

CHINA-INDIA RELATIONS IN THE MODI-XI ERA

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CHINA-INDIA RELATIONS

The Cold Peace that has characterized China-India relations since their 1962 border war has persisted into the 21st Century. Today, as in the past, elements of cooperation and competition are advancing in tandem, though the latter has been accelerating more rapidly in recent years.

While India and China have grown more diplomatically and economically engaged since the 1990s, deeper economic integration and political engagement has yet to diminish tensions in the security arena. Mutual suspicion is arguably as great as it's ever been. A 2013 Lowy Institute poll showed 83% of Indians considered China a security threat while 70% thought China's goal was to dominate Asia.ⁱ A 2014 Pew poll found just 31% of Indians with a favorable view of China. In the same poll just 30% of Chinese surveyed had a favorable view of India (vs 50% for the U.S.).ⁱⁱ

Bilateral relations continue to be characterized by a major imbalance in threat perceptions. Notably, many in India's security establishment now view China as a greater security threat than Pakistan, and Indian perceptions of China are colored by fears of Chinese hegemony.

Chinese views toward India, meanwhile, are characterized by disinterest and disdain. The mouthpiece of China's nationalists, the *Global Times*, has argued India is "not a first-class major power" and is being misled by a U.S. and Japanese plot to contain China.ⁱⁱⁱ "Due to the Indian elites' blind arrogance and confidence in their democracy, and the inferiority of its ordinary people, very few Indians are able to treat Sino-Indian relations accurately, objectively and rationally."^{iv}

The "legacy disputes" that have shadowed Sino-Indian relations since the 1960s remain just as salient today: an unresolved border dispute; a conflict of interests in Tibet; and Chinese patronage toward India's rival Pakistan.

Despite adopting greater shades of neutrality in its diplomatic approach to Pakistan and India, China has continued its robust economic and military support to Islamabad; engaging in controversial infrastructure projects in disputed Kashmir; providing Pakistani-based terrorists diplomatic cover at the United Nations; assuming control of Pakistan's Gwadar port in 2015; and building new nuclear reactors in Pakistan.

While free from violence, volatile stand-offs between Chinese and Indian patrols at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) continue disrupt bilateral relations at the most inopportune times, sowing suspicion and mistrust in the process. Meanwhile, China's sensitivity on Tibet issues has been elevated since 2008, when the plateau was rocked by a wave of anti-government protests, and a series of self-immolations by Buddhist monks that began the following year. As China has sought to establish greater authority over Tibetan Buddhism, it has grown more sensitive to political activities by the Dharamsala-based Tibetan Government in Exile and the Dalai Lama. In recent

years an additional layer of complexity has befallen the China-India-Tibet equation, as Beijing has engaged the Dalai Lama in a struggle over the right to name a successor to the octogenarian Buddhist leader.

While not substantially worsening in recent years, none of these legacy disputes has shown signs of material improvement. However, in recent years new friction points have emerged in the Sino-Indian rivalry. As each country inches closer to attaining the capabilities and standing of a truly global power, the geographic expansion of their interests and spheres of influence have begun to overlap with greater frequency, creating new fault lines and widening existing ones.

Today, South Asia stands at the frontline of a major westward expansion of Chinese interests and influence, one embodied by China's ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) New Maritime Silk Road Initiative. Designed to advance a web of interrelated military, economic, diplomatic, and energy security-related initiatives and objectives, OBOR, and the growing presence of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Indian Ocean, have revived Indian fears about Chinese encirclement and a neo-"String of Pearls."

China's westward expansion has also marked a new chapter in a decades-old struggle for influence in regional capitals between Beijing and Delhi; a competition in which China has gained considerable ground over the past decade.

China's interest in South Asia is by no means novel: throughout the 20th Century Beijing made repeated attempts at establishing political, military, and economic relationships in the capitals ringing India's periphery. And regional capitals have long sought to play the "China card" to balance against Indian power. Yet attempts to do so in the past were met with prohibitive costs from Delhi and the dalliances with Beijing proved short lived. Today that is no longer the case.

Since 2005 China has made substantial gains in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, effectively eroding India's longstanding monopoly of influence. In all three countries China has seized on opportunities generated by political instability and civil conflict to establish a foothold. In all three cases, the U.S. and India attempted to sanction and/or isolate those regimes in response to democracy violations or human rights abuses. And in all three countries China eagerly filled the void with military or diplomatic assistance and billions of dollars in investments and loans.

In each case China's strategy produced not just new diplomatic partnerships, but important geopolitical benefits, including support for its "One China" policy and its new OBOR initiative. Once a refuge for Tibetan migrants exiting and entering the plateau, the flow of Tibetans through Nepal has fallen from between two and three thousand just a few years ago to virtually zero today. At China's behest, Kathmandu has substantially restricted the activities and freedom of Tibetan migrants in Nepal.

In Sri Lanka, China has established a substantial presence at the country's two largest ports, Colombo and Hamabantota. After showering Sri Lanka in billions of dollars in commercial-interest loans, the country's debt has tripled over the past decade. China has agreed to ease the terms of its loans in exchange for exclusive rights over sensitive port facilities and infrastructure.

Last year the Maldives hastily passed a constitutional amendment overturning a ban on land ownership by foreigners. The new text permits foreigners to purchase land if they invest more than \$1 billion in a project, and if reclaimed land accounts for at least 70% of the completed project area. Critics note China is the only country with the financial resources and land reclamation experience to benefit from such a deal.

As China's diplomatic footprint in South Asia has grown, regional politics have become increasingly bifurcated. More and more, regional political actors are assuming overt "pro-India" or "pro-China" hues, and political transitions are viewed through the lens of which power has "won" or "lost," though in governance the distinction is rarely straightforward. With China's regional profile poised to expand further still, this zero-sum competition is likely to shape regional politics for the foreseeable future.

XI LOOKS WEST

Xi Jinping ("elected" president March 2013) and Narendra Modi (elected prime minister May 2014) both replaced cautious, bookish leaders lacking political charisma and their own power base. Both were propelled to the leadership atop an aura of strength and nationalism. Both are widely viewed as the most powerful leaders in their respective countries in decades. And both publicly pledged early in their tenures to strengthen Sino-Indian relations.

