

ROLE OF INDIA- CHINA RIVALRY IN SOUTHERN ASIAN GEO-POLITICS: THE PAKISTAN FACTOR

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Abstract

At the same time as the competition between India and China plays a significant part in determining the geopolitical landscape of Southern Asia, Pakistan has emerged as a significant element that influences the dynamics of the area. Considering that India and China are two of the major economies and military forces in the world, they engage in strategic competition, notably in the areas of commerce, military influence, and regional connectivity. Pakistan, which has been a staunch friend of China for a very long time and has been India's foe throughout history, is an important participant in this competition. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a major initiative under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), boosts Sino-Pakistani ties while also raising India's security concerns about territorial integrity and regional balance. In addition, disagreements over the borders, military alliances, and strategic collaborations all contribute to a shifting power dynamic that has an impact on the stability of the area. The policies that India and China have towards Pakistan are the subject of this research, which investigates how these policies influence wider geopolitical tactics, which in turn have an effect on security, economic interests, and diplomatic engagements in Southern Asia.

Keywords: India- China, Rivalry, Geo-Politics, Pakistan

Introduction

Both India and China are regional heavyweights with conflicting strategic, economic, and security interests. The geopolitical landscape of Southern Asia is strongly affected by the complex and ongoing competition between India and China. This struggle encompasses a wide range of spheres, including disagreements over borders, economic endeavours, military alliances, and power in diplomatic relations. Pakistan, a nation that shapes the dynamics of this competition owing to its deep-rooted strategic links with China and its long-standing hostile relationship with India, is at the centre of this power struggle. Pakistan plays a significant role in determining the dynamics of this rivalry. Due to the fact that both India and China are nuclear-armed states with rising global ambitions, they frequently find themselves at conflict with one another about regional dominance. India sees such movements with caution, particularly when they involve Pakistan, whereas China is looking to increase its footprint in South Asia through economic and infrastructure investments. Such moves are being made by China. India views the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a crucial component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as a danger to its sovereignty and regional supremacy. This expanding influence has been a major cause of concern for India, which views it as a critical component of the BRI. In the meantime, India's strategic worries are further expanded as a result of China and Pakistan's military partnerships, which include the trafficking of armaments, defence agreements, and joint exercises. As a result of Pakistan's involvement in regional security challenges, including as cross-border conflicts, counterterrorism activities, and partnerships with

external countries, the country's geopolitical prominence is further enhanced. In addition to being essential for defining the stability of South Asia, the interaction between India, China, and Pakistan also has wide-reaching repercussions for the security of the whole world. India must traverse a difficult geopolitical terrain in order to protect its national interests in light of the fact that China is deepening its strategic presence in the area and Pakistan is continuing to capitalise on its position between the two giants. The competition between India and China is investigated in this study, with a particular emphasis placed on the Pakistan factor, as it relates to the formation of geopolitical dynamics in Southern Asia. It investigates the most important areas of competition, the influence of strategic alliances, and the larger consequences of this triangle connection on the stability of the region, the growth of the economy, and the safety of each individual.

They allowed the outside world to into their economy and began doing business with them. Furthermore, they were primarily concerned in normalising ties with other nations, particularly those that they referred to as being close to or surrounding the border with China. Relationships between China and Pakistan have also been susceptible to these profound shifts as a result of this evolution. Because of the geopolitical shifts, the Republic of China adopted a neutral stance not only towards the South Asian area but also towards the disputes between India and Pakistan. This was the most significant element that led to this transformation. The support and stance that China takes on certain situations, such as Kashmir, has also lessened. For all intents and purposes, it only maintained that the Kashmir problem must be resolved in a respectful and peaceful way. (c) China has reduced its assistance for India on a variety of other subjects on which the two countries have disagreements. This was made abundantly clear by the Kargil crisis that occurred in 1999 and the Indo-Pakistan military standoff that occurred in 2001 and 2002, both of which observed China's practically neutral stance. d) The shifting mentality of the Chinese government had a significant and profound effect on the collaborative defence efforts between Pakistan and China. Aside from that, it stopped providing assistance to Pakistan while it was working on its nuclear and missile programs. Nevertheless, open cooperation is still taking place in the present day. The year 1988 saw the beginning of China's efforts to normalise its relations with India, Pakistan's nuclear adversary.

