-democracy candidates will increase. But as per the revised electoral law, an aspiring member for Legislative Council has to obtain the prior approval of China.

The development in Hong Kong and China's iron fist attempts to suppress and stifle the democratic aspiration of the people have raised questions on the 'one country, two systems' in Hong Kong and the prospect of its replication in

Taiwan, where the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is growing strong. Even the opposition KMT sensing the people's sentiment in Taiwan has started distancing itself from mainland China. Perhaps China doesn't care much about the economic wellbeing of Hong Kong as it already has been successful in emulating it in the form of Shanghai, an alternative financial hub. China is rather more worried that if the pro-democracy movement is allowed to function in Hong Kong, in the long run, it will have a contagion effect on mainland China, arousing fresh bouts of democratic aspirations. It, thus, wants to demonstrate that no dissent can be tolerated in the communist regime. The decline of Hong Kong has already set in and its resilience is already put to test.

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Implications of COVID Crisis on Global Politics – Strategic Choices for India

Jagjeet S Sareen*

1. Introduction

The COVID Crisis is causing unimaginable and unprecedented human and economic losses. World Trade Organization (WTO) has estimated that global trade could fall by up to 32 per cent in 2020¹ due to the damage to the economy from COVID crisis, hereafter referred as the Crisis. Financial markets across the world are experiencing extreme volatility; global commodity prices, especially of crude oil, have declined sharply². The World Economy Growth Outlook Report of International Monetary Fund (IMF)³ released in April has projected that the global economy is going to contract sharply by negative 3 per cent in 2020, much worse than during the 2008–09 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates⁴ that as job losses escalate, nearly half of global workforce is at risk of losing livelihoods. Governments have pledged to bolster their economies with unprecedented monetary and fiscal stimulus – despite holding already-massive public debt. Direct government spending by G20 countries for the Crisis response measures, so far at 3.1 per cent of 2019 GDP, is higher than levels during the GFC⁵.

Loads of early analysis is coming out on how crisis will impact globalization, supply chains, trade, and investments. This unprecedented shock to the global system caused by the Crisis is speculated to reorder economic relationships, political forces

(within and between countries), and balances of power.

This article aims to:

- a) Highlight key economic, social, and political implications emerging from the Crisis and the key drivers that would impact global politics.
- b) Present the current state of play of strategic competition among the major powers that is driving global politics in the past decade.
- c) Speculate on how the Crisis could impact the competition between these major powers.

It also:

- c) Speculates on how the Crisis could impact the competition between these major powers.
- d) Examines potential implications for India under such scenarios.
- e) Articulates strategic choices for India to leverage the opportunities and manage the challenges emerging out of reshaped global politics in a post-Crisis era.

2. Implications of the Crisis

The ongoing Crisis will affect nearly every aspect of global economics, trade, and politics. While the Crisis is global in nature, there are three epicenters, namely, America, East-Asia, and Europe, where implications of the Crisis would be severe. Duration of the Crisis and severity of its impacts in these three epicenters will determine how it reshapes global politics.

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The following factors will play a critical role in shaping the next phase of global politics:

- a) **Perceived success or failure of governments in managing the Crisis:** Depending on the extent of damage- to people and economy- the citizenry has and will continue to be keen to pass a verdict on the performance of the government in handling the Crisis. On one hand, while rising death tolls and insufficient support to the physically and economically most vulnerable may get an ‘F’ to certain governments, others who may have, or at least perceived to have, fared better, will score better in their COVID report cards. In either case, such a verdict can only aggravate the existing inequalities and deep political divides both at the national and global levels.
- b) **Exploiting the Crisis response measures for gains in global politics:** The effects of Crisis on the forces of nationalism and populism could be far-reaching and greatly influence global politics. Domestic fiscal and monetary measures, high-tech surveillance, re-shoring of manufacturing capacities and stockpiling, and border restrictions imposed to manage the pandemic may be continued and in fact, even expanded, to cover a wide range of sectors even in post-Crisis era to restrict global trade, investments, and movement of people. Countries and leaders who emerge relatively better off out of the Crisis may also exploit vulnerabilities of others.
- c) **Perceived failure of multilateral system in responding to Crisis:** No country can in a purely national effort overcome the Crisis. However, regional, and multilateral institutions

(UN, WHO and EU) and international platforms (G7 and G20) have been perceived to be rather ineffective in forging a strong global health and humanitarian assistance response. This will further deplete any trust in multilateral system and reinforce “Nation’s first” approach leading to enhanced multipolarity in global politics while multilateral institutions suffer a further decline in their effectiveness. A global vision and collective action may not be in the offing for some time to come. Some countries may also exploit these new vulnerabilities to expand their influence in multilateral institutions.

3. Key drivers of global politics

a) US strategic competition with the revisionist powers

With an “America First” approach under Trump administration⁶, the US has finally shifted from viewing China as a potential “responsible stakeholder⁷” to a “strategic competitor⁸”. The latest National Security Strategy (NSS) of the US⁹ called out China and Russia as revisionist powers. The NSS underlines that the central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition from these revisionist powers. The 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community¹⁰ notes that China and Russia will present a wide variety of economic, political, counterintelligence, military, and diplomatic challenges to the United States and its allies.

In the past years, the Trump administration has challenged China in the following key areas¹¹: trade and the economy, technological dominance,

military advancement, and control over the Indo-Pacific rim land. The administration has pursued a targeted decoupling with China. The political decoupling is clearly visible with termination of various high-level strategic, security and economic dialogues¹², and the threat of US sanctions for violation of human rights in Hong Kong¹³ and Xinjiang¹⁴. The administration has also deployed an array of coercive economic measures against China¹⁵, including import tariffs, export controls, heightened scrutiny of Chinese investment, sanctions, and law enforcement measures against Chinese intellectual property (IP) theft. These economic coercion measures have also brought decoupling in high-tech sectors. The administration¹⁶ may have also reached a conclusion that the US-China strategic competition covers an ideological struggle as well¹⁷.

At geo-economic front, the US and its allies have kept their control over inter-national financial institutions (IFI). To shore influence off IFIs, the US and its allies have provided capital increase for the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund, and other multilateral development banks. The US has recently established a new Development Finance Institution¹⁸ (DFI), through the passage of Asia Reassurance Initiative Act¹⁹, with USD 60 billion in its authorized capital, to counter-balance China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The DFI will support Blue Dot Network²⁰ to finance high-quality infrastructure projects in developing countries, with focus in Indo-Pacific.

On the other hand, China has acted swiftly to US withdrawal from various multilateral agreements and UN Agencies in order to enhance

its strategic influence. In the past years, the US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, UN Human Rights Council²¹ and UNESCO²², and worked actively to substantially cut aid to UN and its agencies²³. Similarly, withdrawal from Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)²⁴ has given greater leverage to China to push coercive economic and trading practices in Asia-Pacific²⁵.

The hardening of US-China strategic competition has had a profound impact on strategic and defense planning of the US allies in Europe and Asia. Following a strong push by the US at the 2019 London Summit of NATO²⁶, members have been constantly assessing what the strategic cooperation between China and Russia means for global and regional security²⁷. The EU in its EU-China Strategic Outlook²⁸ has defined China an economic competitor and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance. The EU also sees its relationship with Russia as a 'key strategic challenge'.²⁹ The current "Geopolitical"³⁰ EU Commission is trying to carve out a strategy based on interests as well as values that would allow the EU to accommodate China and Russia and to cooperate with the US. In the era of great power competition, the post Brexit UK has articulated a "Global Britain" foreign and security strategy to cover from Far East to Indo-Pacific³¹. The UK plans to focus on maritime Commonwealth in the Indo-Pacific region, with a planned deployment of HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier Strike Group in 2021 in the Indo-Pacific³², and exploring opening military bases, either in Singapore or Brunei. With the US's push for a free and open Indo-Pacific Strategy³³, the US allies in the Region, namely Japan³⁴, Republic of Korea³⁵, and Australia³⁶, have also

responded with repositioning of their foreign and defense policies with China.

To summarize, US is locked into a long-term strategic competition with China for economic, technological, political, and ideo-logical dominance globally. The U.S. is likely to continue a targeted decoupling of the U.S. and Chinese economies, mainly to protect its defense capabilities and technological superiority. On trade and economics, the US is likely to pursue strategies to exploit integration of Allies and Partners with China's trading networks to US's relative advantage. As the US-China strategic competition intensifies, it is conceivable that in the medium to long-run, the US may choose to be an "island power" leaving Eurasian landmass to be a theater of conflict. The Indo-Pacific region will see a never-seen-before display of major powers' politics, the ramifications of which will be global.

b) China's rejuvenation is reshaping global politics

After many centuries, China has managed to bring peace at its borders on the North and West, stabilized internal order through unprecedented high economic growth and high-tech surveillance, and insured internal stability by eliminating succession challenge in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Following 18th Party conference in 2012, Xi specified deadlines for meeting each of his "Two Centennial Goals."³⁷ First, China will build a "moderately prosperous society" by 2021, and second, a "fully developed, rich, and powerful" nation by the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic in 2049. President Xi's three signature programs launched in 2015, the Belt and Road

Initiative³⁸, Made in China 2025³⁹, and military-civil fusion⁴⁰, maintain his focus on growing strategic, technological, and economic power to be used by the state. At the 19th Party conference, President Xi set a target⁴¹ for China's becoming a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence by 2049.