Yet the rise of Xi Jinping has been viewed largely as an ominous development in Delhi. A 2014 Pew poll, for example, found just 13% of Indians surveyed had confidence in Chinese President Xi Jinping to "do the right thing."^v

It's not that Xi has assumed a more overtly anti-India posture than his predecessors; his public statements are generally filled with praise for India and the peaceful development of bilateral relations. Rather, it's that President Xi assumed office amid a period of greater Chinese assertiveness abroad, and greater repression at home, and both trends have accelerated under his watch. It's also because President Xi's signature foreign policy initiatives are designed to amplify the westward expansion of Chinese influence and interests that began under his predecessor, creating new arenas for competition with India in the process.

Nothing embodies this western expansion better than President Xi's OBOR initiative. First unveiled at a speech in Kazakhstan in September 2013, OBOR was designed to organize and advance a myriad of overlapping political, economic, military, and energy-related objectives. Bearing President Xi's personal hallmark, it is China's most ambitious foreign policy initiative in a generation.

Leveraging its \$4 trillion in foreign currency reserves, Beijing has announced the China Development Bank will "invest more than \$890 billion into more than 900 projects involving 60 countries,"^{vi} creating six overland and maritime economic "corridors" to "better connect Asia and Europe." As one analyst notes, "This is literally China's economic diplomacy for half of the world, under one single policy framework."^{vii}

Notably, legs of both the continental "Belt" and the maritime "Road" pass through the Indian Ocean and South Asia. As if to underscore the region's centrality to OBOR, during a 2015 visit to Pakistan, President Xi announced \$46 billion in investments in a new China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), linking the Chinese-run port of Gwadar in Pakistan's south to China's

Xinjiang province. The first project to receive funding from a New Silk Road Fund was a \$1.65 billion for a hydropower dam near Rawalpindi, Pakistan.^{viii}

The OBOR initiative has received enthusiastic endorsements from every South Asian capital, with one important exception: India. Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar has called OBOR a “national initiative devised with national interest.... if this is something on which [China] want[s] a larger buy in, then they need to have larger discussions, and those haven't happened.”^{ix} Analyst Jabin Jacob says many Indians see OBOR as mostly “about consolidating Chinese leadership in the region, particularly in opposition to the United States.”^x

CPEC offers another reason for India’s objections, given the planned corridor passes through Indian-claimed territory in Kashmir. “A formal nod to the project will serve as a de-facto legitimization to Pakistan’s rights on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir,” notes a report from India’s Observer Research Foundation.^{xi} When Prime Minister Modi visited China in 2015, he reportedly told President Xi “very firmly” that CPEC was “not acceptable.”^{xii}

Many Indian analysts also suspect that China’s OBOR investments will, as in the past, serve as “trojan horses” for its broader strategic ambitions. “China’s strategists do not draw lines separating economic and security objectives,” argues Shyam Saran. “Each dimension reinforces the other, even though the economic dimension may sometimes mask the security imperative.”^{xiii} Professor Srikanth Kondapalli concludes: “When you put together all these jigsaw puzzles it becomes clear that Chinese focus in Indian Ocean is not just for trade. It is a grand design for the 21st Century.”^{xiv}

CHINA’S “PLAN” IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Indian concerns over China’s broader strategic ambitions have been stoked by the expanding regional footprint of the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

Over the past 20 years China’s surging appetite for natural resources has transformed it from a largely energy-independent country to a world-leading consumer and importer of natural resources.^{xv} As a result, China’s energy imports (including some 70-80% of its oil), must traverse long and vulnerable Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) through the Indian Ocean and Strait of Malacca, an intolerable source of insecurity for Chinese strategists.

This “Malacca Dilemma” has been a pervasive feature of China’s strategic discourse for a decade now, and informs much of the rationale behind the OBOR initiative. Years before OBOR was announced China was aggressively pursuing a network of alternative overland energy sources to mitigate its dependence on vulnerable SLOCs. In recent years this produced new, multi-billion-dollar gas and oil pipeline deals with Russia, Myanmar, and Kazakhstan, among others.

More consequentially, the Malacca dilemma has helped propel a major evolution in Chinese military philosophy. In a relatively brief timeframe, China has abandoned its longstanding opposition to overseas military deployments and bases, which Chinese literature long associated with Western colonialism. And nowhere is the paradigm shift proving more consequential than in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

In its 2012 Defense White Paper, China for the first time noted the importance of “safeguard[ing] the security of the international SLOCs.”^{xvi} China’s 2015 Defense White Paper added: “The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned.” It emphasized the need to “safeguard [China’s] national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests” and “protect the security of strategic SLOCs.”^{xvii} And in December 2012, PLAN Vice Admiral Su Zhiqian declared in Sri Lanka: “The freedom and safety of the navigation in the Indian Ocean play a very important role in the recovery and development of global economy *and the Chinese navy will actively maintain the peace and stability of the Indian Ocean.*”^{xviii}

A 2014 “Blue Book of the Indian Ocean Region” published by several Chinese think tanks noted: “In the past, China’s Indian Ocean strategy was based on ‘moderation’ and ‘maintaining the status quo’, but the changing dynamics of international relations necessitates China play a more proactive role in affairs of the region.”^{xix} Chinese analyst Shen Dingli is less coy. China, he says, has every “right” to establish naval bases in the Indian Ocean: “The real threat to us is not posed by the pirates but by the countries which block our trade route.”^{xx}

Ironically, the Chinese Navy’s first foreign port calls were in the Indian Ocean. Between November 1985 and January 1986 a handful of PLAN warships made port calls in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. A year later, the Indian Coast Guard interdicted three Chinese trawlers carrying survey equipment and military charts near India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In 2000, a Chinese destroyer made the PLAN’s first full transit of the Indian Ocean and the following year a PLAN submarine made an unannounced port call to Myanmar. In 2005, two PLAN ships made their first port call in India.

