

## India's Neighbourhood Policy in 21<sup>st</sup> Century with Special Focus on China: A Security Perspective

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### Abstract

*There is no debate among analysts of International politics about the fact that a country's clout in International politics depends among other factors on its relations with the neighbours. This is especially true in the case of a country like India, which is on the verges of emerging as a major power in the world. India has therefore been making efforts towards improving its ties with 'neighbourhood first policy, because of the recent Chinese activity in the South Asian region. Chinese activity in India and her neighbouring countries is very crucial for India; recently China is creating strategic tension in India. China has not only used Pakistan but has also used other South-Asian countries. While India is moving towards the US, China is creating pressure on India directly and indirectly through her neighbours. In pursuit of such policy, China has successfully established its military presence in almost all countries neighbouring India in all four directions. In this context, this paper aims to discuss the security of India vis-à-vis China in the South Asian region.*

**Key words-** emerging , neighbourhood first, Chinese.

### Introduction –

If the 20th Century the 'American Century', it is apt to regard the 21st Century as the 'Asian Century, with India, an important factor in global politics. The contemporary world order has unprecedented stress and strain. The contemporary world order has entered a phase of such rapid transformations about which no one had any idea two decades before. One of the most spectacular developments of the last two decades in world politics and international economic scenario has been the miraculous growth and development of the Chinese economy, tremendous expansions of its military and naval capability and unprecedented spread and reach of its diplomatic networks around the globe. The second most significant happening in world affairs in general and in the Asian strategic landscape, in particular, is India's rapid growth of economic, nuclear status and diplomatic networks around the globe. China and India are emerging as pivotal components in the evolving balance of power in Asia. There is no doubt that they are rising rapidly in the 21st Century. Today, without China no one can discuss anything related to fast-changing Global politics. Its importance in recent decades can be traced not only

to its Military potential but also economic strength gained by making others dependent on its cheap labour but also efficient manufacturing processes (Cohen, 2002:8). Now, the whole world is talking about India and China. The reason is very simple: the combined population of the two countries makes up almost 40 per cent of humanity; the two economies are among the largest in the world, and both are rising. India, like China, has a distinct civilizational identity, composed of many cultural patterns, social structures and special view of history. These factors enable it to mobilize its people around a unique set of values, images and ideas. These include the idea that India is a source of profound ideas and values, that India (and Indians) has something to teach to the rest of the world and that the major civilization uniquely unassertive towards others. India also has a distinctive way of organizing society, which incredibly influences the outlook of the rest of the world and the way others see it. It is not an overstatement to say that the development of the two nations and the relations between the two countries will have a far-reaching influence in the future of the world in the coming decades. India and China are Asia's two giants, both are proud of their ancient civilizations and both represent the top two populations in the world. They possess large

territories with enormous natural resources, the world's fastest economic growth rate, the world's third (China) and fourth (India) military power, a large number of educated and talented scientific manpower. Together they provide the largest contiguous market in the world. These are the major indicators of the real rise of the global power of the future. Today the world is more complex and every country takes cautious strategic steps by carefully weighing the losses and gains and view of its national interest. In this paper, the researcher has tried to show Chinese behaviour in this region arises a critical security dilemma which is a threat to Indian security.

### **India and Her Neighbours: A brief Outline**

There is no debate among analysts of International politics about the fact that a country's clout in International politics depends among other factors on its relations with the neighbours. This is especially true in the case of a country like India, which is on the verges of emerging as a major power in the world with having a modest economic growth rate. C.Raja Mohan argues that without enduring primacy in one's neighbourhood, no nation can become a credible power on the global stage (Mohan, 2007). Mohan and S.D Muni also argue that for India if India achieves a principal power of Asia it will be dependent on how to manage its neighbours (Muni & Mohan, 2004:317-318). Four factors shape India's position in this region 1. The mixed imperial legacy, 2, an interplay between geography, strategy and technology 3, the regional ideological irruption, and finally 4, the role of outside power (Cohen, 2015:341). India has therefore been making efforts towards improving its ties with neighbours, because of the recent Chinese activity in the South Asian region. Unfortunately, India has no consistent policy towards her neighbours except Gujral Doctrine in few years. Surprisingly though it may appear, which India shares a lot of things in common with South Asian states that include geography, culture, history, society and economy, these commonalities, instead of acting as facilitating factors in closer ties, have acted as structural constraints on New Delhi's relations with them. The Indian Neighbours consist of nine core populations (including India) and cover an area of more than 10%

