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India-China Competitive Coexistence: A New Era of Strategic Partnership

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Abstract

India and China are civilisational states with historical boundary disputes, whose roots lie in the colonial past. In modern times, both modern nation-states have taken a different politico-economic model in the global comity of nations. Both Asian powerhouses are separated by mighty Himalayan ranges geographically, but modern communication and transport technology have filled these geographical gaps. As a result, there is increasing Indian engagement in South-East Asia & East Asia; whereas Chinese engagement in South Asia and Indian Ocean region has brought them together to shape the Asian equilibrium in the multipolar world order. Over the years, both countries have transformed their relationship towards a cooperative framework in economic and military affairs for improving mutual trust and mutual understanding in their bilateral diplomatic relations. Furthermore, many developmental issues of common concern and global governance are acting as a catalyst to work towards their mutual benefit in regional and multilateral forums. Indeed, the India-China strategic partnership seems to be moving towards comprehensive partnership in the field of politics, economy, military, cultural and people to people contact. It is in these backdrops, one might wonder about the future trajectories of India-China bilateral relations in shaping the Asian equilibrium as well as the crucial role of their national interest in it.

Keywords: India, China, Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, International Relations

I. Introduction

Unlike modern nation-states, India and China are civilisational states which took a different politico-economic model of development. The communist party led China enjoyed the fruits of globalisation through multilateral diplomacy in the last four decades, while India as a multi-party largest democracy is catching-up the economic development comparatively with a slower speed. Meanwhile, according to the current projection of International Monetary Funds (IMF) and World Bank, India is going to remain the fastest growing Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in the next five years. As China's largest neighbour, India plays a vital role in the regional geopolitics and beyond. With the help of rising India, China seeks reform in the United Nations (UN), Bretton Woods Institutions such as IMF, World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO) to bring fair and more representative global order in trade, investments and diplomacy for building the Asian century. But both countries have a tumultuous shared history with root lies in the colonial past of both civilisational states. In the absence of agreed actual line of control, the regular incidents of border incursions and standoff burdened the bilateral

relationship from the last seven decades. In recent times, Indian refusal to join China's Belt and Road Initiative in disputed Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) through which China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes highlights the limitation and challenges in their bilateral relations. At the same time, China has blocked Indian candidature at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and Nuclear Supplier's Group (NSG), showed other complexities in their bilateral relations.

In fact, the India-China bilateral trade is around 100 billion USD, which showed another positive factor in their bilateral relations. At the ninth BRICS Xiamen summit (2017), India and China enhanced their security cooperation on counter-terrorism first time. The joint communique of this summit explicitly referred to Pakistan based anti-India terrorist organisations Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) responsible for committing, organising and supporting terrorist acts. However, as a sign of fresh breather recently China has agreed to put Masood Azhar, the founder of Pakistan based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad under the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In April 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping made a diplomatic breakthrough in the form of "Informal Wuhan Summit" after the 73-days long Doklam standoff. Furthermore, Xi Jinping led China formulated the "community of common destiny in a new era," while Narendra Modi led India conceptualised the "Act East Policy" (AEP) and "Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific" (FOIIP) in the common pursuit of progress and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region. In the new era of world politics, both India and China should think creatively to promote their economic interest in Free and Open Inclusive Indo-Pacific (FOIIP) by joining Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Thailand Economic Corridor (BIMSTEC), Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) on the one side, while promoting joint project in the existing infrastructure and connectivity projects like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), and International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

In the emerging geopolitical centrality in the Indian Ocean region, India has further developed the traditional maritime policy from "net security provider" to a "leading power." As a leading power, India is working with China and other maritime actors towards an inclusive maritime security policy to ultimately enhance regional connectivity through improved maritime cooperation for ensuring effective humanitarian and disaster relief operations in the Indian Ocean region (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018). For small south Asian neighbours (Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan), India-China competitive coexistence presents both opportunities and challenges to maximise their economic interests by getting the best deal out of both bilateral interactions and by bargaining best possible outcome within regional multilateral organisations. India's relations with these small south Asian states is best described by with historical, cultural, ethnic, and people to people linkages but, China's active engagement opens up a new range of possibilities for India and these small South Asian states. Both India and China should avoid any unnecessary geo-strategic and geo-economic traps by simultaneously working towards safeguarding their security and strategic interests. Under this pragmatic approach, India-China strategic partnership is all about making enough diplomatic space to maintain and protect their strategic autonomy. Indeed, India and China are confident enough to cooperate on issues such as energy security, trade negotiations, climate change, maritime security, maritime piracy, and so on (Fravel, 2011).