This tempo of limited and infrequent forays into the Indian Ocean changed dramatically in 2008. That year the international community formed a naval coalition to combat the growing threat of piracy off the Horn of Africa. China was invited by the U.S. and others to join the anti-piracy patrols and Beijing dispatched a PLAN escort fleet to participate, though it chose to operate independently from the coalition. (Notably, within a few months of the PLAN’s first deployment, the Chinese press reported that an Indian submarine was spotted trailing the Chinese task force in the Indian Ocean. Two Chinese destroyers and an anti-submarine helicopter confronted the Indian submarine and forced it to surface).^{xxi}

As of February 2016, 23 PLAN escort fleets have rotated through the Indian Ocean. They’ve offered the Chinese navy invaluable “blue water” experience operating thousands of miles from China’s coast, as well as growing familiarity with regional ports in Pakistan, Iran, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Djibouti, and the Seychelles, among others.

SUBMARINES

Critics argue the PLAN’s growing Indian Ocean presence has little to do with combating pirates and everything to do with military power projection and SLOC protection.^{xxii} After all, the anti-piracy mission has been an unmitigated success: from 52 vessels hijacked off the coast of Somalia in 2009, the number fell to zero by 2013.^{xxiii}

The same year, however, China elevated ordered its first-ever nuclear submarine patrol in the Indian Ocean. Notifying Delhi in advance, a Chinese *Shang*-class SSN entered the Indian Ocean via the Strait of Malacca in December 2013, surfacing twice near Sri Lanka and in the Persian Gulf before returning to the Western Pacific three months later. “The security establishment in

India knows that nuclear boats are not needed to tackle pirate skiffs,”^{xxiv} commented India’s *Economic Times*.

In September 2014, a Chinese diesel-powered submarine was spotted in the Indian Ocean, the first in over a decade. The *Song*-class submarine surfaced at Sri Lanka’s Colombo port for nearly a week, returning again in November. Then, in May 2015, a *Yuan*-class conventional submarine participating in China’s anti-piracy task force surfaced in Karachi, Pakistan, marking the first time a Chinese conventional submarine docked at an Indian Ocean port without a support vessel.

A few months prior, Pakistan announced the purchase of eight *Yuan*-class submarines from China at a cost of roughly \$5 billion, marking China’s largest-ever defense deal. Four of the eight submarines are to be built in Karachi while China will enjoy a facility in the western Indian Ocean specifically tailored to support its own growing fleet of *Yuan* submarines.

Finally, in September 2015 the Indian media reported that PLAN ships were “snooping” around India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands “on a routine basis.” Critically positioned at the western mouth of the Strait of Malacca, the Chinese warships reportedly attempt to get close to the Andamans’ territorial waters “at least twice every three months.”^{xxv}

MILITARY BASES

Already China’s shift in philosophy has affected the most taboo of subjects in Beijing: overseas military bases. Concerns over Chinese interest in establishing regional military bases surfaced over a decade ago, when debate over China’s “String of Pearls” in the Indian Ocean reached a fever pitch.^{xxvi} Those concerns were partially subdued by Beijing’s repeated insistence it would never establish military bases abroad, and the belief that its portfolio of Indian Ocean investments carried no explicit military arrangements.

However, within months of the PLAN’s Indian Ocean deployment, Senior Colonel Dai Xu argued that establishing military bases overseas was a logical extension of the navy’s new mission: “If we make things difficult for ourselves in this matter by maintaining a rigid understanding of the doctrines of nonalignment and the non-stationing of troops abroad, then it will place a lot of constraints on us across the board.”^{xxvii} Three years later Chinese Defense Minister Liang Guanglie announced China would “consider having logistic supply or short rest [facilities] at appropriate ports of other countries.”^{xxviii}

Finally, in July 2015, Djibouti’s president signed an agreement with Beijing to establish China’s first overseas military facility.^{xxix} Reports suggest the facility will be located at the \$590 million Doraleh Multi-Purpose Port in the south of Djibouti. The PLAN is expected to be allocated one of the berths at the port, which is currently under construction by a consortium that includes China Merchants Holdings International.^{xxx} Beijing insists it has “no military ambition in Djibouti” and has refused to call the facility a “military base,” preferring different variations on “overseas naval logistics support facility.”

WHOSE OCEAN?

China and India have begun trading rare public barbs over the legitimacy of the PLAN’s Indian Ocean deployments. In a 2015 lecture, Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar stated: “Those who are resident in this region have the primary responsibility for peace stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean.”^{xxxi}

In what seemed like a direct rebuttal, China's Foreign Ministry argued: "in the globalized era, the security of the Indian Ocean is in the common interest of all countries."^{xxxii} Weeks later, the *China Daily* wrote: "India alone cannot assure the security of the Indian Ocean, even if it regards the Indian Ocean as its backyard and wishes no one to compete with it there...If the Pacific is big enough to accommodate China and the US, so is the Indian Ocean to accommodate India and China."

A 2015 report by the Australia India Institute argues that "Beijing refuses to recognize India's claims toward great power status or its perceived prerogatives in South Asia or elsewhere in the Indian Ocean region. In short, there is a very real contest of status and legitimacy."^{xxxiv}

MODI AND CHINA

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a public champion of strengthening economic cooperation with China since his days as Chief Minister of Gujarat. Yet, after assuming office Modi wasted little time marking a break from his predecessors with a more confident approach to Sino-Indian relations.

On the campaign trail in February 2014, Modi traveled to the Chinese-claimed province of Arunachal Pradesh, declaring: "No power on earth can snatch away [the Chinese-claimed province of] Arunachal Pradesh. Times have changed. The world does not welcome the mindset of expansion in today's times. China will also have to leave behind its mindset of expansion."^{xxxv}

At his inauguration three months later, Modi ruffled Chinese feathers by inviting the Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile to his inauguration. And soon after taking office he passed a series of decrees fast-tracking stalled military infrastructure projects along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), streamlining environmental clearances for construction within 100 kilometers of the LAC, and approving dozens of new roads, railways, and tunnels, and upgrading several advance landing grounds and border posts.^{xxxvi}

Modi appointed General VK Singh, a retired four-star general and former Chief of Army Staff, as Minister of State with responsibility for India's northeast. And he appointed Kiren Rijiju, a BJP MP from Chinese-claimed Arunachal Pradesh, as Minister of State for Home Affairs. Rijiju, a native from Arunachal, appeared at the 80th birthday celebration of the Dalai Lama, later declaring: "India might have lost Tibet, but we have the Dalai Lama." He has publicly warned that India "will not accept any kind of [Chinese] intrusion into our territory and we will not concede." And in 2008 he argued that India's recognition of China's invasion of Tibet was a mistake, and that India bears responsibility for Tibet's tragedy.

