

India-China Relations: Conflict and Cooperation in Indo-Pacific Region

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Abstract

From the last three decades, the Indo-Pacific has been a central theme in the global geopolitical scenario. India, China, and several other rising powers have shifted the balance of power. Thus, Indo-Pacific region marks instability and uncertainty especially caused by consistent crises of the world economy. In the present globalized era, both India and China are paramount drivers of the global economy. They are simultaneously reacting to this shifted balance of power in Indo-Pacific region. The actions of China and India towards each other and especially in Indo-Pacific region have significantly changed in last decades. At present, the Indian government has started to focus on Indo-Pacific region. The Trump Administration has focused India to contain China in Indo-Pacific region. At that moment, the Indo-Pacific region has thus become more important region than ever before. The geo-strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region has attracted the main global-powers to preserve their strategic interests in this region. So, the Indo-Pacific has got enormous significance in the present context. From the last few years, the region has got international acknowledgment. The US's Asia-pivot policy and China's 'String of Pearl' policy have been focusing on India. The geopolitical importance of the Indo-Pacific region has dragged the western powers to counterweight growing Chinese power. That's why; Indo-Pacific has shaped the new subject of divergence between China and India. Yet, there is no need to undermine the enlarging economic relations between the two big nations of Asia. This study also examines that how US and Pakistan are affecting the bilateral India-China relations. The study observes that how India and China satisfying their strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, the study tries to find out the new issues of cooperation and conflict between the two nations. Thus, the study tries to find out the new issues of cooperation and conflict between the two nations.

Keywords: Indo-pacific, India, China, Bilateral Relations, Conflict

Backdrop

India and China are the two developing countries and emerging global powers. Since the ancient times, cultural and economic linkages have adjoined the two neighbouring countries of Asia. The Silk-Road has facilitated as the main trade-way between China and India. Due to the Cold War strategic compulsions, the two countries come into sight in a frustrating strategic environment. Both the countries have two largest populations and emerging economy. India has always been pursued a friendly neighbourhood policy vis-à-vis China. Therefore, after getting Independence in 1947,

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India tried to establish amicable relations with China. The communist government was established in China in October 1949 and India immediately extended its recognition to Peoples Republic of China (PRC) on 17th December 1949 and established the formal political relationship with the People Republic of China (PRC). India was the first non-communist nation to institute an embassy in the People Republic of China. As an effect, India finished its official relationship with the erstwhile Republic of China (Taiwan) in 1950.

The opposing models of government systems in two neighbouring countries have always affected India-China relations. Because, India adopted the parliamentary democracy and whereas on the other side, China has been always famous for its oppressive one-party ruling system. India has always sponsored and promoted parliamentary democracy whereas, China has constantly disregarded the ideal Model of democracy. Moreover, China has always measured democracy a barricade in the progress. China adopted the socialist system and another side, India adopted a mixed type of economic model. In the intervening time, India strongly supported China's permanent membership in the Security Council.

The plateau of the Central Asian area labeled as Tibet. It is one of the key issues that traditionally caused strain between India and China from time to time. China had constantly claimed administrative control over Tibet. Thus, China captured Tibet in 1950 and detached a historical barrier between China and India. On 23 May 1951, Beijing concluded an agreement with Tibet which conceded local autonomy to it and its army's incorporation with People Liberation Army (PLA). By this concord, India had given recognition that Tibet to be an integral part of China. Since then, India followed the appeasement policy towards China's annexation of Tibet. As well as, the then Indian Prime Minister Nehru acknowledged China's rule over Tibet and also encouraged the Tibetans to uphold their autonomy under the 1951 Sino-Tibet agreement.

Tibet was situated as a buffer state between India and China and therefore it has always strategically importance. The strategic importance of Tibet propelled China to control it. After the takeover of Tibet by China, India's border line directly touched with China and it caused a security threat for India's national security. Most of the Tibetan peoples opposed this political and military action of China on Tibetan territory. In the beginning, the Nehru government did not openly oppose to Tibet annexation by China because the Indian government wanted to maintain cordial relations with China. Thus, India mock reactions over Tibet propelled the Chinese government to adopt an assertive approach over immediate neighbourhood. India's

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security unease's towards Tibet did not impress the then Mao-led Chinese leadership. Thus, Chinese assertive approach did not match with India's soft neighbourhood policy. The problem of Tibet had alleged both countries towards each other. Afterward, India's silent approach over Tibet proved a big mistake for its own national security. Having neglected the events in Tibet, the Nehru government moved further to develop India's relationship with China.