China's military modernization program, with defense spending growing for the 24th consecutive year, has made China the second-largest defense spender (\$261 billion in 2019) after the United States.⁴² China's large-scale investment in next-generation defense technologies presents risks to the U.S. military's technological superiority⁴³. The 2019 white paper on China's National Defense in the New Era⁴⁴ notes that the US has adjusted its national security and defense strategies and adopted unilateral policies. The White paper notes that the "US has provoked and intensified competition among major countries, significantly increased its defense expenditure, pushed for additional capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber and missile defense, and undermined global strategic stability"⁴⁵. In the Indo-Pacific region, China has continued to expand its strategic influence in South China Sea by investing to build a blue water navy, building artificial islands, and Anti-Area Access Denial (A2/AD) capabilities⁴⁶ to constrain the ability of the US and allies to operate freely in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the economy and trade front, as technology, capital, and flow of trade between China and the world have shifted, China's exposure to other countries has declined, while the world's exposure to China has increased⁴⁷. Starting with 17th Party conference in 2007, the CCP has taken measures

to boost domestic consumption, thereby reducing its reliance on foreign demand⁴⁸. Although China has 111 Global Fortune 500 companies, more than 80 per cent of their revenue is still earned at home⁴⁹. China's banking, securities, and bond markets rank in the global top three in size, but international players have limited presence. With this massive restructuring of Chinese economy, the decoupling efforts by the US may cause more damage to the world economy than to the Chinese.

On multilateral front, China is likely to defend its equities and continue to expand her influence in other multilateral institutions. China has called for collaboration between major countries to be instrumental for the success of multilateralism⁵⁰. The white paper of the State Council of China, titled, "China and the World in the New Era"⁵¹, calls for the UN to be at the core of the global governance system. China has become the second-largest contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget and the third largest contributor to the UN regular budget⁵². It is successfully lobbying for its nationals to obtain senior posts in the UN Secretariat and UN Agencies⁵³ and using its influence to press the UN and member states to acquiesce in China's preferences on issues such as human rights and Taiwan. Recent cases in point are ICAO and WHO vis-a-vis Taiwan⁵⁴. In geo-economic sphere, China has also pushed forward with creation of Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative fund to spread its influence through financing connectivity projects.

In sum, China has identified deepening the world's interdependence and integration in multiple domains as essential to its continued economic

growth and development, to the realization of national rejuvenation, and a source of global influence.⁵⁵ China is on a rapid path to amass all the required material capabilities of a major power to change the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region, and perhaps globally in the long-run.

c) Russia-China Entente

Under President Putin, Russia has returned as a global player, competing with the United States for influence. Russia has played a spoilsport at US-led initiatives in Syria, Venezuela, and North Korea⁵⁶. Russia has been leveraging the US-China strategic competition to bolster its own strategic competition with the US. Over the past decade, there has been a steady expansion of China's relative influence in Central Asia, Eastern and Central Europe, and Arctic. China, with close cooperation of Russia, has expanded its influence Central Asian Region through frameworks, like Belt and Road Initiative and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)⁵⁷. China has also expanded her influence in Russia's near abroad, the Eastern and Central European Countries with its 17 Plus One Partnership⁵⁸. Russia-China are cooperating in Far East and Arctic to develop energy, transportation, and telecommunications infrastructure⁵⁹.

To ameliorate the economic stress caused by Global Financial Crisis⁶⁰, Russia has deepened its cooperation with China, especially in the energy, military, and technology spheres. Russia and China concluded large-scale sale deals for oil and gas⁶¹. The economic stress was exacerbated by economic and secondary sanctions imposed by the US⁶² and

its allies⁶³ following the Russia-Ukraine conflict and use of Russian Active Measures Campaign and Interference in the 2016 US Presidential elections⁶⁴. These sanctions by the US and its allies further pushed Russia in China's embrace solidifying a Russia-China Entente. There has been an increased sale of advanced weaponry, like strategic missile defense, hypersonic weapons, high performance aircraft engines and nuclear-powered submarines to China⁶⁵. In the past years, China and Russia also increased joint military and naval exercises⁶⁶. To elevate their strategic cooperation, Russia and China have recently agreed to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era⁶⁷.

At multilateral front, Russia and China are expanding cooperation through international bodies to shape global rules and standards to their benefit and present a counterweight to the US and its allies⁶⁸. They have worked together in the APEC forum, the East Asia Summit, and the BRICS to align their interests. China and Russia also increased their influence in the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to shape global interest governance through key leadership appointments, financial and technical assistance⁶⁹.

In sum, Russia under President Putin is most likely going to leverage China-US strategic competition to its advantage. Russia will double down on its grey zones tactics and cyber warfare to challenge US dominance globally. Russia will remain in a quasi-alliance with China in the near term, but it is conceivable that US, supported by key allies like France, Germany and the UK, may be able to forge a new *Détente* with Russia as

US-China strategic competition intensifies in the medium to long-run.

d) India manages her strategic autonomy in world politics

India is the only leading power with potential material capabilities that can block China from seeking dominance over the Indo-Pacific. In the logic of Mackinder's Heartland Theory⁷⁰, the US strategic thinkers have concluded that China is building power projection capabilities by controlling the "World Island", and has the intention to threaten the Outer Island, i.e., the US. With this organizing principle of geo-politics in the Indo-Pacific, India is the only Rimland power (in Spykman's formulation⁷¹) that can potentially amass sufficient material capabilities to block China from seeking dominance over the Indo-Pacific and beyond. This has been the underlying geo-political logic that is driving the enhanced US's strategic cooperation with India. The Bush⁷², Obama⁷³, and the Trump⁷⁴ administrations have signed various strategic⁷⁵ and defense⁷⁶ partnership agreements to deepen the strategic cooperation with India. However, on trade and investments, the relationship has never been able to reach its desired potential⁷⁷. In the last few years, while US has imposed trade protectionist measures,⁷⁸ India has also increased import tariffs to protect her SMEs. Further, the slow pace of Indian economic reforms could create doubt in US strategic circles regarding India's ability to manage its power asymmetry with China. To summarize, the two countries have been making progress on strategic and military fronts but struggling to align their economic interests in a way that benefits both.

The bilateral relationship between India and China has grown more complex over the years with elements of both competition and cooperation. China-India bilateral trade touched USD 87.1 bn in FY19, with a trade deficit of USD 53.6 bn for India⁷⁹. India has raised serious objections to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as it directly impinges on the issue of sovereignty and territorial integrity of India⁸⁰. China has also used its diplomatic, financial, and military support to Pakistan to keep India off balance. Chinese investments in India's neighborhood with potential of using commercial ports for defense purposes by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has raised strategic concerns in New Delhi. India has also worked with US, Japan, and EU to raise issues of openness, transparency, and financial responsibility against the BRI⁸¹. The recent military confrontation between India and China at the LAC in Galwan Valley region has caused casualties of soldiers on both sides. The increased tensions in bilateral relations would lead to, in the short to medium term, hardening of Chinese and India's security posture along the LAC, in the Indo-Pacific, and strain the bilateral trade and investments.

On the multilateral front, India and China cooperate on several issues including trade, sovereignty and recently, even climate change. India has also joined AIIB, NDB and SCO. However, China has blocked India's membership to Nuclear Supplier' Group and not supported India's potential membership in the UN Security Council.

Broadly, the bilateral relations between Russia and India remained "business as usual" in the past decade. Informal Leaders' Summit and the

purchase of S400 by India has been the highpoint in strategic and security relationship between Russia and India. But Russia's increasing cooperation with China, including sale of advanced weaponry, has raised anxieties in strategic elites in New Delhi.

With intensifying competition between the US, China, and Russia, India, under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, has deftly exercised her strategic autonomy with each of three major powers. India has managed the US, China, and Russia primarily through a lens of a bilateral relationship, and so far, avoided bilateral relations to spill over each other. Although, India has also used trilateral groupings of Japan-America-India (JAI)⁸² and of Russia-India-China (RIC)⁸³ to counter-balance major powers. Direct diplomacy amongst Leaders, through Head of States Summits, has paid dividend for managing issues of strategic importance.

In sum, India's leadership and foreign policy machinery has demonstrated agency to make independent choices in US-China-Russia strategic competition. Significant diplomatic, financial, defense, and strategic investments are being made to shape the external environment for enhancing India's national interest.

4. COVID crisis as a tool for strategic competition among major powers

Shock to the global system caused by the Crisis is most likely going to alter the national and global order. While the Crisis is global in nature, there are three epicenters, namely, America, East-Asia, and Europe. The Crisis will greatly impact politics

and economics in these major powers (the US, China, and Russia) that are driving global politics. The three major powers are using the Crisis as an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage more so than enhancing cooperation. The decisions made by these leaders in the coming days has the potential to reshape world politics and the existing national and global order.

a) United States

At the time of writing this article, the unfolding COVID crisis in US has led to more than two million cases with 118,205 Americans dead.

With the US economy in recession due to COVID crisis⁸⁴, the Federal Reserve⁸⁵ and Congress⁸⁶ were forced to pump-in more than USD 4 trillion to absorb the economic pain. More than 22 million Americans have lost their jobs⁸⁷ in the month of April as the coronavirus pandemic has swept across the US. As per the Federal Reserve estimates, job losses could total 47 million, with unemployment rate rising to as high as 32 per cent⁸⁸.

I. Perceived success or failure of governments in managing the Crisis:

At the current death toll, COVID-19 has killed more Americans than both First World War and the Vietnam War⁸⁹. Job losses and economic stress has also brought about huge public frustration and anger, expressed through (social) media and on the streets, making strong calls for reopening of the economy. The Trump Administration^{90,91} and member of the US Congress^{92,93} are blaming China and WHO to deflect the blame of any perceived mismanagement of the Crisis. State of Missouri

has filed a lawsuit against China in Federal Court⁹⁴ while “China hand” behind the spread of COVID pandemic in the US is most likely going to be a popular bumper sticker during the upcoming Presidential elections. Both Trump and Biden are already trying to shore up their anti-China credentials to solidify their support among voters. The Global Engagement Center of the State Department has reported⁹⁵ that China and Russia are using the Crisis to launch a propaganda and disinformation onslaught against the US. Such efforts may intensify as Presidential elections come closer. Depending on how Americans perceive the success or failure of their government institutions⁹⁶ in managing the Crisis, the voters will determine the outcome of the Presidential elections come November⁹⁷. No matter who wins the elections, a hard China policy seems to be in the offing.