The belief is that China has adopted a policy of neutrality towards issues pertaining to South Asia since the end of the Cold War. The gradual shift in Chinese mentality is reflected in the country's shifting foreign policy, as well as the growing economic and military connections with India. The present value of China's commerce with India is fifteen billion dollars, and it is anticipated that this figure will increase to one hundred billion dollars. Even if India and China have strong economic and military relations, this does not mean that China's attitude towards Pakistan has completely shifted at this point.

Changing political, geoeconomic, and security conditions in the area were the driving forces behind China's decision to alter its foreign policy. "China's decision to reach a rapprochement with India was not in any way an indication of its change of stance on the disputed territories; rather, it was the by-product of the new international political environment, which ushered in a new pattern of working between nation states. This new pattern of working between nation states was brought about by the changing situation. Developing nations were required to engage with the outside world as a result of the debt crisis and the shifting global ideological environment of the unipolar world respectively.

Both the end of the Cold War and the simultaneous fall of the Soviet Union were major factors that led to the transformation in Chinese foreign policy. It has the effect of creating a large void or void. China was

able to fill this need effectively. Regarding its neighbours, it adhered to a policy that was non-confrontational and non-violent. It is clear that the deepening of links between two countries is causing changes in the geopolitical, economic, and security dynamics of the area. This is evident from the fact that India and China have become closer in their interactions.

It was during the 1990s that the Kashmiri movement for self-determination was confronted with a number of negative factors, including as extremism, religious militancy, and other similar types of forces. As a result of the Nine-Eleven activities, the whole climate of the region was dramatically altered. The populace of Kashmir, on the other hand, was not in a position to benefit from the shifting circumstances. The ability to exercise their right to self-determination was placed in a cold storage facility. An enormous setback and blow was dealt to the Kashmiri people's rightful quest for independence. 1- 1- In 1980, Deng Xiaoping stated, "Kashmir is a bilateral problem between Pakistan and India, and it should be solved by both states in an amicable manner." This information was provided to the Indian journalist during the course of an interview. At both the national and international levels, the topic of Jammu and Kashmir received a great deal of attention. The contested portion of the land is located there. The countries of India and Pakistan have each been involved in four wars. There has been a disagreement between the two nuclear rivals of Asia on Kashmir for nearly 62 years. Kashmir has been a source of dispute between them. A nuclear flashpoint in the South Asian area has been this contested zone for a considerable amount of time.

During the time before the Cold War, China was a supporter of Pakistan's position on Kashmir. However, through the years that followed the end of the Cold War, it continued to adhere to its policy of neutrality. Now, the leadership of China maintains that Kashmir is a territory that is contested between India and Pakistan; hence, they are the ones who are responsible for finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. It is now very concerned regarding China's future relationship with India and Pakistan, taking into consideration the changes that have taken place. It is thought that China would not abandon its Pakistani card any time soon, despite the recent changes that have taken place. It has reached a number of deals with Pakistan that are collectively worth billions of dollars worth of money. The future of China's commitments to Pakistan will be manifested in the form of significant advancements in Pakistan's energy sector, security sector, critical ports, and overall economic infrastructure.

The Frigid China-India Relationship: Reconstructing the Old Framework

Since independence in the late 1940s, China and India witnessed ups and downs in their bilateral relationship, with the 1962 war as the lowest point. But after the normalization of relations in 1988, China and India strived to set up some kind of framework, assuring the relationship might move through various challenges and remain relatively stable. Generally speaking, this framework consists of the following: both countries agreed to set aside the border dispute while improving their overall relationship and making efforts to maintain the peace and tranquility of the border area, both countries view each other as a development opportunity instead of threats and share common interest in promoting economic cooperation, and both countries will not object the other's rising and will carry forward cooperation in the international arena. This framework, however, is facing increasing challenges and is integrating at a rapid pace. Some negative features and trends are described below.