II. A Brief Overview of Historical Boundary Dispute

The main reason behind the root of India-China boundary dispute lies in colonial past and more precisely the drawing of "McMahon Line" before the independence of India (1947) the establishment of People's Republic of China (1949). At the Shimla Convention (1913-14) of British India, the United Kingdom (represented by Henry McMahon), and the representatives of Tibet drew this line in the presence of Chinese representative (Republic of China). While the representatives of the Republic of China participated in the Shimla convention but did not sign

the resulting accord, thus became the reason to question the legitimacy of McMahon line by the people's republic of China. However, the successive Indian government continuously asserted the validity of McMahon line that constitutes Indian administered Arunachal Pradesh (83,743 square km, and China administered both Aksai Chin (37,555 square km) and the northern part of disputed Kashmir region known as Trans-Karakoram Tract (the 5,800 square km) are areas in dispute between the India and China. China administered Aksai Chin was occupied during the 1962 war, while Pakistan temporarily ceded disputed Trans-Karakoram tract (also known as Shaksgham Valley) to China on March 2nd 1963, until the final legal settlement of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. India complained about this illegal transfer of disputed territory to China by Pakistan, therefore continued to claim sovereignty over the Trans-Karakoram tract and Aksai-Chin till today (Horimoto, 2014). The undefined and undemarcated territorial India-China boundary can be divided into three sectors primarily: the eastern sector (Arunachal Pradesh), middle sector (Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh), and western sector (Aksai Chin and the Trans-Karakoram Tract). For the middle sector, however both sides exchanged map showing each believed where the line of actual control (LAC) lies. Since there is even no consensus on the LAC, the suspicion and tension remain over the demarcation and delineation of LAC in the eastern and western sectors until today (John, 2016). Even there is a disagreement over the total length of the line of actual control (LAC) in the eastern and western sectors. India claims the length of LAC about 400 square kilometers, but on the contrary, it is about 200 square kilometers as per the Chinese claim. Therefore, China claims Arunachal Pradesh as a part of southern Tibet, while India claims the Aksai Chin and Trans-Karakoram Tract annexed during the 1962 India-China war and illegal transfer of Trans-Karakoram Tract in 1963 respectively. There is no denying of the fact that the main reason for the India-China boundary dispute lies in the colonial past of both modern nation-states. Moreover, there was time to time border incursion, standoff and limited conflict that created a historical baggage and suspicion in the public of both countries e.g., four weeks long "1962 India-China limited war", 4-days long "1967 Nathula Pass skirmish in Sikkim", 8-months long "1986–1987 Sumdorong Chu confrontation in Tawang", and more recently 73-days long Doklam standoff at a disputed tri-junction border area with China, Bhutan and India's northeastern state of Sikkim (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018).

However, the pragmatic wisdom of both civilisation states pacified the historical boundary dispute from time to time in the broader interests of the ordinary people of both Asian giants. Both modern nation-states India and China reiterated their commitment to not allowing their differences to become a dispute. India as the first non-communist country recognised People's Republic of China (December 30, 1949), supported China's re-entry into the international community, and invited China to take part in the 1955 Bandung Conference. Although Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru supported "One China policy" but failed in materialising the "recognition of McMahon line" in exchange to solve the historical boundary disputes (Arun, 2008). This diplomatic failure in recognition of McMahon line resulted in the four weeks-long India-China 1962 war and the suspension of India-China diplomatic relations (1962-77), which marked as the lowest point in the bilateral ties (Horimoto, 2014). In the last seven decades of diplomatic ties, the mutual strategic distrust deepened the continued strategic partnership between China and Pakistan. The creation of Pakistan after the partition of India (14th August 1947) and resulted bilateral Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan primarily added another layer of mistrust and suspicion in the India-China strategic partnership (Ruisheng, Jianxue, Jiali, & Zhizhen, 2010). However, China has managed to settle seventeen land border disputes with their neighboring states except for India and Bhutan. One might wonder if People's Republic of China (PRC) had recognised the same McMahon line (i.e., drawn when Myanmar was part of British India) to solve China's boundary dispute then why there is a reluctance to legitimise the same McMahon line with India? In short, the historical boundary dispute, China's support to Pakistan, and India's support to Dalai Lama are a major irritant in India-China bilateral relations (Taylor, 2011). Both Asian giants have shown the pragmatism to make tactical adjustments to move towards deeper political and economic cooperation and to strengthen diplomatic relations. Indian recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet; and Chinese de facto recognition that Sikkim as part of India reflects their mutual desire to shift focus from more dominant historical boundary disputes towards more consultative cooperation in regional and multilateral forums for jointly raising the concerns of developing countries (Gupta, 2015). In the post-2000 scenarios, India-China diplomatic relations are driven by their shared desire to deepen