Meanwhile, Modi has continued a policy begun by the UPA government in 2010, which saw Delhi refuse to recognize Beijing's "One China" policy in joint statements. In 2014 Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj told her Chinese counterpart India's support was contingent on China recognizing a "One India" policy, a reference to China's position on the disputed territory of Kashmir.^{xl}

At a speech in Tokyo September 2014, Modi declared: "Everywhere around us, we see an 18th-century expansionist mind-set: encroaching on another country, intruding in others' waters,

invading other countries and capturing territory.”^{xli} When President Xi Jinping made his inaugural trip to Delhi weeks later, the visit was overshadowed by a three-week PLA intrusion across their disputed border and the summit produced few tangible outcomes.

Some of Mr. Modi’s gestures toward China have been more subtle. When Russia held a major military parade to celebrate its victory in World War II in May 2015, India sent President Pranab Mukherjee and a military delegation to participate. When China hosted a rare and high-profile military parade months later for the same purpose, India sent a deputy external affairs minister, and no military contingent.^{xlii}

This only scratches the surface, however. If China’s westward push into the South Asian subcontinent and the Indian Ocean represents one of Xi Jinping’s signature foreign policy initiatives, Prime Minister Modi’s signature foreign policy initiatives have arguably been tailored as a direct response.

NEIGHBORHOOD FIRST

One of the first initiatives unveiled by Prime Minister Modi was titled “Neighborhood First,” a policy designed to reinforce Delhi’s commitment to strengthening its position and partnerships in its immediate periphery. In an unprecedented move, Modi invited the heads of state of all South Asian countries—including Pakistan—to attend his inauguration.

Modi followed that gesture by making Bhutan the destination of his first trip abroad. His first six months in office witnessed state visits to Brazil, Nepal, Japan, America, Myanmar, Australia, Fiji and again Nepal. That was followed in March 2015 by a high-profile tour of Indian Ocean island nations, including the Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka (the first visit to Colombo by an Indian prime minister in 28 years).

On the tour Modi invited Mauritius and the Seychelles to join an existing trilateral security arrangement with Sri Lanka and the Maldives. He has also launched a coastal surveillance radar project as part of a larger maritime domain awareness network, including eight surveillance radars in Mauritius, eight in the Seychelles, six in Sri Lanka, and ten the Maldives, all connected to 50 sites across the Indian coast.

In Mauritius, Modi outlined a framework for India’s maritime engagement with the Indian Ocean littoral: defending India’s national interests and the security and stability of the Indian Ocean; deepening security cooperation with regional partners; enhancing multilateral cooperative security mechanisms; promoting sustainable economic development; and greater openness to cooperating with external powers in the Indian Ocean (like the United States).^{xliii}

In June 2015 Modi made a landmark visit to Bangladesh, reaching two deeply consequential agreements—a border swap and a water-sharing agreement—that had been decades in the making. And he has pressed for the underperforming^{xliv} regional forum, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to assume a more robust role in regional integration, though he has little to show for his efforts to date.

Finally, in January 2016, the Indian aircraft carrier *Vikramaditya* began a regional tour that included port calls in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. And a month later India hosted its second-ever

International Fleet Review with participation from 50 navies, two dozen warships and over 70 aircraft.^{xlv} Linda Jakobsen and Rory Medcalf see an “increasingly coordinated and resourced set of policy responses [from Modi] aimed at limiting China’s influence and presence in the Indian Ocean.”^{xlvi}

FROM LOOK EAST TO ACT EAST

Modi’s second-biggest foreign policy initiative is also deeply connected influenced by China. Following a crippling financial crisis in the early 1990s Delhi adopted a “Look East” policy: a modest, economic-oriented initiative designed to tap the dynamic markets of East Asia. Under the UPA government (2005-2015) Look East began to assume more overt focus on strategic and defense cooperation with East Asia.

In November 2014, Modi announced at an ASEAN-India Summit that the policy was being upgraded from “Look East” to “Act East,” supporting the rhetorical shift with an ambitious agenda to elevate defense and strategic collaboration with Japan, Vietnam, and Australia, among others. C. Raja Mohan notes how Modi has moved away from a “fastidious avoidance of military partnerships in the past to making security cooperation an important part of India’s foreign relations now.”^{xlvii}

When Modi assumed office Delhi had already become a vocal proponent of “Freedom of Navigation” in the South China Sea, thinly-veiled code for opposing Chinese hegemony in the Western Pacific. His government has continued its public support, while urging China to accept international arbitration over its South China Sea territorial disputes, as India successfully did with Bangladesh in 2014. Notably, in October 2015 Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj held bilateral meetings in Manila with her Filipino counterpart where their joint statement referred to the “West Philippine Sea,”^{xlviii} a provocative first.

The Indian Navy, meanwhile, has been making bi-annual deployments to the South China Sea since 2000. India’s 2007 Maritime Military Strategy defined the Sea as an area of “strategic interest” and the updated 2015 Maritime Military Strategy listed the South China Sea in its “secondary areas” of strategic interest. Yet, included in the “primary areas” were the Strait of Malacca and “other areas encompassing our SLOCs, and vital energy and resource interests.”^{xlix} It’s noteworthy some 55% of India’s trade passes through the South China Sea.¹

Under Modi the Indian Navy has continued its regular deployments to the Western Pacific. In 2015 they included port calls and joint exercises with Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia. Most notably, in March 2016 India, the U.S. and Japan announced they would conduct a first-ever trilateral military exercise in the northern Philippine Sea later in the year.^{li}

Other “Act East” highlights include:

- In June 2015 Modi established an India-Japan-Australia (IJA) trilateral dialogue at the ministerial level. It was reportedly “dominated by questions of maritime security, the South China Sea and desirability of holding trilateral naval exercises in the future.”^{lii} Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Akitaka Saiki said they had a “full day discussion on China” in which they were “on the same page.”^{liii}**

- In August 2015, Mr. Modi hosted the heads of 14 South Pacific island nations at a new FIPIIC forum in India, proposing to turn the summit into an annual affair.^{liv}
- In September 2015 India and Australia held their first-ever IN-RAN bilateral naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal. The exercises included anti-submarine warfare (ASW) maneuvers and will now be a biennial affair.^{lv}
- Also in September 2015 the India-Japan-US (IJUS) trilateral dialogue established in December 2011 was upgraded to ministerial-level.
- In November 2015 the Indian and Japanese navies held bilateral JIMEX exercises in the Bay of Bengal. The same month the Indian Navy held joint exercises with Thailand (INDO-THAI CORPAT).
- In November 2015 Indian Defense Minister Parrikar called for an early conclusion of a South China Sea Code of Conduct at the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM+).
- In February and March 2016 the Indian and Myanmar navies held joint military exercises.