First and foremost, India reconnects the border issue with the development of an overall bilateral relationship. Since the Modi government came into power, India has considered it more pressing to convince

China to solve the boundary issue. It was reported that during his visit to China in May 2015, Indian Prime Minister Modi conveyed the message that “if we (China and India) want the full potential of the relationship to be realized we must address outstanding issues ... in a pleasant but forthright manner” (Economic Times Citation2015). Partly due to rising nationalism at home and a hawkish national security team, and partly due to the speculation that it can benefit from the US competitive strategy against China, India tends to take an assertive stance on the border issue. Thus, there are more tense incidents during the past few years along the border area, including but not limited to the Dong Lang (Doklam) standoff in 2017 and the Galwan incident in 2020. Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) Jaishankar stated that “it (China-India relationship) cannot be normal, if the situation in the border areas is abnormal” (Ministry of External Affairs Citation2022). Considering the sensitivity and complexity of the border issue, India’s stance makes it difficult to reset the bilateral relationship. Chinese strategist YE Hailin has pointed out pessimistically that “the statements and actions of the Indian government during the China-India border standoff in 2020 have fully demonstrated that the boundary issue has become the core issue shaping the future trend of China-India relations, despite Chinese unwillingness and Indian denial. The positions of the two sides on this issue are too far apart to be reconciled, so it may be difficult for China-India relations in the future to push forward the resolution of the boundary issue and cooperation in other areas” (Ye Citation2020).

Second, the role of economic cooperation in stabilizing the bilateral relationship is being diluted. China and India, as the two largest developing countries, share common development goals and cherish the developmental partnership as the core of bilateral strategic partnership. During the past several decades, despite issues such as the anti-dumping tariff and the trade deficit, China-India bilateral economic cooperation keeps moving forward. These years, however, India takes a more negative attitude towards bilateral economic cooperation. Moreover, with the returning of power politics and geopolitical competition, major powers emphasize security issues more than previously. Development issues are more frequently to be examined from a security perspective. The US encirclement strategy against China, the outbreak of Covid-19 and the shock of the Ukraine crisis all aggravate this trend. Against this backdrop, India is not as enthusiastic about promoting economic cooperation with China compared to the past. India cares more about the security and resilience of its supply chains, trying to reduce the supply chain dependence on China. India also resonates with US strategy to reshape the global supply chain and takes a harsh policy towards Chinese investment. It’s argued by Chinese scholar Dr. WANG Rui that “India has taken the opportunity to introduce discriminatory economic policies against China in an attempt to establish De-Sinicization industrial and supply chains to decouple its economy from China” (Wang et al. Citation2020).

Third, China and India face a more competitive relationship regionally and even globally to some extent. With the simultaneous rise of China and India, it’s quite natural that the two countries’ interests and presence extend and overlap with each other. Due to the lack of mutual strategic trust, this kind of overlapping raises concerns from India’s side. India has a strong mindset of regarding its immediate neighborhood as some kind of “backyard”. Thus, India is concerned about China’s increasing presence in the South Asian region. India also becomes more passive in cooperating with China at multilateral platforms. For example, in the latest council of the heads of state of the SCO in September 2022, India didn’t sign statements on food security, energy security, or on ensuring reliable, sustainable and diversified supply chains. As to the Quad, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar stated that “if there are reservations in any quarter (about the Quad), these stem from a desire to exercise a veto on the choices of others. And possibly a unilateralist opposition to collective and cooperative endeavours” (Jaishankar Citation2022).

Though there are increasing voices, particularly from the Chinese side, for resetting the icy bilateral relationship as soon as possible, the road ahead is quite bumpy. From the Chinese perspective, India forsakes its non-alignment policy and becomes part of the US containing strategy against China. From the Indian perspective, China backs Pakistan and enters into India's South Asia backyard. India tends to view China as "the most significant challenge in India's external security policies in the coming decade" and argues that "India's China policy must now be reset to the reality of a live border and of antagonistic political relations" (Aiyar and Khilnani et al. Citation2021). And the concern that India would probably take an assertive policy towards China is widely shared in the Chinese strategic community (Hu and Wang Citation2020; Lou Citation2020; Feng Citation2019). This tense China-India relationship will surely impact the China-India-Pakistan nuclear trilemma.