II. Exploiting the Crisis response measures for gains in global politics:

“America First” and “China Hawks” band together during the Crisis. China hawks in the Trump administration (Wilbur Ross, Peter Navarro and Mike Pompeo) have started using the Crisis as an opportunity to push for nationalistic measures, like high import tariffs, suspending immigration, “Buy America” executive order for public procurement of medical supplies⁹⁸, and fiscal measures to support re-localization of manufacturing and supply chains⁹⁹. Strict measures are being contemplated to curb the flow of Chinese investments in the US and her capital markets¹⁰⁰. The administration is speculated to be crafting renewed import tariffs that would be applied to

Chinese imports in retaliation¹⁰¹. This could jeopardize the Phase One trade deal reached with China. The threat of sanctions by using Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 may also intensify in coming months¹⁰². Adding to its continued “maximum pressure campaign”¹⁰³, the Trump administration is also exploiting vulnerabilities of Iran during the Crisis, by blocking a USD 5 billion loan from the IMF¹⁰⁴. Iran is a key BRI partner of China in the Middle East¹⁰⁵. As far as NATO members are concerned, the economic stress caused by the Crisis is likely to reduce their ability to meet the 2% expenditure commitment for defense spending. This will again put NATO allies, like Germany in crosshairs with Trump. However, it is worth noting that depressed economic growth in the US may lead to another sequestration of defense budget as was enacted by Obama administration to manage the impacts of the Global Financial Crisis¹⁰⁶.

The US is building a coalition to shape global narrative on China’s mismanagement of the Crisis. The Trump administration, working with its Allies like the EU¹⁰⁷, UK¹⁰⁸ and Australia, is making strong calls for a global independent investigation into the origins of COVID 19 virus and mismanagement by China in handling the Crisis. The US is also trying to build a coalition of countries to support sanctions against China for their alleged mismanagement of the Crisis. In the coming months and years, the US would push its Allies and Partners in Europe and Asia to take a hard stand against technologies and investments from China. Domestic politics in her Allies in Europe is likely to take a sharp turn against China as countries battle

impacts of the Crisis. With massive deaths toll, leaders in the UK, Germany, and France have also expressed angst in the media against mismanagement of the Crisis by China. This could further deepen the divide among Eastern European Countries (the 17 plus one) which have received BRI investments and the western Europeans countries (Germany and France) and the UK.

III. Perceived failure of multilateral system in responding to Crisis:

US scrutiny of multilateral institutions, especially UN and its agencies, for their China bias will be intensifying in the coming years. Termination of US aid, doubling down of financial and diplomatic support by China, to WHO show the signs of how the US and China are going to fight for dominance at the UN and its agencies moving forward. The Trump Administration efforts in the past three years to make substantial aid cuts to the UN and its agencies could finally push through the US Congress. On the other hand, at international financial intuitions like IMF, WB and MDBs, led by the US and Europe, have stepped up financial assistance to developing countries to counter-balance Chinese assistance under BRI. The US and EU would prefer to keep their hold on these institutions and avoid any governance reforms to provide any greater role to China. Given the purely nationalistic response by the Trump administration, it seems unlikely that the US would lead any multilateral response of the Crisis. The US is also not participating in a pledging “marathon”, led by European Union, Norway, Japan, Canada, China, and Saudi Arabia- to raise

at least \$8 billion for research into a possible vaccine and treatments for the coronavirus¹⁰⁹.

To summarize, the unprecedented human suffering and economic pain caused by COVID crisis are likely to force leaders in the US to take strong measures against China in the coming years. The Crisis could turn out to be the defining moment in forcing US-China competition over the cliff into a very spirited rivalry across economic, technological, and security domains of global geopolitics. The US is likely to expedite efforts to de-couple from China, particularly in the technological domain. Additional tariffs and protectionist measures may be employed to shift supply chains and re-shoring of some critical manufacturing capacity. Given domestic political implications of the Crisis, US allies in Europe and Asia are likely to support a hard China Policy. However, there is a serious risk that further economic decoupling could slow growth in US, its allies, and China, and in the process, increasing security competition in Indo-Pacific.

b) China

Not only there is uncertainty about the accuracy of the death toll and COVID cases in China, there is also an impending risk of a second wave of positive cases. China's National Bureau of Statistics has stated that Chinese economy is going through its first ever contraction in the past 40 years with quarter one GDP down 6.8 per cent from a year earlier with exports bearing the brunt¹¹⁰. For the year 2020, China's GDP is expected to grow at 1.2 per cent, its slowest rate since 1976¹¹¹. Significant fiscal and monetary measures

that have been swiftly enacted by CCP and People Bank of China (PBOC) injected 1.2 trillion yuan into the financial system to soften economic stress and revive the sectors that are badly impacted by the Crisis. In the coming years, suppressed external demand and global recession may lead to a slight slowdown of Chinese economy¹¹².

I. Perceived success or failure of governments in managing the Crisis:

The Crisis has not turned out to be "China's Chernobyl"¹¹³. The government imposed strict containment measures, the lockdown of Hubei province, along with large-scale mobility restrictions at the national level to contain the spread of COVID-19. This slowed the domestic transmission of the virus significantly, resulting in the removal of severe mobility restrictions¹¹⁴. Compared to other countries, China has broadly managed the crisis more effectively¹¹⁵ especially through an effective use of surveillance technologies, powered by big data, and artificial intelligence¹¹⁶. Given the results they have yielded, not to mention a more developed understanding of its potential, such measures are likely to enhance the CCP's ambition for perfecting its surveillance apparatus. Apart from panic during the initial period of the virus' outbreak, there has been no national outcry against President Xi's leadership or CCP's management of the COVID crisis. There are hardly any signs of a challenge to President XI's leadership¹¹⁷ or his control over the CCP and of the PLA¹¹⁸. Finally, the optics of President Xi's tours of the provinces¹¹⁹ have helped project an imagery of control over crisis response efforts.

It is also projected that economic recovery in China is more likely to be faster and broad-based than any other economies in G20¹²⁰. China has huge public and private debt. This diminishes potential for a large monetary stimulus like what was offered by PBOC after the Global Financial Crisis. Beijing has sent clear signals that future policy responses to mitigate the impacts of Crisis will largely be fiscal support¹²¹. The State Council is planning to provide financial support for the construction of “new infrastructure” projects such as big data centers and 5G networks in order to spur China’s economic recovery in the post Crisis-era.¹⁶⁷ Subsidies for production of electric vehicles may be forthcoming.¹⁶⁸ By providing fiscal support for prioritized industries, President Xi is likely to strengthen State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and advance Made in China 2025 agenda. Fiscal stimulus measures will further expand the role of SOEs in Chinese economic in a post—Crisis era.

The Crisis will likely not have a disruptive impact on supply chain linkages with China. US-China Business Council has concluded that diversification and some redundancy in supply chains may happen in the coming years¹²² but it’s highly unlikely that there will be wholesale rush of exits by companies doing business in China. The fragmentation of supply chains may have reached a peak in 2019 for four reasons — automation and 3D printing, delivery time, customization, and protectionism¹²³. The Crisis is likely to increase the pace of digital globalization, with more financial flows and investments, and less products moving across continents. Despite strong calls by the US and allies for more regionalized and diversified

supply chains, it is more likely that only low-cost manufacturing supply chains would shift from China to other countries in South-East and South Asia¹²⁴. However, some re-shoring of manufacturing capacity and stockpiling of essential commodities is likely to happen in the US and its allies in the post-Crisis era.

II. Exploiting the Crisis response measures for gains in global politics:

BRI has taken on a new avatar of a Health Silk Road¹²⁵. China has been offering medical supplies, equipment, and expertise to 82 countries, WHO and African Union¹²⁶ to strengthen further its credentials¹²⁷. Propaganda apparatus of CCP¹²⁸ and the Foreign Ministry¹²⁹ is in full swing to portray China as a global savior and to push back against any attempts to blame China for the origin or mismanagement of the Crisis. China is also using its economic coercion tools to suppress any criticism¹³⁰ of mismanagement of the Crisis.

Like post Global Financial Crisis, China is likely to exploit public and private sector debt situation in Eastern & Central European and Asian countries for strategic share purchases in key infrastructure sectors¹³¹. The economic coercion tools used by China, coupled with active measures through enhanced cyber capabilities by Russia, could further weaken the EU cohesion. China will most likely aim to leverage the period of low oil and commodity prices to boost domestic consumption and buffer its strategic reserves. Increased oil and LNG imports from Russia may further strengthen China-Russia cooperation.

China-US media and propaganda war for

shaping domestic and global narrative on the origin of COVID -19 and Crisis response management will only intensify. Analysis by a leading Chinese institution, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), has concluded that global anti-China sentiment, led by the US, is at its highest since the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown. As a result, Beijing needs to be prepared in the worst-case scenario for armed a confrontation between the two major powers¹³².

President Trump wants China to deliver on the Phase One Trade deal to bolster his anti-China credential before domestic audience for electoral gains. While China is likely to implement the Deal¹³³, the situation can quickly worsen if US imposes additional tariffs on China¹³⁴ in response to perceived mismanagement of the Crisis.

For continued signaling of her geopolitical ambitions, China is not shying away from flexing its muscles in the Indo-Pacific region. It has increased border skirmishes at multiple fronts along the LAC with India, flew flying bombers in Taiwan Straits, and displayed the use of unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) in the Indian Ocean. Following US State Department Report,¹³⁵ there were speculation of China having tested a low-impact nuclear device even though such claims have been strongly rebuffed by Beijing¹³⁶.

III. Perceived failure of multilateral system in responding to Crisis:

China is likely to double down on efforts to gain influence in the multilateral institutions, including the UN and its various agencies. It has provided a total of USD 50 million to WHO to

support the global fight against Covid-19 and strengthen developing countries' health systems. In a snub to the US, a new tranche of USD 30 million was provided following a decision by the Trump Administration to withhold its aid to WHO. At a bilateral level, China, as part of G20 debt service suspension initiative¹³⁷, has also agreed for suspension of debt service payments for the poorest countries that request forbearance. A debt restructuring deal for BRI countries may also be in the making.