of the Asian continent or 2.7% of the World's total land surface. It accounts for about 34% of Asia's population or over 16.5% of the global population. Its GDP based on purchasing power parity is \$3.57 trillion, with a registered share average growth of over 7% in 2010; with a consumer pedestal of over 425 million in the middle-class bracket and 423 billion labour forces the largest among other economic blocks the world (Chakraborti, 2012: 3).

To begin with, South Asia is a complex region; the countries in this region have common legacies and historical links. At the same time, there is much diversity in this region like religious, linguistic, political fabric. South Asia has been a theatre of the bloody interstate as well as civil wars; it has witnessed liberations movements, nuclear rivalry, military dictatorships, and this region suffers from insurgencies, religious fundamentalism, terrorism, besides serious problems associated with drugs and human trafficking. On the other hand, South Asia has an unbalanced and asymmetric power structure, because India's stands in this region are like a dominant or hegemonic structure. In terms of size, economy, populations, military strength, political stability India is far superior to any of its neighbours. The disparity in power between India and Her Neighbours certainly generate understandable apprehensions in the latter that India wants to behave as a big brother or a policeman in the region (Rajan, 1993: 17-20). At times, some of the neighbours consider fitting to policy the so-called 'China Card' in the hope to derive concessions from India (Malhotra, 2015: 8).

### **India's Neighbourhood Policy in 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A brief Overview**

India's neighbourhood policy has moved towards a major shift from the 21st century. Under the leadership of P.M. Narendra Modi, from the first day (26 May 2014), India has focused on her neighbours. In the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly, Modi had remarked, 'A nation's destiny is linked to its neighbourhood, that is why my government has placed the highest priority on advancing friendship and cooperation with her neighbours' (Press Information Bureau, 2014). P.M. Modi gave a clear message for an active and intense engagement with neighbouring countries by making

his first official visit to Bhutan. The vision according to P.M. Modi is 'My vision for our neighbourhood puts a premium on peaceful and harmonious ties with entire South Asia'(2017, MEA). Modi governments redefined India's Neighbourhood Policy. Earlier governments had only focused on SAARC countries while formulating neighbourhood policy. But MEA, of India, has now added the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Mauritius and Seychelles to the exiting list. The extended geographical scope has both continental and maritime components - a new direction of Modi's 'neighbourhood first policy.' Modi government added India's maritime security issue in the neighbourhood policy. Because India is highly dependent on the seas for trade and commerce. P.M. Modi has furthered the 'neighbourhood first policy' to 'Act East Policy'. He has brought major Indo-pacific, littoral powers like Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia within the ambit of 'Act East Policy.' Modi's neighbourhood first policy actively connected five Ts: trade, tourism, talent, technology and tradition with the goals to build and strengthen a peaceful, stable, democratic and economically interlinked neighbourhood. But recent Chinese activity in the South Asian region has posed a serious threat to India's national security. This discussion is given below in detail in the next section where the Chinese role in the South Asian region is analysed.

### **Chinese Role in India and Her Neighbours**

The best way to discuss the present nature of Sino-India relations is to observe China's behaviour with neighbours. China is not located in South-Asia but China has skilfully used South-Asian countries to dominate India. Recently China has not only used Pakistan but has also used other South-Asian Countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka. While India is moving close to the US, China is creating pressure on India directly and indirectly through India's neighbours. In pursuit of such policy, China has successfully established its Military presence in almost all countries neighbouring India and from all four directions. After the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, China and Pakistan were drawn to each other on the theory: 'enemy's enemy is a friend' replacing the 'Hindi-Chini-Bhai-Bhai' idea. Thus, Pakistan is a major factor in Sino-Indian relation.