CHINA-INDIA-US STRATEGIC TRIANGLE

While often left unsaid, it's widely believed that mutual concerns over China's rise were a major force behind the Indo-U.S. strategic rapprochement that began in earnest in 2005. Since then, the U.S. has been gradually encouraging India to assume a greater interest and role in maritime security affairs across the Indo-Pacific.

A 2010 Pentagon report for the first time said India will "contribute to Asia as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond."^{lvi} In June 2012, then-U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta described India as a "linchpin" in America's strategic pivot to Asia. The 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy went a step further, affirming that America "support[s] India's role as a regional provider of security." America, it said, "see[s] a strategic convergence with India's Act East policy and our continued implementation of the rebalance to Asia and the Pacific."^{lvii}

(It's noteworthy "Act East" was first coined by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a July 2011 address in Chennai, India. There, she "encouraged" India "not just to look east, but to engage East and act East as well."^{lviii})

Prime Minister Modi sent a strong signal about his intention to strengthen Indo-U.S. ties by calling the U.S. and India "natural allies" shortly before his election as prime minister.^{lix} During his first visit to the U.S. in September 2014, he and president Obama agreed to renew a 2005 10-year defense cooperation framework and began a technology partnership between the two navies while Obama endorsed a permanent seat for India at the UN Security Council.^{lx}

Even more consequential was a visit to Delhi by President Obama in January 2015, the first U.S. president ever received as the guest of honor at India's pre-eminent Republic Day ceremony. As reported by the *New York Times*, when Obama met with Modi "the first 45 minutes were dominated by just one [topic]: China."^{lxi} The Obama administration found "Mr. Modi's assessment of China's rise and its impact on the greater strategic situation in East Asia was closely aligned with their own." Modi further:

Agreed to sign a joint statement with Mr. Obama chiding Beijing for provoking conflict with neighbors over control of the South China Sea. He suggested reviving a

loose security network involving the United States, India, Japan and Australia. And he expressed interest in playing a greater role in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, where India could help balance China's influence.

During the visit the two sides signed the first "Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region." Although little more than a compilation of previously-agreed principles, the document represented a symbolically-significant level of strategic convergence. And by affirming "the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea," the two sides were unafraid to implicate Beijing. China's nationalist *Global Times* was displeased, opining: "A trap is a trap. Although craftily set, it will be revealed eventually."^{lxii}

Modi and Obama also agreed to form a working group on aircraft carrier technology cooperation which met for the first time in June 2015. The same month, Delhi hosted U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, where he toured India's Eastern Naval Command and was granted an audience with Prime Minister Modi. The South China Sea was reportedly a "feature" of Carter's discussions.^{lxiii} During the visit the two agreed to expedite cooperation on jet engines, aircraft carrier design and construction, and co-development and co-production of joint defense projects.

In another significant development, U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) is now openly encouraging India to maintain an active presence in the South China Sea. In March 2015, PACOM Commander Adm. Harry Harris stated: "the South China seas are international waters and India should be able to operate freely wherever India wants to operate. If that means the South China Sea, then get in there and do that."^{lxiv}

Months later, Adm. Harris hosted Indian Defense Secretary Parrikar at PACOM headquarters in Hawaii, the first-ever trip by an Indian defense minister (India falls under CENTCOM's area of responsibility). There, the two leaders discussed "the continuance of the maritime security cooperation, *the potential for joint U.S.-India maritime patrols*, and the value of foundational agreements such as a logistics support agreement and a communications and information security memorandum of agreement."^{lxv} They also reviewed the gamut of bilateral and multilateral military exercises, including Malabar, Yudh Abhyas, Red Flag, Vajra Prahar, and RIMPAC (the U.S. conducts more exercises with India than with any other country, NATO allies included).

In late 2015, reports suggested India was inching closer to signing a long-pending Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) with the U.S., which would allow the two sides to use each other's ports and military facilities for staging and refueling.^{lxvi} And in early 2016 the two confirmed India would be participating in the 2016 iteration of the U.S. RIMPAC multilateral military exercises, and announced India-U.S. joint air force exercises would resume in Nevada in 2016 after an eight-year hiatus.

INDIA AS A BALANCER

Since 2005, Delhi's enthusiasm for a stronger Indo-U.S. partnership has been tempered by two factors: First, the historical legacy of "Non-Alignment," the deep-seated Cold War philosophy that bred an aversion to alliances. And second, the strategic dilemma that India faces in balancing ties between the U.S. and China.

Many Indian strategists believe China poses the greatest potential security threat to their country while a partnership with the U.S. provides the greatest insurance against that threat. However, many also have expressed concern that moving too quickly or aggressively toward the U.S. could unnecessarily provoke Beijing. With America's commitment to Indian security unclear, such a move risked increasing, not diminishing, the threat from China.

Modi and his foreign policy team have turned that thinking on its head. They believe a closer relationship with the U.S. actually puts Delhi in a stronger position vis-a-vis Beijing. "China is more sensitive to Indian concerns when India has strong and diversified relations with other major powers," explained Shyam Saran, then-Chairman of India's National Security Advisory Board in 2014. "Its pressures on India mount when India is seen to have fewer options. China does not want India to forge close security relations with the United States, Japan, Australia and Southeast Asian countries, as this constrains China's own room for maneuver."^{lxviii}

"Before 2005 China had gamed us," a now-senior member of Modi's administration told me years ago. "With the 2005 nuclear deal and the defense partnership, President George W. Bush 'de-gamed' us."