In short, relatively faster economic recovery in post-Crisis era is most likely going to only boost China's geopolitical ambitions. With enhanced role of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) through fiscal support measures, China will likely remain on track for realizing its Made in China Vision 2025, civil-military fusion and BRI initiatives. Russian and China strategic cooperation is also likely to be strengthened. All these trends point to an intense strategic competition between China and US leading to a fierce geopolitical rivalry in the Indo-Pacific.

c) Russia

At the time of writing this article, Russia has over half a million positive COVID cases and 8000 deaths¹³⁸. Moscow has been the epicenter of the Crisis, but the cases are on rapid rise across the country. Kremlin and regional governments have stepped up efforts to manage the Crisis.

I. Perceived success or failure of governments in managing the Crisis:

If the Crisis deepens in Russia, President Putin

could suffer a loss in public support, leading to a hardening of the Russian authoritarian model. Kremlin has imposed a partial lockdown across Russia. The Crisis has delayed the constitutional referendum scheduled for April 22 that would have allowed President Putin to extend his rule until 2036¹³⁹. Russia's planned measures to fight the new coronavirus pandemic will be worth around 2.8% of its gross domestic product to support direct budget spending, tax cuts and tax breaks and direct state support for firms and households¹⁴⁰. The global economic recession caused by the Crisis has significantly reduced oil demand and prices are likely to remain low for a few years¹⁴¹. Fossil fuels account for over 60% of Russian exports¹⁴², so reduced energy export earnings will put an enormous strain on the economy. The oil shock has increased volatility, both in the stock market and the currency market¹⁴³. Although Russia has built a financial war-chest in the past years through increased saving, banking sector reforms and inflation targeting, financial reserves may not last beyond one or two years¹⁴⁴.

II. *Exploiting the Crisis response measures for gains in global politics:*

Russia is likely to continue its disinformation campaigns in the US and Europe in order to undermine trust in governments. The European External Action Services (EEAS) have already accused the country of disinformation operations related to the COVID-19¹⁴⁵. Exploiting vulnerabilities in countries in Eastern Europe, Moscow may further increase efforts to destabilize governments and weaken the EU. On other hand, through diplomatic efforts, the country has also

been making a plea at the UN¹⁴⁶ and G20¹⁴⁷ for lifting international sanctions to ease economic pain. Its supply of urgent medical supplies to Italy and the US seem to be part of the same effort. However, domestic politics in EU and the US make it highly unlikely to allow for any relief in the near term.

Under these circumstances, and as Russia battles the impacts of the Crisis, Russia-China Entente may evolve into a formal Alliance which can lead to further worsening of Russia-US relations. It is speculated that in recent telephonic conversations between President Putin and President Trump, they have discussed sanctions relief, energy markets situation and START arms reduction *treaty*. However, no apparent signs are visible for any potential any sanctions relief. It is worth noting that the Trump administration has made a firm condition to include China in the new START treaty negotiations. This would further complicate security dynamics between the three major powers. With severe economic impacts of the Crisis Russia may go further into the Chinese fold and sign up to large-scale deals for hydrocarbons and advanced weaponry. This strengthening of the Sino-Russian axis would complicate the American military posture in the Pacific and European theaters.

In short, it is more likely that impacts of the Crisis will bring Russia and China in closer strategic cooperation and they may forge a formal Alliance that would complicate global politics and create more security challenges for the US and its allies.

5. Strategic choices for India

India has so far managed the COVID crisis

much better than her peers. Early implementation of flight restrictions and nation-wide lockdown measures have helped India manage the spread of the virus. While human death toll may be limited, collapse of economic activity due to various restrictions imposed would mean a slow economic recovery, sharp drop in export earnings and international remittances (by 23 per cent from \$83 billion last year to \$64 billion)¹⁴⁸, drop in FDI and capital outflows in the coming months¹⁴⁹ and may remain low for an indefinite period. Reserve Bank of India¹⁵⁰ and Finance Ministry¹⁵¹ have taken various robust steps to stabilize and support households, businesses, and the financial system, but for an economy that was already limping before the Crisis hits its shores, this does not bear good news.

The Crisis response measures taken under the decisive leadership of PM Modi, firmly established his credentials as a strong leader globally. The PM has taken timely and tough decisions and got them implemented effectively. These decisions coupled with past decisions on Demonetization, Balakot strike, revocation of Article 370, and more recent display of strength and resolve during India-China border clash at the LAC in Galwan Valley region have once again demonstrated his qualities as a strong Leader. This offers the PM significant currency to navigate the headwinds of global geopolitics with confidence. India should maintain its strategic autonomy as pressure mounts from the US and its allies to support a global campaign against China for alleged mismanagement of the Crisis.

India's leadership at the Executive Board of the WHO, and selection as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council is likely to create near term policy dilemma¹⁵².

The Crisis would sharpen the strategic competition between the US, China and Russia and expedite the pace and scope of competition to cover all domains of statecraft. This could shrink the strategic autonomy space for India to strike bargains with US, China, and Russia. While GST and other recent policy initiatives have been in the right direction, the policymakers must hasten the implementation of hard reforms on a war-footing to revive and grow the economy in the coming years. Under the current situation, the country must stand ready with supportive and predictable enabling environment to reap the benefits of any mass corporate exodus out of China.

Efforts are also needed on geo-economic, security and political domains as well to strengthen the capabilities of the State and its bureaucratic machinery to manage the expected surge in competition amongst US, China, and Russia for geopolitical dominance.

In the evolving global politics shaped by the Crisis, India's policy makers are faced with a set of strategic choices pertaining to economic, security and strategic considerations. The decision made by India's Policymakers to reap the potential opportunities arising in post-Crisis era:

a. Strengthening security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

In the post Crisis era, contest between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific is most likely going to intensify with the US more likely expected to use strategic and security agreements with India to create dilemmas for the country's military. It is also likely to push India harder to play a larger role as a net security provider in the region.

I. *Enhanced maritime cooperation with the US allies:*

India should leverage the domestic political compulsions among US' NATO allies, like France, Germany, and the UK, for a tougher stance on China and craft a broader strategy to engage Russia in the Indo-Pacific. It could further strength maritime cooperation with France and the UK and hold joint naval exercises with the UK in western Indian Ocean region with the goal to balance US' demand for the role of a net security provider in the region.

II. *Expedite defense modernization efforts:*

Together with expediting the defense expenditure reform, the government needs to expeditiously implement CDS's plan¹⁵³ for reducing defense forces personnel strength while modernizing the defense forces. Measures to reduce military spending on personnel and social benefits would increase financial headroom for modernizing military and procurement of advanced weapons.

III. *Safeguard energy security:*

The US may double down on its maximum pressure tactics on Iran to exploit her vulnerabilities during and post Crisis era, not to mention the increased maritime tensions in the South China Sea with China. The heightened maritime conflict environment could increase the specter of naval blockades in Strait of Hormuz and Straits of Malacca. India has strategic oil reserves for only 9 days, and under these potential developments, it should aim to expand its strategic reserves capacity

and lock- in long-term oil and LNG contracts with Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Russia.

b. *Leveraging shifting global politics for economic growth*

Domestically, it would be opportune now for the PM to use his political capital to enact strong reform measures to revive economic growth post Crisis. Real economic opportunities are also expected to arise from domestic political pressures in the US and its allies to reduce dependence and vulnerabilities to China.

The US and its allies are providing fiscal incentives for shifting part of supply chains out of China and stockpiling of critical supplies. In a low interest rate and low-growth environment in the US and its allies, capital flows will also be chasing high-investment grade opportunities in emerging markets.

Crisis has also fast-tracked digitization of economies with large-scale adoption of work-from-home technologies, heightened activity on customer-facing networks, and greater use of online services. This rapid growth in digital economy will also increase vulnerabilities to cyber-attacks which also creates potential opportunities in cyber security sector. The US and allies have been looking for cyber workforce to safeguard its critical infrastructure. The heightened anxieties about China may provide an opportunity to India to offer such a trusted cyber workforce. The speed and effectiveness with which India taps into these "new economy growth opportunities" to revive growth will have far reaching implications for India on both domestic and global geopolitical front.

I. Cashing the digital acceleration:

To cash into extreme acceleration in digital economy, the Govt. can forge an aggressive strategy with India's IT giants for expanding services export. IT industry could build and offer cybersecurity workforce to respond to the global demand. No other country can offer such skilled, tested, and reliable workforce. The Govt. could also position India as a big and curated data generator for AI and related applications which has huge commercial value; promote technologies for offering personalized services at scale.

Enabling policy and institutional environment: The Union Budget 2020¹⁵⁴ has allocated USD 2 billion for IT enabled new economy measures and for National Mission on Quantum Technologies and Applications. Report of the Steering Committee on Fintech Related Issues¹⁵⁵ by the Finance Ministry offers excellent recommendations to drive economic growth in the ear of fast-tracked digitization of economies. The New, Emerging and Strategic technologies (NEST) division in MEA could take lead in striking strategic bargains with the US and its allies to open new business opportunities for Indian IT giants.

II. Shifting of supply chains and investment flows:

Unless there is a strong push from the government, it is highly unlikely that any supply chains, capital flows and investments moving out of China would naturally shift to India. The Govt. can strengthen the mandate of Invest India to actively engage with global brands to attract supply chain that may be moving out of China. A joint Task force of National Infrastructure Investment

Fund (NIIF) and Invest India can be created to actively seek Sovereign Wealth Funds from Middle East and Nordic countries for high-quality pipeline infrastructure projects. The government can work with RBI to issue Diaspora bonds to offset a drop-in remittance flow. Diaspora bonds could also be linked to financing infrastructure projects. Finally, the government needs to create a system to foster competition amongst Indian PSUs on the lines of Chinese SOEs' model.

Enabling environment: Report of the High-level Advisory Group¹⁵⁶, by Minister of Commerce and Industry, offers excellent recommendations to shore up exports and capture global investments. Report of the Task Force for New Infrastructure pipeline¹⁵⁷.