In 1954, India circulated the new map that showed the Aksai Chin region as 'undemarcated' and demonstrated within the boundary of India. Despite India's claim over Aksai Chin, China built a road in Aksai Chin area. As a result, Indo-Sino border clashes became more frequent. To make the affable bilateral relationship; both nations acknowledged the Panchsheel Agreement (Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence) on 29 April 1954. The Panchsheel Agreement respecting each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty and, for that reason, India accepted China's rule over Tibet. The Panchsheel Agreement could not enlarge India-China relations to the next level. The will of the motto of "Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai" was the famous theme of the relationship between the two nations. The Chinese leader Zhou Enlai traveled India in June 1954 and in responding; the then Indian Prime Minister Pt. Nehru traveled China in October 1954 to strengthen two-sided ties.

In 1954, the bilateral relationships turn into declined when the Chinese maps showed vast areas of India as the Chinese territory. In reply, India protested and Chinese replied that these maps would be revised soon. But, China's never refined these misprinted maps. Later, instead of revising their map, Chinese claimed on more India's geography. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai traveled India in January 1957 and in April 1960 but these visits proved futile. Thus, these visits could not bring-out the positive developments in the Indo-Sino bilateral relationship.

Thus, the Panchsheel Agreement led short-term convergence in the India-China bilateral relationship. Nehruian socialist policies could not placate Chinese leadership and thus, the two leadership's common socialist visions could not lead to friendly India-China relations. It is relevant to note down that Nehru's standpoint towards Tibet could not satisfy the then Chinese leadership. Thereafter, Chinese army intervention took place in Tibet in 1958 and as a result, Dalai Lama urged India to provide political asylum. India considered Dalai Lama request and provide asylum to Tibetan religious leader in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh in 1959. Dalai Lama settled-down in the North-Western Himalayan part of India with thousands of Tibetan refugees, particularly in Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh. The Chinese government strongly protested against over Dalai Lama's asylum in India. In the next two decades,

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many Indian political leaders and political parties including Socialist Party and Jan Sangh supported the grounds of Tibet's self-government. As a consequence, the issue of Tibet caused strain in India-China relations

After the issue emerged of political asylum of the Dalai Lama in India, the two nation's relations got affected pessimistically. In January 1959, the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai wrote to Prime Minister Nehru, that no Chinese government has accepted the 'McMahon Line'. In Shimla convention of 1914, the eastern sector of the border-line was acknowledged between India and the Tibet. Thus, China questioned the legitimacy of 'McMahon Line' and showed some Indian territory in Chinese map. Then in that perspective, the Indian Administration stated McMahon line as a non-negotiable issue. Thus, Chinese reactions towards McMahon line strained the India-China relations. However, India has always tried to establish 'hale and hearty' relationship with China; however, the Chinese reply did not imitate coordination and cooperation. Moreover, Nehru was not aware of the fact that China would wedge a war against India, whereas Home Minister Sardar Patel was concerned regarding a possible Chinese hostility on India in the future, but Nehru did not agree with him. China's geopolitical and geostrategic interests in developing itself as a superpower in South Asia caused strain its relationship with India. Moreover, Chinese Premier Mao always considered that India was in control of western imperialists.

Then, the main dispute erupted over the western and the eastern fronts of Indo-Sino border. China claimed these two areas within the Indian Territory such as Aksai-Chin area in the Ladakh region of Kashmir and, same as, the some parts of the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) region showed in China. Between 1957 and 1959, the Chinese seized and controlled the Aksai Chin and built a strategic highway there. India claimed that the boundary was settled in colonial time, but the Chinese said that any colonial decision would not be considered by China. In fact, India was being more defensive to protect its own regional sovereignty while China was being more offensive vis-à-vis its border problem with India.

Thus, India-China relationships have been warm till to the outbreak of Tibet clash. The '1950-1958' period was acknowledged as an 'affable era' in Sino-Indo relations. It was tagged a 'honeymoon period' in Sino-Indo relationship history. After that, India-China bilateral relations deteriorated dramatically. Bhutan has not established diplomatic relations with China so far and Chinese accuse India of this gap between China and Bhutan. In China, there is a perception that India is instigating Bhutan against China. The problem of Bhutan and Tibet has constantly pessimistically exaggerated India-China relationship.