political, economic, multilateral and regional engagement to advance their broader economic and security interests. In a new era, the foundation of India-China bilateral relation is towards creating an international political situation to support their national interests through the institutionalization of bilateral, regional and multi-level engagements (Fravel, 2011).

III. An Era of India-China Rapprochement

Driven by the common politico-economic aspirations and new realities of Asian geopolitics, there was a major diplomatic breakthrough, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China in 1988. This official visit, the first of its kind in the last 34 years, became a direct driver of improvement in political relations that opened a diplomatic opening to subsequent high-level official visits from both sides. Subsequently, Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng's India visit (1991) set the table for political discussions in the light of collapse of Soviet Union, and emerging post-cold war era of world politics in the form of official Chinese position: "*We do not stand for the internationalisation of the Kashmir question,*" in the midst of Pakistan's ongoing effort to the internationalisation of Kashmir dispute. This official position also translated as the China-Pakistan strategic partnership is not against India, but it's a part of China's multi-dimensional friendly cooperative relations with all its neighbours. It is in positive spirit of these series of bilateral contours and pragmatic diplomatic overture, Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao's China visit (September 1993) signed "the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control" towards establishing a mechanism for further rounds of border discussion and negotiations (Garver, 2001). India-China relations are transformed significantly in the last two decades. Both countries learned to cooperate despite the boundary dispute as an irritant in their bilateral relationship. Indeed, the "1993 Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement", and then after following confidence-building measures (CBM) have stabilised the status quo on both sides of the borders that helped in the improvement of infrastructures, capabilities and position in last two decades. This duality of cooperation and competition simultaneously in terms of core national interests has helped in improving the existing economic and security order of SA-IOR. Furthermore, in these changing geopolitical contexts, India too understands that China's iron brother Pakistan holds a more crucial role to check and balance religious extremism and terrorism in neighbouring Xinjiang region, which also provides alternate transit route to the Indian Ocean region (Menon, 2016).

During the 1990s, there was tremendous diplomatic pressure on the Indian government to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). India became wary of resolution 984 of NPT, which can prevent India from acquiring nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Also, under the draft of the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in United Nations Disarmament Conference, the "entry into force" provision put India on a tight spot. Thus India voted against CTBT draft treaty in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Since this was a significant setback for Indian diplomacy, thus India started to rethink about the relevance of multi-directional non-aligned foreign policy driven by the era of post-cold war politics. This serious regarding the foreign policy deliberations led to the Indian nuclear test in May 1998. Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee ordered three underground nuclear tests and one hydrogen bomb test (Garver, 2016). There is no denying of this fact that India's 1998 nuclear test and "China justification theory" reversed the positive momentum in their bilateral relations but, this new-found nuclear parity and strategic confidence took the diplomatic trajectories of bilateral ties away from the dominant border dispute discourse. Indeed, Indian nuclear tests (May 1998) proved to be a turning point in India-China diplomatic relations because, China entered into a strategic dialogue with India in 2003, which was against Chinese official position to not hold strategic dialogue with India on the ground of non-signatory to "Non-Proliferation Treaty" (NPT) and "Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty" (CTBT). As a result, India-China diplomatic relations became dynamic with the recently acquired nuclear technology to safe their strategic interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region (Fravel, 2011).