III. Stockpiling of critical supplies:

The US and its Allies will be re-shoring manufacturing of critical supplies, including pharmaceuticals and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (APIs). Government can provide fiscal incentives to pharmaceutical and bio-genomic industries - to push for innovations in generics, bio-pharma, and genetic engineering.

c. Strengthening geo-economic toolkit

Competition for influence by US and China at the UN and its Agencies will intensify in coming years. India could consider making strategic investment for expanding influence in global financial institutions, like IMF, WB and MDBs. This will continue to bring much needed long-term investments in India on one hand and open-up new trade and co-investment opportunities for the Indian industries in other developing countries. Expand

partnership with WB and MDBs will also pay dividends as India prepares to host the G20 in 2022. Some specific opportunities to strengthen the Govt.'s geo-economic toolkit are as follows:

- Seeking membership in Inter-American, and Caribbean Development Banks could also enhance trade engagement opportunities in Latin America.
- Strengthening the balance sheet of EXIM Bank and expanding its mandate for co-financing investments in connectivity projects with MDBs will also help in expanding exports.
- In debt driven scenario in Africa, make targeted efforts to turn soft power into investment opportunities for Indian companies for connectivity projects; Work with the US, UK, Germany and France to jointly finance projects in Asia - Africa Growth Corridor.
- Working with France, Germany, and the UK, through the Alliance for Multilateralism, strengthen the ISA and the CDRI, for establishing leadership on the global climate change agenda.
- With Russia undergoing economic stress, there may be opportunities for India to secure long-term oil and LNG contracts. India could also explore purchasing advanced weapons from Russia.

Enabling policy and institutional environment: The Finance Minister announced in 2019-20 budget speech that the government is look at revamping Indian Development Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) and exploring alternative development models which include private sector equity, multilateral financing, contributions from corporates, non-residents. The Ministry of Finance and Ministry of External Affairs could conduct a joint review of India's strategic positioning at the UN and IFIs. Strengthening strategy and policy planning capabilities in PMO, MEA and DEA through lateral entry of experts from academia, private sector, and multilateral organizations.

d. New model of economic cooperation with China

Intensifying strategic competition between China and the US in the post-Crisis ear may offer a strategic opening to India. While the current India-China border clash would lead to strain in bilateral relations across the security, trade and investment domains, in the near to medium term, there may be a strategic opportunity to explore a grand bargain with China to reorient bilateral economic cooperation while managing its security competition along the LAC, and in the Indo-Pacific region. The economic cooperation framework used by Japan and China in the 1970s may offer useful insights to Indian Policymakers.

Acknowledgement: *The author would like to greatly appreciate review feedback on the Article provided by Mr. Hemang Jani (former aide to Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, and currently serving as a Senior Private Sector Specialist, the World Bank) and Mr. Abhishek Bhaskar (Senior Energy Specialist, the World Bank).*

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Geo-strategic and Geo-political Opportunities for India

*Air Marshal Sumit Mukerji

Introduction

The spread of the Corona virus across the world has seemingly brought life to a standstill. After the initial detection, the probable effect of the contagion was not only inaccurately gauged, the urgency to stem the spread did not manifest itself to some of the educated and economically well-established countries. The devastating impact of the virus ripped through Italy and the rest of Europe, into Africa and now threatens to bring the United States of America down to its knees. The origin of the Corona virus, also known as the COVID-19, has more or less been identified as Wuhan, a teeming industrial and commercial city in Wuhei Province of China. A hub centre of extensive commercial activity, it has always had a stream of businessmen and tourists passing in and out at a frenetic pace. The highly successful commercial centre with global business reach provided the ideal core which could spread an infection across the world, its human traffic acting as carriers, as they pursued their business interests across countries.

While conspiracy theories abound and continue to proliferate, about China having unleashed biological war on the world, history will record the findings and apportion the blame. It is not without justification that China is being blamed for the spread. The fact that after the initial

detection, its presence was attempted to be suppressed and once the spread started, the medium of transmission was underplayed which resulted in the escalation of the epidemic to a pandemic of colossal stature, wreaking death and debilitation to the people of every country. The fact that China and especially Wuhan, has recovered remarkably and is pushing to rekindle its economy while the rest of the world flounders, has alienated China in the geo-strategic and geo-political domains. The physical encapsulation of the public has restricted the quantum of work that can be generated without human presence, resulting in sharp strictures to industry and the consequent crippling effect on the economy.

Impact on the World

As the effect of the Corona virus subsumed the economies of the countries afflicted, the plummeting stock markets painted a bleak picture for the future. The effect, which in fact has not played out fully as yet, has required the governments to tap into their monetary reserves to sustain the population, ravaged with a jobless horizon. The infusion of billions of dollars for sustenance and survival has been necessitated to get the economy to revive at a later date by preserving humanity. The economic crash will have its effect across all spectrums, including the military

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and its potential capability to sustain a conflict. There is no doubt that the world can only limp back to its platform and it will be licking its wounds for a long, long time.

What this huge pandemic and its enfeebling effect has surely ensured is that the world order will never be the same again. Globalisation and a unipolar world with the United States as its leading player is going to be a thing of the past. The driving power, the economy, and its growth, post such a turbulence, will determine who comes out ahead. The picture is becoming clear. While Russia seemingly has not buckled, China definitely has its feet on the ground and has started moving ahead. The countries that are likely to recover reasonably are Japan, South Korea, India and Israel.

Geopolitics and Geo-strategy

Geopolitics, a Darwinian game of survival of the fittest, has no place for the weak and infirm. As the powers that be wax and wane, so also the sine curve of geopolitics courses through history. It is also a natural fallout of power balances that entities tend to secure themselves through friendships and alliances. There is no doubt that this will certainly happen, opening doors hitherto thought closed, offering succour to the needy and providing a supporting platform for revival. It has also strengthened the hands for some. The United States, for many years, had been wooing India. And for a reason. The far-sighted strategists realised that in Asia, with the strife torn Middle East and China steadily building its potential, India, as a non-aligned democratic nation provided a ballast. Thus, India's strategic tilt towards the United States in the last decade, from its old (Soviet)

Russia leanings, came as a windfall and consequently paid dividends in many spheres for India. The concerted drive to achieve a strategic relationship finally paid off, cementing a bond hitherto lacking which certainly has portents of a crucial union. The United States now has a friend sitting at the soft under-belly of a likely threat – China. Further strengthening the relationship, the United States has taken a huge step to re-name its Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command. While this relates more to its areas of interest to include the Indian Ocean, India, as a major player in the region gains significance.

China's Strategic Posture

China's relentless pursuit of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to develop connectivity across Eurasia, has now enveloped the Maritime Silk Road, a revival of its famous and historic commercial trade passage of ancient times, developed by the Han Dynasty. As the maritime equivalent of the overland routes, the Maritime Silk Road was the precursor of what we know today as the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC). Chartered in the modern era to cater to the draught of large and heavy cargo vessels, they are largely synonymous with those chartered thousands of years ago. The Maritime Silk Road is also designed for the far-east (mainly China) to carry out business and commerce with SE Asia, the Indian Sub-Continent, Arabian Peninsula and Europe. It necessitates transit through the Indian Ocean. Over 60 per cent of all the merchandise and trade in the world passes through the Indian Ocean, accounting for over 50 per cent of GDP of the nations in the region. Therefore, the SLOCs

constitute the economic lifeline for the far east and the management and security of these take on vital importance for all stakeholders dependent on them. The Maritime Silk Road also passes through the South China Sea. China's economic and military potential has been steadily growing and surpassing that of most other countries, including the United States. This potential, with added exposure of the military to strategies employed by other major powers (through internet and exercises beyond their borders) has had a vital impact on future of their power projection. Restructuring the military with an added emphasis on modernising the Air Force and Navy, China is developing its military for autonomous deployed operations. Its power projection in the South China Sea (SCS) has caused significant discomfort to the US Navy operating in those waters and the newly improved Chinese Navy's (PLAN) forays into the Indian Ocean has raised a lot of concerns in the region.

The Indo-Pacific

President Obama's 'pivot' in the (then) Asia-Pacific which rebalanced and realigned military forces to increase their focus to the Indian Ocean and the adjoining Pacific (which today constitutes the Indo-Pacific) was primarily to emphasise the importance of the region, which he (rightly) predicted as the economic and therefore strategic centre of gravity of the world of the future. Critics are of the opinion that the US' Air-Sea Battle Doctrine, rolled out at the time of the pivot, aggravated and energised China into upgrading its military and adopting an aggressive posture. History will decide whether President Donald Trump's reversal of policy was the right decision.

The consequent moves by China in the South China Sea and in the Indian Ocean definitely point to a more domineering attitude with a definite strategic intent. While Japan and the SE Asian countries felt the Chinese pressure in the area of the SCS, India started feeling hedged in and encircled on two counts. Firstly, to the north and west China started establishing itself with a tentacle of the BRI, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Secondly, China's access to a series of ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Djibouti (termed as 'String of Pearls') using its soft power modus operandi. There is no doubt in anybody's mind that China's growing footprint in the geopolitical space of the region and its aggressive posture are all directed towards power projection and attempting to establish itself at pole position as the world's primary super power.

The Quad and its Relevance

The unsteady Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD), which included the United States, Japan and Australia, expanded its scope to include India (acknowledging its strategic relevance, with its strategic partnership with the US acting as a catalyst, no doubt) and renamed it the Quadrilateral Dialogue or Quad. The four countries formed a core group in the wake of the horrific tsunami which devastated large portions of SE Asia in 2004. Having been brought together to address a catastrophe, the purpose of the coordination was to create a resource group which would be able to effectively respond to any Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) contingencies that may arise in the future. The success of the 2004 coordination led to the

suggestion of creating the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a grouping of nations with a common humanitarian purpose. The charter envisaged for the Quad was restricted within the bounds of regional issues, which would be possible if there were a free and open Indo-Pacific.