Indian Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar has argued India "aspire[s] to be a leading power, rather than just a balancing power."^{lxix} The rather significant implication of the statement is that India already is a "balancing" power. He's also argued that India "welcomes the growing reality of a multi-polar world, as it does, of a multi-polar Asia."^{lxx} The subtext is clear: while India agrees with China that its better the international system not be ruled by a single power, India also does not want to see Asia dominated by a single power, but rather a balance of multiple power centers.

CHINA-INDIA COOPERATION

Though competitive elements of the Sino-Indian relationship have outpaced the cooperative tract in recent years, bilateral relations have not been devoid of accomplishments.

It's notable that unlike in the past, Chinese leaders now not only add India to the itinerary of every South Asia visit, they generally visit India first.^{lxxi} Indeed, President Xi Jinping's first visit to Pakistan took place six months after his first September 2014 visit to Delhi^{lxxii} following repeated security delays. While Xi was in Delhi, he used the phrase "two major powers in the region and the world,"^{lxxiii} a potentially significant evolution given China's proclivity to characterize India as a regional, rather than global, power.

China-India military-to-military engagement has maintained its modest course under Xi and Modi. The two militaries began cooperating only in 2007, when the Chinese and Indian armies held their first-ever joint exercise in Kunming, China. The "Hand-in-Hand" exercise was held again the following year in Belgaum, India before military-to-military relations were suspended in 2010. In 2013 joint army exercises resumed in Miaoergang, China^{lxxiv} and the fourth and fifth iterations followed in November 2014 in Pune, India, and October 2015 in Kunming, China.

While the two countries' navies and air forces have exercised together in multilateral formats, and loosely coordinate their anti-piracy patrols, they have yet to conduct bilateral drills. In 2013, the two sides announced joint naval drills would be held in the "near future," though there has been no movement since. Also in 2013, Delhi and Beijing announced a bilateral maritime security dialogue, which convened for the first time in January 2016.^{lxxv}

In November 2015, Delhi hosted a large, 26-member Chinese military delegation led by Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission. It was the highest-level Chinese military delegation India has received in a decade, and included the deputy chief of general staff of the PLA, and the Political Commissar of the PLA's Chengdu Military Region, with responsibility for the Eastern Sector of the disputed China-India border.

Just days later, Indian Home Affairs Minister Rajnath Singh traveled to Beijing in the first such visit by an Indian Home Minister in a decade. According to *Outlook India*, Singh was surprised by the “proactive way China pushed security cooperation with India” and the “change of attitude” shown from China's security czar, who was unexpectedly joined by the Chinese State Councilor and a handful of vice ministers.^{lxxvii} The report said the two sides “discussed terrorism concerns faced by them from Pakistan and Afghanistan” while Beijing was even willing to discuss its protection of Pakistani-based terrorists from sanctions at the UN Security Council.^{lxxviii}

Other recent accomplishments include:

- **In October 2013 China and India signed a modest Border Defense Cooperation Agreement designed to help manage border patrolling along the Line of Actual Control.**
- **In July 2014 China hosted Indian Army Chief Gen. Bikram Singh, the first visit by an Indian army chief in nine years.**
- **In September 2014, India's Eastern Command headquarters hosted a seven-member PLA delegation.^{lxxx}**
- **In September 2014, Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval visited Beijing, where he said bilateral relations were poised for an “orbital jump.”^{lxxxi}**
- **In January 2015, China received Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj. Unusually, she was granted an audience with President Xi Jinping.**
- **In June 2015, China and India opened a new border crossing at the Nathu La pass that had been closed since the 1962 border war.^{lxxxii}**
- **In July 2015, China welcomed India (and Pakistan) as full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.**
- **In December 2015, China hosted the head of India's Northern Army Command, which has responsibility for Kashmir. The suspension of military-to-military relations in 2010 was caused by China's refusal to issue a normal visa to the then-head of Northern Army Command.**
- **A military hotline between the director general of military operations in both countries has been in the works for years. As of January 2016, it was scheduled to be operational “in the coming months.”**

Finally, while India has yet to endorse OBOR, it appears to be warming to a sub-OBOR initiative that preceded the New Silk Road. In December 2013, Delhi and Beijing gave formal approval to an initiative that had been gestating in Indian and Chinese think tanks for over a decade: a Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor. The project envisions a 2,800 kilometer high-speed infrastructure corridor between Kunming, China and Kolkata India, via Mandalay, Myanmar and Dhaka, Bangladesh. In June 2014 the four countries held the first “Joint Working

Group” meeting in Kunming. In February 2016, Bangladesh, China, and India finished their BCIM “strategy papers,” though Myanmar had yet to complete its draft.^{lxxxv}

China has tried to integrate the BCIM Corridor into OBOR, calling it the southwestern route of the New Silk Road. Despite its position on OBOR, Delhi is attracted to BCIM because it would cross horizontally through India’s underdeveloped northeastern states, a region Prime Minister Modi has targeted as a priority for development.

INDIA’S MILITARY MODERNIZATION

Today, India is the largest importer of arms worldwide. Between 2010 and 2015, Delhi accounted for almost 15% of global arms imports, more than three times China’s share.^{lxxxvi} As Walter Ladwig explains, “If the Indian Navy were primarily concerned with Pakistan or littoral defense, then a localized fleet of short-range surface combatants supplemented by land-based naval aviation assets would be most appropriate.”^{lxxxvii}

Instead, the Indian Navy is devoting its resources to aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, long-range sea-launched ballistic missiles, and expeditionary capabilities—all of which suggest India is preparing to meet a challenge from a large conventional force in the Indian Ocean, and that it is developing the capabilities to sustain operations further abroad, in the Western Pacific.

India’s Eastern Naval Command (ENC), with responsibility for the eastern Indian Ocean, has traditionally been the junior partner to the Pakistan-focused Western Naval Command (WNC). That is changing, with a major transfer of naval assets underway from the WNC to the Vishakhapatnam-based ENC. A full fifty warships—over a third of India’s naval fleet—are now under the ENC’s command.

All five of India’s Rajput-class guided missile destroyers have been transferred to ENC from the Western fleet, as has the Russian-leased nuclear submarine (SSN) *Chakra*. As have India’s three *Shivalik*-class stealth frigates and its U.S.-built P8 maritime patrol craft.