China and Pakistan maintain an all-weather friendship'. It is a well-known fact that for China, Pakistan has been a useful second front against India. Under the boundary agreement between them, Pakistan had ceded to China the occupied territory of the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir and they jointly constructed the Karakoram Highway which serves to strengthen their hold over the occupied territories. Moreover, as Garver mentions 'A product Chinese policy would sustain Pakistan against India... To sacrifice Pakistan would be tantamount to conceding South-Asia as India's sphere of influence' (Garver, 2001: 241). Whether this observation is tenable in the contemporary changing world is a matter of further debate but it is for sure that a time-tested entente creates its rationale for perpetuating the existing arrangements (Majumder, 2007: 40). Chinese vice Minister foreign Affairs Wang Yi while referring to Pakistan said that it is the Chinese tradition to value an old friend. Still, Sino-Indian relations have progressed leading to the impression in some quarters that further development would gradually diminish the acuity and salience of Sino-Pakistan links (Ranganathan, 2003:551). China has acquired control of Gwadar Port in Baluchistan. This geostrategic presence in the North Arabian Sea gives China, not only easy access to the North Arabian Sea but also through it to the Persian Gulf. After the Earth Quake of 8 Oct 2005, 11,000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) was used for reconstruction of the road and other developmental work in PoK. There have been numerous reports suggesting China's open support to Pakistan's nuclear programme, indicating a threat for India. China is helping Pakistan by supplying a huge number of nuclear material and technology. In 1998, when India had successfully tested Pokhran-II, Pakistan could not counter it. By all accounts, Pakistan could not emerge as a nuclear power to date.

China is investing in the construction of the 165 km long Jaglot- Skardu Road and 135 km long Thakot-Sazin Road in POK(Pakistan Occupied Kashmir). China has also expanded the network of lateral as also as feeder roads and bridges in the strategic peripheral valleys of Gilgit – Baltistan, converting pony tracks to jeepable roads along the Line of Control (LoC), thus helping Pakistan to

strengthen its military bases near LoC and enhancing the ability to launch swift operations into Ladakh and Kashmir Valley. According to Monika Chansoria of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), there are many as 767 development projects funded by China in the Gilgit- Baltistan region, which included construction of dams, bridges and roads (including the construction, maintenance and expansion of the Karakoram Highway) (Bhatia, 2016:403). In October 2013, China made operational a vital road link to Medong Country (hitherto the only country which was not connected) in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), located close to the Indian border at Arunachal Pradesh. China while declaring the road open alluded to Medong Country in Nyingchi prefecture in TAR as the "last isolated country." OBOR (One Belt One Road) is an ambitious project of China that focuses on connectivity and cooperation among different states and CPEC is a bilateral project of Pakistan and China that is passed through Pakistan occupied Kashmir. These are Chinese increase in strategic footprints in India and the neighbours' region. This is the reason why India has highly criticised both the project.

China is increasing its presence in Nepal by building a rail link to Kathmandu that could easily be used in case; occurs any conflict with India. With the Maoist takeover of power in Nepal, this possibility has turned into a real threat. A Maoist corridor created by their presence in some states of India like Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka strengthens Chinese influence through Maoist movement posing an internal security threat. Chinese plan to surround India, what American scholar have called 'A String of Pearls' that China is creating around the neck of India can be used to strangulate India at it will. The necklace of pearls becomes complete when we add Chinese presence in the east and south. In the east Chinese has naval facilities in Bangladesh at Chittagong Port and navel facility surveillance in Coco Islands in Myanmar. Chinese has taken initiative to develop Gwadar port in Pakistan that would enable Beijing to counter any Indian naval hegemony in the Bay. Both Gwadar and Coco provide excellent posts for monitoring India's naval movement along the Maritimes arc. China also has control over the Myanmar port of Sittwe. The port of

Sitwee in Myanmar is another area of Chinese interest. The Chinese have offered to build a deep seaport in Sonadia Island in Bangladesh at \$5 Billion. The two other projects China have proposed to include the construction of the Bangladesh-Myanmar road corridor (a part of the Asian highway). In Sri-Lanka, China has developed Hambantota port-- a navel facility within a striking distance of India. A major mistake was made by the Indian policymakers when the Hambantota port of Sri Lanka, an important hub in the Indian Ocean, was first offered for development to India, but unfortunately, India's ignorance of strategic thinking gave china a new space to develop better linkages in the South Asian Region. Recently China was negotiating with the Maldives government for a northern most Island to develop a naval base which is close to India & Sri Lanka. Recent Chinese activity of Galwan valley (Eastern Ladakh) has posed a serious strategic tension between the two states.

### Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the present researcher has three recommendations in conclusion. First, India should develop more and more friendly relations with its neighbours. India will need to optimize all elements of national power and maximize its use of soft power or smart power, including diplomatic, economic, military, informational, cultural and political options. It needs to review the "India and Her Neighbourhood Policy" to make it more dynamic and purposeful. India needs to "Bind to Balance." To create confidence and trust in her neighbours, India should give more attention to frequent interaction at all levels, track-I, track-II, track-III diplomacy and more open dialogues on regional and global issues. While dealing with the demands of neighbours, India should show a big heart. The pandemic Covid-19 era India has initiated treatment for the citizen of SAARC countries through raising funds by the SAARC countries. India also supplied medical equipment and essential medicines to the SAARC countries like Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan (Nandy, 2020:438). India must use its soft power as an instrument, mainly in the education, cultural, religious and technical spheres to generate

confident that it is not at all a hegemonic power in the region, but responsible power like 'Bhisma' in Mahabharata. It is noted that India's emergence as a regional power and as a key global power depends largely on her image and standing in the South Asian neighbourhood.

Secondly, Balance of power strategy with China; it is true that recently China has improved its relations with its South Asia neighbours and is encircling India strategically. India has also taken simultaneously to counter China. To counter Chinese strategy India has not only maintained good relations with her neighbours but has also extended good relations with the countries of Africa, West Asia, Japan, South Korea, South East Asian Nations, EU countries and parallelly has maintained more and more close ties with the USA. To counter Chinese presence in the Gwadar port in Pakistan, as same as India is building a port in Iran's Chabahar to gain access to Afghanistan. As per India's internal security; in addition to the defence needs, the road-rail-air infrastructure once created will give the much-needed impetus to the development of our remote border region and contribute to education, health, tourism, and economic benefits accruing to the people our border region. In the 21st century, close relations between India and the USA have created strategic tensions in China and influenced the South Asian region. The pandemic Covid-19 (supply of hydroxychloroquine to the USA) has brought a new equation in India-US relations. US and India are determined to contain China's rise not only in Asia but also in international politics. This is the USA's balance game strategy to constrain China's rapidly rising power indirectly through India. The policymaker New Delhi should continue with this policy as a long-term strategy to balancing China not only in the South Asian region but also in the regions of the world where China has its presence.

Lastly, India and China cannot be friends in the old sense of the term, nor need they be enemies in the old sense of the term. In the contemporary world, everybody is everybody else 'strategic partner.' India is U.S. strategic partner; China is Russia's strategic partner? Strategic partnerships imply that you can co-operate closely in certain issues and areas, often chiefly in the economic field. India should project herself as a big power strategic

autonomy, rather than an average member of a U.S. lead alliance. New Delhi's strategy suffers from uncertainty and a sense of insecurity. The point is that how can India rise successfully without Chinese constraints. Is it possible? The answer is yes, but it is possible if awareness could be generated at high policy level dialogues; academic and cultural exchange programmes and maintaining transparency in the bilateral and multilateral relations. India-China has expanded their canvas of engagement on a host of a global cross-cutting issue like- climate change, terrorism, multilateral trade relations, etc. The two Asia's rising power could intensify cooperation and coordination in multinational pluralistic organizations, including WTO, UN, BRICS, G-20 and SCO. We (India) must indeed engage with China but at the same time we should continue with the ongoing dialogues on many lingering issues; i.e. border dispute, Arunachal Pradesh, Pakistan, Chinese influence in South Asian neighbours, etc. But the point is that how to deal with rapidly rising China? The present researcher's understanding is that to engage with China but at the same time remain equally alert about Chinese aggressive activity towards India, which is the best way to deal with China.

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