In the following eight years, the noticeable change in regional stability caused by China's territorial claims and off-shore infrastructural developments, the emphasis on the Nine-Dash-Line and a scant acknowledgement of a rules based system in the region prompted the Quad to reunite, of sorts. But the lull in this period was taken up by many bilateral and some trilateral dialogues and exchanges which kept the four countries engaged with each other, though not as a unified entity. Thus, the coming together to strive for a common strategic policy has been gradual and not really consistent. But in the back of everyone's mind it was evident that the areas of China's forays, which were creating contentious issues, were within the 'diamond' formed by the location of the four nations of the Quad. Predictably, China complained that the Quad was a move to contain China and started using its economic and soft powers to influence the nations within the diamond, especially prominent countries such as South Korea and Indonesia. It strongly emphasised the need and importance of ASEAN centrality, a major binding factor in regional geopolitics, suggesting a threat of dilution of the ASEAN with the introduction of the Quad in the same region.

Geo-strategic Tilt

There are certain issues which could bring in a change in the geo-strategic and geopolitical

scenario in the region. Coercive actions by China have contributed to a heightening of tensions with respect to India. The Doklam face off was precipitated as a result of direct military coercive action. Intentionally blocking India from membership into the Nuclear Suppliers Group left an acerbic atmosphere between the two. China's coercive maritime moves in the vicinity of Japan's Senkaku Islands has heightened tensions in that area and the presence of Chinese warplanes also intruding Japanese air space has resulted in the Japanese Self Defence Force priming its military to higher states of training and readiness. The exposure of covert business deals in Australia involving high level officials has left a scar on China's business ethics and standing in the regional space. China's aggressive theatrics in the South China Sea have steadily increased and have now taken on dangerous portents. The aggressive nature of the Chinese to assert their historic boundaries up to the Nine Dash Line which impinges on the EEZs of other nation states and the upgradation of the PLA (Navy) with aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines has made the United States take a second look at the geo-strategic situation in the region. Efforts to introduce the F-35 stealth fighters into Japan and South Korea have been intensified as also the US naval presence in the area of the SCS.

The world is reeling under the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economies have taken a severe beating. Recovery from this is a long-drawn process, especially for the United States. Rapidly losing its pole position as the lone super-power, the US will have difficulty in managing its vastly spread expeditionary forces

and make its impact on the world stage. With a weakening NATO in the post COVID-19 Europe, Brexit leaving the region in further turmoil, the scenario in the western world is not healthy. This is a time for the US to climb down from its pedestal and support alliances which could take the load off its shoulders. The changed geo-strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific offers an opportunity for the Quad to reinforce its dialogue and maybe consider a shift in its charter. While the Quad was not designed to ‘contain’ China in its basic structure, geo-strategic imbalance can surely be considered as a reason for rethinking the options. The early suggestions that the Quad may become an Asian NATO could actually become a possibility if China’s aggressive outlook in the region and its covert hegemonist ideas continue unabated. This is an opportune moment for India to assert itself in the Quad to take on a more responsible role. The present government’s diplomatic engagements have earned great respect for Prime Minister Modi and the country at large. Bilateral and trilateral engagements with members of the Quad have also brought recognition to the Indian Armed Forces.

Indian Ocean Region Concerns

The sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) traversing the Indian Ocean, as mentioned earlier, constitute the lifeline to the East, inasmuch as they carry all the energy resources from the middle-east to the nations in east and south-east Asia. The importance of these SLOCs cannot be overemphasised and their importance and therefore security take on great significance. Since the SLOCs constitute supply lines for all countries, they

should be considered relatively safe but extraneous factors could prove otherwise. The countries inclusive in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) have enjoyed a peaceful and cordial coexistence with relatively no threat to their status quo. While pirates have pillaged ships on the high seas from time immemorial, the advent of terrorists and non-state actors have added to the security concerns in the region.

Over the past few decades, China has slowly but steadily utilised its soft power diplomacy to acquire naval footholds in the Indian Ocean. Overtly but surreptitiously, they have not only established themselves but have their hosts committed in debt to ensure their continued presence. Notwithstanding capability, no country can afford naval vessels operating in the high seas for protracted periods of time. The need for rest and resupply are a paramount necessity. The periodic acquisition of ports in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Djibouti have ensured China a composite straddling or access to any part of the Indian Ocean for its Navy. Result, a steady stream of PLA (Navy) ships now operate in the Indian Ocean. This extra-regional presence has disturbed the status quo in the IOR and has emerged as a matter of concern. While China would also be concerned about the security of the SLOCs and their energy source, the presence of PLA (Navy) ships throws up concerns of militarisation of the IOR. From the time (then) Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh stated that India’s area of interest stretches from the Straits of Hormuz in the west to the Straits of Malacca in the east, India was committed to its participation in the goings-on in the Indian Ocean.

Taking a major stride in diplomatic strategy,

India made its move in the Indian Ocean Region. In a speech delivered in Mauritius in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined what he described would be India's vision for the Indian Ocean Region. Under the acronym, SAGAR or "Security and Growth for All in the Region," he elaborated that SAGAR will provide a framework for strategic action. He went on to suggest five components which would constitute the charter of SAGAR as under:-

- (a) **Security.** Safeguard national territory and maritime boundaries and defend national interests. Use India's capability and resources to provide HADR in the region.
- (b) **Capability Building.** Enhance security and economic cooperation with nations in the region.
- (c) **Collective Action.** To deepen mutual understanding and strengthen regional mechanisms, there would be a need for collective action.
- (d) **Sustainable Development.** Promote greater commerce, investment and tourism, infrastructure development and protection of the marine environment.
- (e) **Maritime Engagement.** Create a climate of trust and transparency, be sensitive to each other's interests and resolve maritime issues amicably, while ensuring security from extra-regional interference.

It is not possible for India to push the agenda of SAGAR on its own. The collective support of all the representative nations would be necessary. The idea of SAGAR has been well received and provides an additional forum for dialogue in the

Indo-Pacific region. To promote SAGAR, a platform for interaction and dialogue has been provided in the form of the annual Indian Ocean Conference (IOC), initiated by India with wide participation from all rim countries of the IOR. Commenced with the inaugural conference in Singapore 2016, the essence of the conference is "to deliberate on building an institutional framework for managing the threats to regional peace and security through strengthening of multi-lateral cooperate, based on mutual respect, equality and supported by international law." The conference has found wide attendance and participation and provides leverage to SAGAR.

Conclusion

The horrific and cataclysmic effect of the Corona virus on the world has crippled the economies of virtually every country, leading to the possibility of a world recession, the likes of which have never been seen before. 'Where' and 'When' this virus emanated has been identified but the 'How' and 'Why' remain unanswered. The uncanny effect on countries with certain profiles and status have led to many conspiracy theories which not only abound but continue to proliferate. Pandemics that rip through civilisations leave a trail of death and debilitation which, because of the work force being affected, tends to cripple industry and economies of states. Buckling under financial crises, having to pump in reserves for bare essentials to avoid regression into primordial existence, countries are floundering to keep afloat. Recoveries take an inordinately long time, especially when second and sometimes third waves are inescapable.

Weakness of any form allows the predators to come to the fore and diplomacy is no stranger. Aggressive and threatening postures are always evident and certain elements, mostly non-state actors, unmindful of their own casualties, take undue advantage of the situation to perpetrate their crimes.

Historically, China has always possessed a long-term strategic outlook. For some years now, it has doggedly pursued its policy of securing or ensuring security of its energy sources transiting through the Indian Ocean. The route, reaching back towards mainland China also envisages the security of the transit through the South China Sea. The recognition and scaling up of the PLA(Navy) and the stretched-out forces of the United States has emboldened China to increase its assertiveness in the larger Indo-Pacific region. In both the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, the status quo has been disturbed, raising concerns in democratic

countries of the region. China is seen to have extra-regional aspirations and there seems little anyone can do to stop them. The need of the hour is containment through regional partnerships and coalitions. While the stature of such coalitions, their charter and effectiveness can be deliberated and established, a common strategic ideal must be pursued. Post the pandemic and the crushing blow it has inflicted on the United States, there is no doubt that the US can no longer claim its position as top dog in the world order. The Quad and SAGAR provide opportunities for cooperation and coalition. While the basis must be for continued peace in the region, it must factor in a clause for possible military association for a stated purpose. As the strategic centre of gravity of the world in the next couple of years, the Indian Ocean will be the pivot for geo-strategic and geopolitical maneuvering and India has an overwhelming opportunity to cement a place for itself in history.

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Tensions in the Korean Peninsula: A Threat to Regional Peace

Rajaram Panda*

Introduction

North Korea is probably the only country in the world that continues to remain an enigma, unaffected by the geopolitical and geo-strategic churning taking place in breath-taking rapidity outside its geographical boundary. Mired in poverty, North Korea has few friends barring China, though it maintains low-key diplomatic ties with many countries. It is ideologically poles apart with its immediate neighbour, the severed southern wing of what once was a unified peninsula. The love-hate relationship between the two Koreas is further exacerbated by the huge gulf in the economic domain that is unlikely to be bridged even if both unify one day. Different presidents in South Korea have at different times, adopted either hard-line or accommodative conciliatory approaches to its northern neighbour. No conciliatory approach has worked though several modalities were constructed, as North Korea, soon after agreeing to such mechanisms seeking peace, reneged on such offers. Hard-line measures by South Korean leaders and outside powers have also made no impact on the North Korean regime.

North Korea as a nation has survived and probably may survive for long, though no expiry date can be given. The latest in this narrative is the demolition of the Inter-Korean Liaison Office

in the border town of Kaesong industrial complex on 16 June 2020, built with much fanfare in 2018 by North Korea. The provocation for doing so was preceded by warning against South Korea that sheltered defectors to desist from sending propaganda leaflets and floating balloons inside North Korea's territory with messages critical of North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un and human rights abuses by his regime.