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Thus, all attempts of developing friendly relations were gone in vain. The Indo-China relations got strain when China initiated a speedy and gigantic incursion in India on both the disputed sides in October 1962. India retaliated very slowly and Chinese armed forces seized various main regions in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The second sign of assault came next month, while the Indian armed forces could obstruct the Chinese armed forces advantage on the western part in Ladakh. On the eastern front, Chinese forces controlled to go forward nearly to the entry-point of Assam. As a final point, China pronounced a one-sided truce and its armed troops withdrew to where they were ahead of the incursion begun on the border. The best friend of India, the Soviet Union remains neutral during the India-China war. India's internal politics also had a great impact on this issue. Nehru's international image suffered as he was severely criticized for his appraisal of the Chinese purposes and the lack of armed attentiveness of Indian troops. Amul, the leading cartoon series presented this time "Hindi-Chini Bye-Bye". Thus, the chapter of the friendly relationship was closed-down and both the neighbouring countries became the enemy of each other, and the lesson of conflicts starts with this. Thus, the Indo-China war alerted the Indian leadership over the hot-blooded condition in the Northeast area. The process of defence modernization began soon after the 1962 war.

A renowned Swedish strategic author Bertil Lintner claimed in his book "China's India War: Collision Course on the Roof of the World" that "China started plan ing the battle as early as 1959 because China wanted to take a small move in a large strategic game to be a world player" and to break the emerging impact of Nehru as the third world leader.

Pakistan and China signed a boundary (border) accord in 1963. According to this accord, Pakistan documented Chinese rule over the hundreds of square kilometer's area of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Afterward, China developed the nuclear weapons in 1964, and it created insecurity in India. India criticized China for the development of nuclear weapons. During the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, China gave the moral, material and intelligent support to Pakistan. Thus, both the Indian enemies joined their hands morally and militarily against India. China was trying regularly to have the hydrogen bomb also and finally succeed in 1967. This was really a threatening event for India's national security. The Nathu-La and Chao-La incidents, a series of small military clashes between the India and China, alongside the border of Sikkim took place in 1967.

Another Indo-Pak war was started in 1971 on the issue of liberation of Bangladesh. China was morally and strategically with their long-standing strategic partner

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Pakistan. India now feels the importance of a strategic and defence alliance with USSR. To respond to China-US-Pakistan trilateral-alignment, India signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and cooperation with USSR in August 1971. Later, India also turned to the nuclear era and had exploded his first nuclear test in Pokhran in Rajasthan in May 1974. India launched its first Indian satellite with the help of USSR in 1975. China and other neighbours of India criticized the Indian nuclear tests and space program.

After the death of Mao Tse Tung, both countries tried to come closer than ever. It took more than a decade for India and China to recommence diplomatic relationship. The changed government in two nations initiated the new bonhomie. It was in 1976 that full formal relationships were re-established between the two nations. The then Indian External Affairs Minister Vajpayee traveled China in 1979; the visit demonstrated a high point in the bilateral relationship.

The India-China scuffle of 1987 took place as a third armed clash at Sumdorong Chu valley in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. It was a bloodless conflict between the two immediate neighbouring countries. To strike of this stability of India-China relations, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi paid an official visit to China in December 1988. This visit was demonstrated a signpost experience in India-China relationship.

The scenario of the world politics has changed dramatically since the Cold War. The disintegration of USSR cleared the world stage dancing ground for the US. The US became the sole superpower in the world and China also trying to get the advantage of the disintegration of USSR in the unipolar system. Communist China adopted the liberal economic policies step by step after the late 1970s. China prepared the ground to be a sound economy of the world in 1978 with de-collectivization of agriculture. China has currently been acting to take priority over the US in trade and geopolitical tactics. The new world order provides India and China an opportunity to emerge as a major player on the Asian stage with the potential to affect the global balance of power.

Latterly, China criticized India's approach over NPT and CTBT. China was really serious about the nuclear explosions of India in 1998. The Kargil war held in 1999 between India and Pakistan. But this was the first time that China was in a neutral role during Indo-Pak war even after the direct demand for help by Pakistan. Thus, China did not prefer to make the bilateral relations.