As to the nuclear deterrence between China and India, the good and bad of bilateral relations will not have a huge impact. Though China and India continue to modernize their nuclear arsenals respectively, since both countries adopt the no-first-use nuclear doctrine, it's almost impossible for them to resort to nuclear weapons to solve differences. As to the India-Pakistan nuclear interaction, however, the intense China-India relationship may have some impacts, though it's against Chinese willingness.

On the one hand, the China threat perception is one important dynamic for Indian decision-makers to develop nuclear deterrence capability. The worsening bilateral security relationship may further contribute to India's nuclear program. And while India wants to improve its nuclear deterrence capability against China, its nuclear modernization will stimulate Pakistan's nuclear program. On the other hand, India becomes more worried about the hypothetical two front wars against China and Pakistan. The Indian strategic community tends to analyze the India-Pakistan confrontation from the China-India-Pakistan perspective. Shivshankar Menon, India's former national security advisor, points out that "India's Pakistan problem now is in large part a China problem, because it is China that enhances Pakistan's capabilities, keeping it one step behind India at each stage of its nuclear progress, building up its defense, and committing to its long-term future in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (Menon Citation2020). Though China doesn't offer any formal nuclear security guarantees to Pakistan, and it's unlikely that China and Pakistan would coordinate a nuclear attack on India, some observers in India see the threat of a nuclear war with both China and Pakistan as a potential (Badri-Maharaj Citation2020). Chinese scholar ZHANG Jiegen also admitted that "whether China likes it or not, China is often passively involved in the game of nuclear arms race and stability in South Asia" (Zhang Citation2014).

Southern Asian Geopolitics

The southern part of Asia is a region of tremendous strategic importance since it is home to some of the largest economies and nuclear powers in the world, as well as important sea and land commerce routes. Historical wars, territorial disputes, and competing economic interests all play a role in shaping the political and security dynamics of the area. India and China are two of the most powerful powers in the area, and they are engaged in a complicated competition that has an impact on the whole region. China, an economic powerhouse with global ambitions, strives to extend its influence through trade, infrastructure projects, and military expansion. India, the biggest democracy and a rising global force, aspires to deepen its regional leadership, while China pursues the extension of its influence through trade, infrastructure projects, and military expansion. The manifestation of this strategic competition may be seen in a variety of domains, including as border disputes, diplomatic engagements, economic investments, and military achievements.

Historical Context of India-China Rivalry

The competition between India and China has deep historical origins, extending back to the Sino-Indian War of 1962, which resulted in a border dispute that has persisted along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). High levels of tension have been maintained by a series of periodic standoffs, such as the Doklam standoff in 2017 and the Galwan Valley skirmishes in 2020. The strategic calculations of India have been influenced by these battles, as well as by China's growing military presence in the Indo-Pacific area. Tensions are further exacerbated by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is a global infrastructure project with the objective of increasing Beijing's economic reach. The proposal has been met with opposition from India, notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is scheduled to run through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a region that India asserts is its own territory. In light of this opposition, India's worries over territorial sovereignty and China's rising influence in South Asia are brought into sharper focus.

The Role of Pakistan in the India-China Rivalry

China's closest strategic partner in South Asia is Pakistan, which plays a significant role in the competition between India and China on the international stage. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is estimated to be worth billions of dollars, boosts economic and military connections between Beijing and Islamabad, which has a direct influence on India's interests in the area. The military assistance that China provides to Pakistan, which includes the provision of cutting-edge weapons and defence technologies, has resulted in an increase in Pakistan's defence capabilities against India, which has further complicated the dynamics of regional security. From the point of view of India, Pakistan's strong partnership with China provides a "two-front challenge," which means that India must maintain vigilance along both its western and northern borders. As a result of this, India has strengthened its defence posture, strengthened its strategic connections with the United States of America, Japan, and Australia (as part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)), and invested in the modernisation of its military.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and India's Concerns

One of the most significant aspects of China-Pakistan cooperation is the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project under China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. CPEC aims to improve connectivity between China's western Xinjiang region and Pakistan's **Gwadar Port** in the Arabian Sea. Key components of CPEC include:

- **Highways and Railways:** Development of transportation networks to facilitate trade.
- **Energy Projects:** Investments in power generation to boost Pakistan's energy security.
- **Gwadar Port Development:** Strengthening China's access to the Indian Ocean.