The four-storey structure was closed since January 2020 over fears of the novel coronavirus. The large explosion that brought the structure into rubble also damaged partially the neighbouring 15-storey high-rise residential facility that housed officials from both sides working at the liaison office. The facility was effectively working as an embassy and its destruction is a major setback to efforts assiduously being pursued by the liberal South Korean President Moon Jae-in to draw the North into cooperation, and to draw down its nuclear weapons programme.

North Korea is extremely sensitive to any criticism of its leader and considers any insinuation as a huge insult. A veritable personality cult akin to a demi-god has been built for its leader since the time of its founding by Kim Jong-un's grandfather, Kim Il-sung, when the peninsula was divided on ideological grounds more than 70 years

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ago. No wonder, the state-controlled KCNA spewed venom, saying that the building was blown up for “human scum and those, who have sheltered the scum, to pay dearly for their crimes”. North Korea refers to defectors as “human scum”.

The Inter-Korean Liaison Office was established in 2018 as part of a series of projects aimed at reducing tensions between the two Koreas and also to manage operations at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a joint venture between the two Koreas that was suspended in 2016 amid disagreement over the North’s nuclear and missile programs and when South Korea had a hardliner President. In 2018 when the office was reopened, South Korea spent USD 8.6 million to renovate the same.

What was behind the decision to blow up the structure and what does North Korea aim to achieve from such an act? As expected, the demolition sent alarm and shockwaves around the world, including in the US, Russia and China. The demolition, coming soon after the 20th anniversary of the first-ever inter-Korean summit, is a stark reminder of the complex and fragile inter-Korean relations and of how the initiatives renewed in 2018 had started losing salience, barely two years since it restarted. Kim Jong-un’s sister, Kim Yo-jong, the next most powerful person in the country, had warned about the activities of the defectors in strong language, which unless stopped forthwith could result in severe consequences. The execution of the demolition act was a consequence of such threat.

Provocations for what?

With this, Kim Jong-un has again provoked a

crisis when there was no real *casus belli*. So, what can we expect next from Kim? In the coming days and months, it would not be surprising if Kim starts provocative military exercises, live firing of artillery shells towards South Korean territory or even take steps to reverse the accomplishments of the September 2018 inter-Korean Comprehensive Military Agreement. Though the strategic purpose behind these provocations would remain unclear “Pyongyang may be seeking to create a crisis to encourage South Korean President Moon Jae-in, now with a super-majority in parliament following the April mid-term elections, to push forward with inter-Korean economic co-operation projects”, observes Ankit Panda of *Diplomat* magazine.¹ Also, Kim might use this strategy to build further legitimacy for his sister, possibly also linked to his suspected failing health, so that there is no threat to the regime’s continuity.

There could be other reasons that one can conjecture. It is possible that Kim might be trying to put pressure on Moon to reach out to Trump again and then draw him to the table for talks instead of testing a long-range missile or conducting another nuclear test, thereby “create a crisis as a prelude to justifying emergency talks”, opines Professor Andray Abrahamian of George Mason University, Korea. The fact that Kim’s sister was at the centre for taking these decisions might reflect her credentials “as someone who can be tough on the North Korea’s enemies”. In fact, Kim Yo-jong has remained in the forefront, starting from travelling to Seoul for the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Olympics and shaking hands with Moon, to her association with the North-South rapprochement in 2018, thereby conveying a

message both to the domestic and foreign audience about her authority.

Presently, South Korea's Unification Ministry has vowed to stop North Korean defectors from sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets and other materials² such as rice in plastic bottles, dollar bills, etc to North Korea's border areas. This followed Pyongyang's threat to respond to such acts by sending "leaflet bombs of justice" across the inter-Korean border in a bid to "terrorise" the South as a retaliation against Seoul's failure to stop activists from sending anti-regime leaflets into the North.³ The South Korean government fears that the leafleting on the ground could further aggravate inter-Korean tensions and undermine safety of residents near the border. One defector group, Fighters for Free North Korea, planned to send about 1 million leaflets across the border to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Korean War and prepared hundreds of plastic bottles stuffed with rice which they planned to float into North Korea, despite a legal challenge from South Korean authorities and threats from Pyongyang. This has added to the concerns of the Moon government, as such action would infuriate the North Korean regime. The North Korean military is also readying to redeploy troops into the demilitarised zone (DMZ) to support the scattering of leaflets into the South. Thus, no easing of tensions is likely as of now.

Van Jackson, the author of *On the Brink Trump, Kim, and the Threat of Nuclear War*,⁴ argues that the motivations for the attack could be traced to three converging issues. First: Kim could have felt betrayed that despite two summits with the US President in Singapore and Hanoi, he could

not secure any substantive relief from the punishing economic sanctions. Second, trade with China, its main economic partner and lifeline, was severely constricted because of COVID-19, as the border was sealed, limiting both formal and informal trade with its biggest trading partner. The third reason could be that Kim wanted to establish the bona fides of his sister as a competent successor, as demonstrated by her actions in demolishing the liaison office building. Since Kim cannot afford to attack the US directly for fear of massive retaliation, it finds its southern neighbour a vulnerable target.

Consider Kim's own position at home: At least seen to the outside world as a tough leader firmly under control of a system and with complete restriction on the flow of information outside of the country, his own health seems to be failing and the reality could be different than what is being projected to the outside world. Having spent considerable money for the development of nuclear weapons and missiles, the country's capital base seems to be too weak. By embracing Moon's peace overtures, Kim had two summits with Trump with the hope that he can make the US agree to remove crippling sanctions in return of suspension of nuclear weapons programs and missile firing activities. That did not happen. Now Kim is facing real-world consequences for the failed talks as the sanctions-hit economy is further strained by a border lockdown imposed to prevent coronavirus outbreak. This possibly is threatening now his support base among the elites and military. Though Kim might not be facing immediate threat to his regime, he cannot afford the volatility to develop into a major domestic crisis.⁵

The reason why Kim preferred to target South Korea instead of Trump is to remind the American President of the unresolved issues, with the hope that his actions would compel Trump to intervene. The situation might suit Trump as well for, he can sell to his domestic constituency that he successfully warded off possible military provocations that Kim had threatened, thereby making his re-election bid strong. By heightening inter-Korean tensions now, Kim could have thought of pushing South Korea harder to get some sanctions relief from the US at least for the joint economic projects in the Kaesong Industrial area so that some of his economic woes would have been addressed. After all, he needs money to keep the military, if not the people, happy so that his control remains sustained. Once the election date draws closer, Kim would lose substantial time as Trump's focus on North Korea would have diminished somewhat, which means Kim's troubles accentuate further.

The very fact that neither side is unwilling to concede—North Korea unwilling to discuss abandoning enough of its nuclear program and the US not ready to roll back sanctions—the stalemate in all likelihood will continue. In his New Year address Kim vowed to unveil a “new strategic weapon”,⁶ after the US ignored a year-end deadline he had set for a restart of talks, as Kim felt sidelined by Trump whose domestic priorities took an upper hand. The “new strategic weapon” has not been unveiled, perhaps due to the outbreak of the COVI-19 pandemic. It is possible that what Kim intended to do was to test fire an ICBM. The ensuing political situation in the US has perhaps also made Kim rethink his strategy.

With the competition between Republican Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Joe Biden gathering steam, would Kim be happy to continue dealing with the mercurial Trump or a docile Biden who is expected to adopt a more principled approach and empower seasoned negotiators without summitry extravaganzas? If Biden wins, Kim can have hard time to deal with his style of dealing with foreign policy matters. If Trump is re-elected, Kim could at least feel comfortable dealing with him as he already had two summit meetings with him. Such a calculation could have been behind the reason why Kim did not fire an ICBM as that would have benefitted Biden. Either way, Kim is walking a tight rope. Kim might return to ICBM testing and missile firings to unsettle Biden, should he be elected.

The South Korean Reaction

South Korean President Moon Jae-in acted swiftly as tensions flared up following the demolition of the liaison office. He dispatched his chief nuclear negotiator Lee Do-hoon to Washington to hold talks with officials amidst the North Korean threat of military action following the blowing up of the inter-Korean liaison office.⁷

Lee held talks with US officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, who had led denuclearisation negotiations with North Korea in the past to assess the current situation and discuss possible responses.

President Moon remains focussed on securing peace in the peninsula, his efforts leading to two summits between President Trump and Kim Jong-un as part of his engagement strategy. Yet, he is snubbed by Pyongyang as the inter-Korean

economic projects remain stalled due to international sanctions designed to rein in the North's nuclear and missile programs. Moon is also unfairly criticised by Kim's sister Kim Yo Jong for failing to implement a 2018 peace accord. She contemptuously stated that Moon "put his neck into the noose of pro-U.S. flunkeyism."

Moon is also blamed for sheltering the defectors who are active in sending propaganda leaflets into North Korea. Pyongyang takes offence when several defector-led groups regularly send back flyers carrying critical messages of Kim Jong Un, often together with food, \$1 bills, mini radios and USB sticks containing South Korean dramas and news. North Korea denounces the defectors as "mongrel dogs" and "human scum", saying their activities are an insult to the dignity of the country's supreme leader. The *Rodong Sinmun*, the official newspaper of the North's ruling Workers' Party, observed the demolition of the liaison office was the "first stage action" in its "holy war" aimed at punishing Seoul authorities for turning a blind eye to the defector's campaign.⁸

To add further to Moon's woes, his Unification Minister Kim Yeon-chul resigned, taking moral responsibility for not been able to ease tensions. Appointed in April 2019, Kim Yeon-chul left office in an unfortunate circumstance without having a single meeting with the North Koreans.⁹ As Kim Jong-un is expected to indulge in skirmishes in border areas in land and sea in the coming days and months, Moon's fresh challenge would be to reorient his engagement strategy with his new team and restore Seoul's fading role as mediator in the nuclear talks between Washington and Pyongyang. After all, Moon was credited to successfully

negotiate a diplomatic push to bring both Trump and Kim to the negotiating table twice, first in Singapore in June 2018 and then again in Hanoi in February 2019. In no measure Moon can be faulted that the summits ended without any positive outcome. He was only the facilitator to the summits. Critics, however, are harsh to fix responsibility on Moon that he misjudged Kim Jong-un's real intentions and was credulous to believe that Kim would be persuaded to agree to some of the terms set by Trump, without realising that Kim would not voluntarily deal away the nukes which he sees as his strongest guarantee of survival.