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India-China Relations in 21st Century

At the present 21st century, India and China have cooperation and conflicts side by side. The unsolved border matter is so complex; however, the trade and industry and other matters cannot wait so far. However, the Indo-China mutual collaboration also got strengthened in the 21st century. China could not fail to notice India because of having emerged a big market in India. In 2008, China became India's biggest trading cohort and the two nations have also expanded their economic and trade relationship. The two countries are aware that it's not rational for the two countries to go to warfare. This cooperation emerged drastically in the new century in the light of the economic cooperation. For the economic growth, the two countries want regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The word 'Indo-Pacific' was applied by a eminent intellectual of international relations Gurpreet Khurana especially in the context of maritime security concerns in his article entitled "Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation" in 2007. In August 2007 when Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the Indian Parliament, had laid focus on 'Indo-Pacific' term. The phrase 'Indo-Pacific' is used frequently by the western and American political scientists mainly after 2010 and onward in the geopolitical context. When the US looking for new areas of energy growth in the Asian region, US Secretary of State's John Kerry suggests the concept of Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor in the meeting of Indo-US Strategic Dialogue in 2013. The phrase 'Indo-Pacific' was officially articulated in Australia's Defense White Paper in 2013. The term 'Indo-Pacific' was repeated in the Indo-US Joint Statement at White House during the PM Modi visit US on June 26, 2017.

Indo Pacific is a geographical area in the Pacific Ocean; generally, it is lying in the west of the Pacific Ocean, so it is also known as the Indo-West Pacific. It is mainly composed of South East Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. It is widely marked in this geographical region sums up the seas surrounding Indonesia, Sumatra the South China Sea, the north coast of Australia, the Philippine Sea, and Western and Central Micronesia, the seas surrounding New Guinea, the Red Sea, New Caledonia, Africa's East Coast, Persian Gulf, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the Andaman Sea, as well as the coastal waters adjoining Madagascar, Maldives, Mascarene Islands, Chagos Archipelago, and Comoros.

The geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economics interests of India, as well as China, are based in the Indo-Pacific region. This region is very rich in natural resources like hydrocarbon fuels. This is the main reason behind this motion of the power center.

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India has been turning from the policy of Look East to the policy of Act East to refine his relations with South Asian, East Asian and South East Asian, countries but also interlinking the India and littoral countries of Pacific Ocean. In this series, India is taking active participation in the geo-strategic region of Indo-pacific. The Indo-pacific is more vital in the changing circumstances of shifting of strategic interests. The super-powers are interference it due to its geo-economic, geo-strategic importance. It is obvious that the Indo-Pacific has been undergoing through a tough competition and even contention, between the major powers.

China is assertive in the Indo-Pacific region. It becomes more significant due to the dominant and assertive point of view of China in the Indo-Pacific region. India has serious reservations towards growing Chinese assertiveness. China has always been threatening India`s security and regional integrity. The unresolved border problem is the main tussle between India and China. China has not interested to solve out border problem with India. China has constantly been claiming Indian terrain of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese military has constantly been attack Indian area. The 19th phase of dialogue has been completed so far on the issue of border problem but there is not a permanent solution of the Indio-China disputed border issue.

India`s security distress are intensifying due to Chinese armed assertiveness. China has introduced a “String of Pearl” Policy in 2009, which was focused on India`s encirclement. China has established its strategic ports and airfields in India`s immediate neighbourhood specially Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and now trying into Afghanistan also. China has evolved its own strategic infrastructure in India`s immediate neighborhood. China has provided arms and arsenals to India`s northeast insurgent groups. At present, India is concerned over Chinese attitude. India is concerned over China`s “String of Pearls” policy and the other is the renewal of “Maritime Silk Route” by China. The Chinese policy of “One Belt One Road” provides the economic support to Pakistan.

China considers that the US has to spread its strategic influence on the basis of counter-terrorism. India supported the US war on terror and therefore China considered that India played a pivotal role to expend US`s strategic hegemony. The US introduced Asia pivot policy in 2011 to counterweight growing Chinese assertiveness with the help of like-minded countries such as India, Japan, and Australia. China believes that India is a vital strategic partner of US`s pivot Asia policy. India has reacted very positively towards US pivot policy to contain China. China considers that the US has been using India as a balancer player against Dragon. China considers that the US can target Chinese security interests with the help of

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India. China has serious reservation towards Indo-US strategic partnership. China considers that Indo-US strategic alliance has been acting counter the Chinese activities. Thus, the geopolitical area of Indo-Pacific emerged as a central region in world politics.