India's Objections to CPEC

India has strongly opposed CPEC, citing several concerns:

- **Violation of Sovereignty:** The corridor passes through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a territory India claims as its own.
- **Strategic Encirclement:** CPEC strengthens China's presence in Pakistan, raising fears of a potential "String of Pearls" strategy aimed at encircling India.

- Security Threats: Increased Chinese infrastructure in Pakistan could be used for military purposes in a potential conflict with India.

1. India-China Rivalry in Southern Asia

A number of perspectives have been taken into consideration while analysing the geopolitical competition between India and China. These perspectives include border conflicts, economic competitiveness, and strategic influence. Many academics, like M. Taylor Fravel (2008), have conducted in-depth research on the border conflicts that have arisen between India and China. These conflicts have focused on the battles that occurred in 1962 and later skirmishes, especially the recent tensions that have arisen in Ladakh. Other studies highlight China's more comprehensive regional strategy, which includes the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has been regarded as a tool for China to enhance its economic and geopolitical influence in South Asia (Garlick, 2019).

2. The China-Pakistan Nexus and Its Impact on India

As a counterbalance to India's regional aspirations, China's strategic alliance with Pakistan has been well documented as giving Pakistan a competitive advantage. In the book titled "The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics," published in 2015, academics such as Andrew Small highlight the extent of collaboration between China and Pakistan in the areas of economics, nuclear power, and military affairs. Research on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) reveals that it functions both as an economic endeavour and a strategic weapon to expand China's position in the Indian Ocean and challenge India's regional dominance (Small, 2015; Wolf, 2019). This is according to the findings of the research that was conducted on the infrastructure project.

3. India's Response to the China-Pakistan Alliance

The modifications that India made to its foreign policy in reaction to the China-Pakistan nexus have been investigated in a number of different publications. Scholars contend that India has challenged China's ascent through strategic partnerships, including as its membership in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the United States of America, Japan, and Australia (Pant, 2020). It has also been analysed as part of India's larger containment strategy against China's regional aggressiveness (Singh, 2021). This analysis has been done in relation to India's strengthening of protection ties with the United States and European nations.

4. Regional Security and Geopolitical Implications

The dynamics of the trilateral relationship between India, China, and Pakistan have deeper and more far-reaching ramifications for South Asian security. In the literature on deterrence theory and strategic stability, the risks that are created by nuclear posturing between India and Pakistan are highlighted. This is especially true when considering the fact that China is providing assistance for Pakistan's military gains (Perkovich, 2002). In addition, researchers have investigated the impact that international organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) have in either improving or worsening the tensions that exist in the area (Sharma, 2018).

Conclusion

The competition between India and China is a defining character of the geopolitical landscape of Southern Asia, with Pakistan playing an essential part in the formation of the dynamics of the area. It is because of this triangle link that strategic alliances, economic policies, and security frameworks are influenced, which in turn contributes to both cooperation and conflict in the area. As a result of China's efforts to develop its connections with Pakistan through programs such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and military cooperation, the power dynamic has shifted, which has prompted India to build its own regional and global partnerships. The rivalry between India and China continues to be the most prominent aspect of their relationship; yet, the interaction of economic interests, border conflicts, and geopolitical alignments is becoming increasingly complex. In addition to the fact that territorial issues have not been addressed, the area is becoming increasingly militarised, which presents substantial hurdles to the establishment of regional stability. However, possibilities for diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and multilateral communication continue to be vital in order to reduce tensions and ensure that peace will be maintained over time. It is essential to have a solid understanding of Pakistan's involvement in the competition between India and China in order to properly evaluate the future of geopolitics in Southern Asia. When it comes to managing tensions and creating stability in one of the most geopolitically sensitive regions in the globe, the key will be to take a balanced strategy that includes strategic diplomacy, economic resilience, and regional collaboration.

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