Kim Jong-un's vitriol against defector-activists this time seems to be just an excuse to indulge in more provocative acts because the activities of the defectors—flying anti-Pyongyang leaflets across the border condemning Kim's nuclear ambitions and human rights record is nothing new. North Korea is however sensitive to any criticism towards its leadership and in order to buttress the anti-South feeling, the military in North Korea has been encouraging the civilians to fly anti-South Korean propaganda leaflets in areas near the land and sea border. Such developments could stir more trouble in North-South relations. The Moon administration took steps to stop the activities of the defectors in order to stem North Korea's ire but with limited success. The security worries in sensitive times of fraying tempers such as that followed the blowing up the liaison office demands quick attention. While the activities of the defectors are an irritant and not conducive to the reconciliation process, the harsh outburst by North Korea this time was probably fuelled by frustration at the lack of progress in denuclearisation talks and the

perception that Moon did not do enough to break the deadlock with the US.

The North Korea Response

A day after the inter-Korean liaison office was demolished, President Moon offered to send special envoys consisting of Chung Eui-yong, national security advisor, and Suh Hoon, the South's spy chief, to help calm escalating tensions but North Korea angrily rebuffed the offer. In disdain, Kim Jong-un's sister Kim Yo-jong called South Korea's offer as "tactless and sinister and disrespectful". Instead, it threatened to send troops to the demilitarised zone near the border.¹⁰ Shedding any semblance of niceties, Kim Yo-jong directly targeted Moon for expressing his commitment to the 2018 accords, accusing him of "shameless sophistry". Blue House had to respond by commenting Kim's remarks as "rude and senseless".

North Korea's rejection of the special envoy proposal showed that the regime had no intention to defuse tensions through dialogue. On the contrary, it threatened to carry out a series of measures, including sending troops to the shuttered inter-Korean industrial complex in its border city of Kaesong and the Mount Kumgang tourist zone on the east coast – the two key symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation.¹¹ Launched in 1998, the tour program had been put on hold since 2008 when a South Korean tourist was shot dead near the resort for allegedly trespassing in an off-limit area.

North Korea also announced plans to restore guard posts removed from the DMZ and resume "all kinds of regular military exercises" near the inter-Korean border, thereby undoing the 2018 deal

agreed upon to reduce military tensions. Hereafter, Pyongyang would deal with South Korea as an "enemy", and would take military action. Despite Moon's peace moves, South Korea expressed unhappiness that Pyongyang remained unresponsive but warned at the same time it would not hesitate to respond appropriately if North takes more action to escalate tension. The US too cautioned North Korea, urging it to refrain from "further counterproductive actions". China too urged calm and restraint.

When the European Union called for Pyongyang to stop escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula, saying the demolition of the liaison office as "unacceptable", North Korea slammed the appeal as "absurd" and condemned the bloc for siding with Seoul, and urged the bloc to operate on the basis of "impartiality and objectivity".¹²

As regards the possible US response, at the moment it can do little to respond to Pyongyang's provocations, especially when there is a looming election in November. Writing for *NK News*, Mintaro Oba observes that "North Korea has long been the geopolitical equivalent of the boy who cried wolf: it gets much of its leverage from its unparalleled ability to repeatedly generate the same threat perceptions from other countries over and over again."¹³ From all indicators, it suggests that Pyongyang wants to elevate a sense of crisis with South Korea, making it an easy target to achieve its larger goal.¹⁴

Concluding observations

North Korea is unlikely to give up any of its nuclear arsenals in its possession. Kim Jong-un in

all likelihood will continue to bargain hard with the US to get some sanctions relief so that the country's faltering economy is back on track. Kim is unlikely to forget lessons from how the US dealt with dictators elsewhere such as in Iran and Libya and would not allow the same fate to fall on North Korea. Also, by elevating his younger sister Kim Yo-jong to the position of first vice department director of the powerful ruling Workers' Party Central Committee and authorising her to direct the military leaders to carry out the next step of retaliation against the South, Kim seems to have secured the regime's succession in view of his suspected failing health. Being her brother's closest confidant, she is now the most powerful woman in the country and in charge of relations with South

Korea. The Korean imbroglio shall continue and the North Korea is likely to survive despite many pitfalls that might come its way.

What could be India's role in this entire unfolding of events? India has limited role but should not be shy to offer its cooperation and counsel if asked for, if this helps in restoring peace in the Korean Peninsula. After all, India has friendly diplomatic ties with both Koreas and if its good offices are useful in some way, that would be a master stroke for Indian diplomacy and elevate India's stature in the world. With a seasoned diplomat at the helm, South Block might seriously consider this possibility. A back-channel diplomatic initiative to influence policies for the sake of peace could be worth considering.

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India's Soft Power

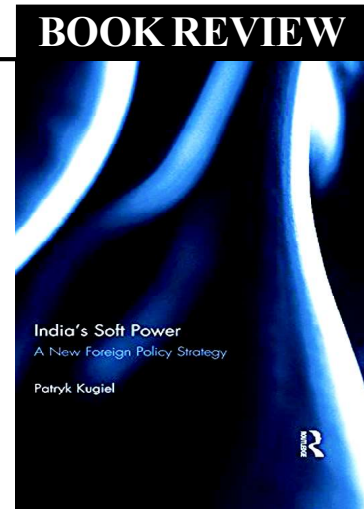
A New Foreign Policy Strategy

Author: Patryck Kugiel

Publisher:

Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, Pages: 230

*Book Review by: Sudarshan Ramabdran**



One of the most interesting inferences that one makes through the book 'India's SoftPower: A New Foreign Policy Strategy' by Patryck Kugiel, a Polish scholar, is that India has its own way of crafting its soft power strategy although the term has its genesis in the West. Whenever we look to understand the term 'soft power', the essential understanding of its import is in the conceptual framework. The introductory portion of the book is an analysis of the conceptual framework of soft power as opposed to hard and smart power, titled 'Soft Power in the International Relations: An International Framework'.

In the initial parts of the book, the author in his own words has tried to provide answers to some of the following questions that are raised in debates over soft power, such as: What constitutes soft power? Who can have it? How can it be measured? How does it work?

The overall assessment of the book is that a country can enable a pragmatic soft power story in a globalised world with a strong hard power foundation. The analogy that the author draws to enable parallels between hard and soft power are also interesting. About its difference in the context of its use, he writes, 'hard power works through

coercion, command, and threats to realise its aims; soft power works through persuasion, attraction and seduction'. In this sense, hard power resources, including military assets, can be a source of soft power if they are used properly. In other words, 'the real differentiation of power is in the context of its use.' The author also cautions against aggressive promotion of the use of a country's soft power that can lead to the undermining of its hard power.

During the course of the book, the author considerably delves into how soft power has been 'de-Americanised' and has been taken up by countries in their own way. The important point of a strong national brand attracting foreign investments is highlighted with the help of authentic studies. The subtle nature of soft power has to be understood by the students and practitioners of this form of foreign policy. The author writes, 'Soft power is more subtle and invisible, and unlike coercion and threats, aims to change the preferences and interest of other states, which cannot happen overnight.'

If the reader is looking out for the author's definition of soft power, then in his words, 'In a very broad sense, soft power means "soft use of power"'. He adds that it works indirectly through agenda setting, persuasion, and attraction, in contrast

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to hard power, which works by coercive means.

The focus of the book is to highlight that soft power regained its mainstream role in the foreign policy circles in India at the turn of the millennium. A very important facet of the book is the glaring inattention of Indian scholars to the field of soft power. He has contrasted this with the approach of China in producing monographs and literature surrounding soft power. The author alludes that India has been consistently honing and spreading its soft power advantage in the world today. Needless to state that there is still considerable distance to cover. What is remarkable is the focus of the author to highlight the potential strength of India's diaspora and the need to leverage it in terms of soft power potential.

The author has highlighted the importance of Yoga to India's soft power discourse but has also delved into the contribution of India to global soft power in the past, via the values of ahimsa (non-violence) and universalism in Hinduism and Buddhism. Some instruments of India's soft power are laid out and briefly mentioned. That public and private partnership has to drive India's soft power story is also a key inference from the book. Subsequently, the author has explained the current status of India's reliance on public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, foreign assistance and relations with its diaspora. Afghanistan as an important case study for India's success in soft power is also presented.

That current surveys and indexes are possibly not the best judge for India's soft power potential due to their heavy reliance on western minds has also been rightly conveyed by the author. Even after two decades of the term 'soft power' existing in foreign policy circles, its exact definition and

contours remain unknown or, at best, evolutionary in nature. This becomes all the more real in the Indian case.

In the final portions of the book, the author posits for a greater need for research and policy-making in the field of soft power. It is here that the author brings to the fore that India may in the future play a lead in the role of a smart power, a country that uses both hard and soft power to advance its foreign policy goals. The author also believes that a stronger soft power narrative could enable and assist India to play the lead in the South Asian region, attract more investments and also strengthen its position in the United Nations Security Council.

Another invaluable takeaway is the prism with which India looks at its soft power policy as a whole. In the words of the author, 'India does not simply follow or replicate the Western approach to soft power; on the contrary, it assertively stresses its different and unique model based on 'mutual benefit' and partnerships with other countries. It does not pursue aggressive cultural promotion or development assistance based on conditionality. Instead, India tries to act in consonance with foreign partners and take its cues from others' requests. It presents "soft use" of soft power. In this way, it can better escape controversies and concerns customarily associated with the use of soft power by the great powers. Its benign approach to soft power decreases resentment and criticism from foreign partners. This augurs well for the policy's success.'

India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy is thus a recommended book, even though the author could have delved deeper into some of the instruments of India's soft power.





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