China has been tried to widen its relationship with India's time-honored collaborator Russia and it is the matter of concern for India. China is going to be the more powerful nation militarily, economically, politically and regionally in the changing world order. China is pursuing strategic containment of Indo-US strategic alliance. India has also been moving tilt towards the US to balancing aggressive China. The US is also looking for a reliable like-minded partner in Indo-Pacific region like India. The US wants to maintain its hegemony power and to control growing Chinese power in the Indo-pacific region.

The current Chinese communist establishment is extremely hostile towards India. For India, communist China is a distrustful nation, like Pakistan. The China overriding India`s regional sovereignty and repeatedly clamming Indian Territory. Furthermore, it had occupied a large area of the Kashmir region. Border problem in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh is also a dominant issue in the bilateral dialogues. It is the reality that despite the fact that both immediate neighbours have 19 rounds of discussions by the bilateral Joint Working Group (JWG) on the unsolved border issue, however, they have not been rid-off their differences. Consequently, India should take note of such a transform of the temper of China; as otherwise, China has never taken an unambiguous position on the boundary issue. The political asylum of Dalai Lama is also another concern in the relationship. The two countries futile to solve their border disagreement and Indian media have frequently reported Chinese armed invasions into Indian land. Both nations have progressively established armed road and rail network along the border region. Besides, India remains vexed about China's well-built strategic and defense relations with Pakistan. China also signed the Civil Nuclear Agreement with Pakistan, which may be proved dangerous for India`s security. On the other side, India`s tie with Bhutan also irritated the Chinese leadership. Another issue is the new Chinese dam on Brahmaputra River because it diverts the natural flow of the river.

The Indian and Chinese economy is very competitive with each other. Both the country`s exports the same things in the international market. At present, India faces trade imbalance deeply in favour of China. The cheaper manpower is available in both the countries. China has advanced in employment and infrastructure. China pressurizes India to agree to the free trade agreement. China's blocking India's effort

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to enlist Masood Azhar as the international terrorist and it also contaminated the bilateral relationship between the two countries. China is opposing UN Security Council reforms and India's entry into the Nuclear Supply Group [NSG] and these two issues are the current concerns in the bilateral relations of the Indo-China. China has articulated unease's regarding Indian armed and economic actions in the South China Sea. The Chinese submarine in the Indian Ocean is also resisted by India because of its security distress.

Despite mounting economic ties, there are several hurdles between the two neighbours. The need of the hour is that two countries find the way to settle their strategic interests in Asia so that they can calmly co-exist and flourish. Although, it is widely considered that India is an established regional power and China is emerging as a super-power. Both, the India and China have martial collaboration with a lot of countries, instead of between the two. There is no longer military conflict after 1962. Rising nationalism, lack of natural resources, internal pressures are some of the factors that could force both countries to go to a war. Increased mutual trade between the two countries is the only long-term solution. Therefore, it can be said that India and China are facing consistent differences in the Indo-Pacific region, but it cannot lose the relevance of cooperation between the two giant Asian neighbours.

The unmatched weight given to New Delhi by the Washington and Beijing's full backing to Islamabad economically and strategically in global forums may further escalate the anxieties between China and India. China's posturing against India in International forums, recent border clashes and Brahmaputra issue may have dangerous consequences in the future. China's continuous stubbornness in the South China Sea, an increase in their efforts in the Indian Ocean, and its plan of emerging as Blue-water navy may threaten the security of India. The Indian Ocean is the main supply route of oil and other assets, countries like US, Russia, and China want to secure their future interests leading into tensions in the area.

Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as an area of conflict and cooperation between India and China in the 21st century. India has been facing differences with China in Indo-Pacific. China is threatening India's core security and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Trump Administration is supporting India to contain Chinese domain in Indo-Pacific region. India is being lean towards the US to control Chinese assertiveness in Indo-Pacific. Thus, there are more differences than convergences. The

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two nations need to sort-out their differences and enhance cooperation in various fields of mutual interests.

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