When India completes two indigenous aircraft carriers to complement the Russian-leased carrier *Viraat*, two will be headquartered with the ENC. The ENC will also take command of India’s first indigenous nuclear submarine, the *INS Arihant*, when it enters service in the next few years, completing India’s nuclear triad.

A new military base is now under construction in Andhra Pradesh on India’s eastern coast near Rambilli, 40 kilometers south of ENC headquarters in Vishakhapatnam. Codenamed Project Varsha, the new base will reportedly host underground pens to protect nuclear submarines from spy satellites and air attack.

In the strategic-arms arena, India is developing longer-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets upward of five thousand kilometers away despite having all of Pakistan covered by its short- and medium-range arsenal. In 2009 India added two new mountain-infantry divisions dedicated to the Sino-Indian border. And in 2013 Delhi announced it was raising the first offensive Strike Corps dedicated to the LAC (India’s three existing Strike Corps are all dedicated to Pakistan). In 2015, it was revealed the Strike Corps has been downsized and delayed due to budget constraints.

THE BORDER DISPUTE

During the 1962 Sino-Indian border war China seized (and still retains) the 36,000 square kilometer area of Aksai Chin—the “Western Sector.” In the “Eastern Sector,” despite considerable advances, in 1962 Chinese forces withdrew behind the McMahon Line, though Beijing still claims some 90,000 square kilometers south of that line in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The border negotiations, begun in 1981, now represent the “longest continuing frontier talks between any two countries since the end of the Second World War.”^{lxxxviii} While a resolution to the dispute remains a distant prospect, the talks have produced an elaborate framework to peacefully manage border. Unlike the volatile India-Pakistan Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir, there hasn’t been a deadly exchange of fire at the China-India Line of Actual Control (LAC) in decades.

Yet, in recent years India has reported roughly 400 Chinese incursions across the LAC annually, mostly in the dozen volatile stretches where there is no mutual agreement on where the LAC belongs. It's unclear how guilty Indian patrols are of similar violations because China doesn't keep count. "If we make the calculation on our understanding of the LAC, maybe the Indian border troops have transgressed the line more than what the Chinese border troops have done," says Maj. Gen. Yao Yunzhu of China's Academy of Military Sciences.

By and large, the incursions are petty, harmless exercises with patrols temporarily crossing the un-demarcated border before returning to their forward base. Yet volatile stand-offs between Chinese and Indian patrols at the LAC have become an almost annual affair, and continue to sow suspicion and mistrust in bilateral relations. A 2015 Pew poll showed nearly 2/3 of Indians concerned about the territorial dispute with China.^{lxxxix} Perhaps most important, they often occur at the most inopportune times. A textbook case was provided by a Chinese border incursion in Ladakh which coincided almost perfectly with Chinese President Xi Jinping's first trip to India in September 2014.

The three-week standoff immediately evoked a sense of déjà vu: the year before, as Indian Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid was preparing to visit Beijing in Delhi’s first exchange with the Xi administration, the PLA launched a three-week intrusion into Ladakh. Then too, it took more than three weeks and several rounds of talks to dislodge the encampment, though not before tainting the optics of Khurshid's visit.

“We were incredibly puzzled by all this,” Commodore C Uday Bhaskar told me shortly after the 2013 incursion. “Even China’s supporters in Delhi were caught off guard and had no idea how to interpret or defend the action. The one conclusion we drew is: ‘we know even less about the workings of the Chinese system than we think we do’.”^{xc} Some in India and the U.S. have speculated that the PLA was acting autonomously of the leadership in Beijing.

President Xi only fed this rumor mill when he seemed ignorant of the intrusion during his private discussions with Narendra Modi. Even more conspicuous, after returning from India Xi appeared to dress down the PLA brass, exhorting them to "have a better understanding of international and domestic security situations" and insisting on "absolute loyalty and firm faith in the Communist Party of China."^{xci}

However, there is good reason to cast doubt on this theory. While Xi's address to the PLA was unusually direct, it was by no means out of line with frequent invocations stressing absolute loyalty to the party. More important, Xi has amassed more power and authority over the various organs of the Chinese state, including the PLA, than any of his recent predecessors. He has not shied away from targeting disloyal or corrupt officials in arguably the most robust purge of senior party figures and military officers in decades. Yet, the opposite has happened: the commander of the Lanzhou Military Region responsible for that section of the China-India border was later promoted.

The fact that the number of incursions have grown substantially in recent years (from 140 in 2006 to 411 in 2013), and the 2013 and 2014 intrusions followed the same template, suggests a coordinated strategy and not a rogue operation.

In 2010 Premier Wen Jiabao raised hackles in Delhi when he admitted the Sino-Indian border dispute would take "a very long time" to resolve. "Even if we somehow miraculously get a resolution, we still have problems [with India] in Tibet, in Pakistan, in the Indian Ocean. So why try so hard? It seems every time we try and solve the dispute it only makes things worse," Ye Hailin, the Deputy Director for South Asia at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told me in 2013. Privately, Indian diplomats have lamented the two sides are "no closer to a resolution than we were 50 years ago."

Present trends in both countries suggest domestic constraints are likely to restrict the ability of the leadership in Beijing and Delhi to make territorial concessions in the future. Mutual suspicion and rising nationalism in both capitals has effectively shrunk the already-limited political space to pursue territorial concessions. In India, where anti-Chinese sentiment is politically and financially profitable, they would have to be sold to an opportunistic political opposition and a highly skeptical public, and may even require an amendment to the Indian Constitution. In China, a new brand of neo-nationalism is pushing Beijing toward a harder line on all its territorial disputes, as evidenced by its recent actions in the South China Sea.

As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi noted in 2015: "At the moment, the boundary negotiations are in the process of building up small positive developments. It is like climbing a mountain and the going is tough because we are on the way up."^{xcii}

THE TIBET CONNECTION

For Beijing the territorial dispute with India has always been closely associated with Tibet. Indeed, the principal objective of China's India strategy may well be mitigating the latter's ability to provoke instability in Tibet, with the border dispute merely a subset of the "Tibet issue." Dr. Mohan Malik argues China will not pursue a resolution to the border dispute "until Tibet is pacified in the same way Inner Mongolia has been pacified."^{xciii}

It was once believed that China was desirous of a speedy resolution to the Sino-Indian border dispute. On several occasions between 1960 and 1980 Chinese leaders proposed some form of "package deal" that would result in a territorial swap enshrining the post-war status quo with China retaining Aksai Chin in the Western Sector and India Arunachal Pradesh in the Eastern Sector. Each informal overture was dismissed by Delhi.

Today, circumstantial evidence suggests India has grown more amenable to a “package deal” yet since the mid-1980s, Beijing has demanded that any such deal would have to include the transfer of the town of Tawang, a small, sleepy Buddhist enclave hugging the LAC in India’s Arunachal Pradesh.

Tawang carries significance for both countries, positioned astride one the least-hazardous paths from the Tibetan plateau to India’s northeast and was one of the first towns seized in the Chinese offensive in 1962. Yet the town’s tactical military value is arguably outweighed by its religious significance, particularly as China has struggled to establish greater control over Tibetan Buddhism and subdue Tibetan opposition to Chinese rule. Tawang is home to one of the largest Buddhist monasteries outside Tibet, was the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama, and was the first stop the 14th Dalai Lama made on his flight from Tibet to India in 1959.

In recent years, China has repeatedly emphasized its claim on Tawang and the need to focus border talks on the “Eastern Sector” despite fierce resistance from Delhi to any prospect of ceding territory to China. Admiral Arun Prakash, India’s formal Chief of Naval Staff, has warned: “Let there be no doubt that China is a hegemon which wants to give India another knock to ensure we know our place in Asia. Give away Tawang today and they will demand Arunachal and Ladakh tomorrow.”^{xciv}

From China’s perspective, the “Tibet issue” with India has yet to be fully resolved. Months after the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 the first deadly clashes at the Sino-Indian border erupted. After the war, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai told an assembly of socialist countries that the “center of the Sino-Indian conflict” was not the border dispute but India’s efforts to “oppose reform in Tibet” and its desire to keep Tibet as a “buffer state.”^{xcv}

China still resents how the CIA supported Tibetan separatists from Indian soil in the 1950s and 1960s, and how Delhi permitted the Dalai Lama to establish a Tibetan Government in Exile in Dharamsala. It seems to matter little that Delhi has shied from playing the “Tibet card” since then, or that successive Indian leaders have recognized Tibet as an integral part of China.

Beijing has repeatedly implicated the Dalai Lama in promoting unrest in Tibet and demands India prevent him from engaging in any “political activities.” Thus, every time the Dalai Lama meets with senior Indian officials, gives a prominent speech in Delhi, or is permitted to venture to Tawang, Beijing sees an Indian-designed strategy to undermine Chinese sovereignty and authority. Dr. John Garver says “Tibet is virtually the only effective mechanism of leverage India has against Beijing. China’s vulnerability in Tibet is to India what India’s vulnerability vis-à-vis Pakistan is to China.”^{xcvi}

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The USG should focus on ways to better coordinate its South Asia and Indian Ocean policies with Delhi, a process which saw some important breakthroughs in 2015, including: the signing of a joint strategic vision statement; the beginning of discussions on joint naval patrols; and the invitation to Japan to participate in the Malabar naval exercises on a more permanent basis.

- Thus far, the U.S. “Pivot” to Asia has focused on bolstering U.S. military capabilities in the Western Pacific. The USG should consider expanding the geographic scope of the Pivot to include the “Indo-Pacific.” In the process, the USG should engage in a more concerted effort to find synergies between Mr. Modi’s “Act East” initiative and the U.S. “Pivot” to Asia.
- The USG should explore ways to extract additional value from the U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. That should include both building upon the existing statement, and reviewing whether it could serve as a template for Strategic Vision documents with other friendly capitals. A more ambitious goal would involve gathering U.S. partners and allies across the Indo-Pacific to commit to a set of shared principles and objectives to provide more clarity, stability, and unity to the weak regional security architecture.
- With regard to China’s OBOR initiative, the U.S. should better exploit the commonality of interests with India. Both capitals have approached OBOR tentatively as they try to assess its goals and strategic implications. Ironically, both Delhi and Washington have similar, potentially competing alternatives: America’s “New Silk Road” and India’s “Project Mausam.” And ironically, both initiatives are sorely lacking in resources, commitment, and strategic vision. The U.S. and India should cooperate on ways to bolster and find synergies between their two initiatives. Even more desirable would be a merging of the two initiatives—perhaps a “New Asian Community Initiative” (NACI)— with the political and financial backing to compete with (and where desirable complement) OBOR. If such an initiative were positively received, the inclusion of Japan should be entertained, given its surplus of experience, capital and technical expertise in infrastructure development.
- The U.S. should promote more formal cooperation and collaboration between India and U.S. Pacific Command. An important step was taken in December 2015, when PACOM headquarters in Hawaii hosted an Indian defense minister for the first time. Before that, the U.S. government had resisted formal interactions between the two, as India and Pakistan both fall under the purview of CENTCOM. However, this geographic and bureaucratic division has become woefully outdated, as India becomes an increasingly active player in the Western Pacific and the Sino-Indian naval competition unfolds over a progressively interconnected Indo-Pacific security space.
- The U.S. government should devote more attention and resources to monitoring China’s westward expansion into South Asia. To date, Washington has been fixated on the Western Pacific and China’s territorial disputes with Japan and the South China Sea. While far more subtle, China’s diplomatic and military push into South Asia may prove no less consequential over the long term.
- In 2009, President Barack Obama agreed to a controversial joint statement with China in which the two sides promised to work for “peace, stability and development in South Asia,” including “the improvement and growth of relations between India and Pakistan.” In the future, the U.S. should forego public signaling about coordinating its South Asia or Indian Ocean strategies with China.
- The U.S. should not hesitate to assume a more publicly supportive position of India in the China-India border dispute. The U.S. has recognized the McMahon Line as India’s

international border with China since 1962. After more than a decade of silence on the status of the McMahon Line, in December 2012 then-U.S. Ambassador to India Nancy Powell reaffirmed that the U.S. recognizes the McMahon Line as the legitimate international border.^{xcvii} More frequent public expressions of America's longstanding position, particularly during violations of the LAC by Chinese border patrols, are recommended.

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^{xvi} China 2012 "White Paper" – "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces" Ministry of National Defense. April 2013. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2013-04/16/content_4442756.htm

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