In April 2005, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited India, where both countries institutionalised the border discussion framework and most importantly signed an agreement on "India-China Strategic Partnership" to acknowledge their mutual aspirations and to cooperate in various fields including economics, trade, energy,

security and defence. With the significant rise in mutual investments, both countries later established three critical dialogue and consultative mechanism namely "India-China Strategic Economic Dialogue," "Joint Economic Group Dialogue," and "India-China Joint Group on Economic Relations and Trade, Science and Technology" to facilitate enhanced economic cooperation by proposing concrete measures to eliminate existing trade and investment barriers (Wojczewski, 2016). But the most crucial aspect of "*the 2005 agreement on the political parameters and guiding principles for the settlement of the India-China boundary question*" was ready to set guiding principles and parameters for settlement of the territorial issue. According to article 7 of 2005 agreement, a settlement "*shall safeguard due interests of... settled populations in the border areas.*" This line highlighted China's pragmatic intention to transform the existing line of actual control (LAC) into the international boundary between both countries in the eastern sector that also imply both Arunachal Pradesh (with one million population) and Tawang (with 39,000 population) in the eastern sector would remain with India. Furthermore, China recognised Indian sovereignty over Sikkim - that integrated into India after a long process of constitutional reform and democratic procedures into India. This was also first time both countries decided to move towards a more profound political, economic, strategic, and defence cooperation. Before this 2005 strategic partnership, the India-China relationship was a prisoner of the historical boundary dispute. Hence, this course correction was a welcoming boost in their diplomatic relations. Also, this strategic partnership developed a three-tier structure with political leaders of the top, special political representatives in the middle, and finally, joint working groups (JWG) comprising bureaucrats, officials, experts of various kinds, technical personnel, specialists and other representative groups to deal with any contradictions from time to time (Acharya, 2011).

Another takeaway from 2005 agreement is about growing cooperation in international institutions and negotiations as both India and China agreed on the convergences on global issues in regional and multilateral forums. To enhance mutual trust and mutual understanding between both armed forces, India and China fine-tuned their regular bilateral defence interactions. On May 2006, India and China established an annual "India-China Defense and Security Dialogue" for holding joint military exercises and regular goodwill visits, which helped in the institutionalisation of dialogues through a consultative mechanism for the exchanges of views on regional and global security issues. The first joint military exercises in 2007-08 helped in enhancing trust through several mutual visits of service chiefs of both countries (Li, 2009). These initial momentums were abruptly frustrated in 2010 after Chinese government's denial of visa to an Indian army commander from Arunachal Pradesh however within a year in December 2011, both countries resumed their defence exchanges and declared to broaden maritime security cooperation in the field of joint naval escorts and exercises in the Indo-Pacific region (Panda, 2013).

IV. An Era of India-China Competitive Coexistence

More than ever, both India and China acknowledged the relevance of multilateral diplomacy in the new era of competitive coexistence. It was evident that liberalisation, regionalisation and globalisation are inevitable trends, where multilateral diplomatic is quite helpful in safeguarding geopolitical and geo-economics interests. As a result, both India and China became members of BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations (UN), and a range of regional and multilateral forums as a dialogue partner. In the post-2000 era, both India and China engaged in regional and multilateral forums with a view that joint participation offered an opportunity to enhance political trust and reduce mutual insecurity. In November 2005, China had won observer status in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao explicitly articulated to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about joint participation in regional forums to reduce mutual insecurity and enhance political trusts. This new positive spirit in their bilateral relations formalised "Russia-India-China Foreign Minister Meeting" (Uberoi, 2001).

In multilateral forums and summits like G20, World Trade Organization (WTO), Copenhagen Climate Change Summit 2009 and Paris Climate Change Summit 2015, United Nations and global financial reforms, India and China jointly raised the voices and concerns of developing countries. Both countries are founder members of the

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and BRICS National Development Bank (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018). India and China are increasingly cooperating in international institutions and negotiations like the Doha trade round, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) quota reforms, the global financial crisis, and climate change. Also, to various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, both countries have cooperated in the G20, BASIC, and BRICS to discuss and align their position. Unlike China's anti-western outlook, India does not use these multilateral groups as a political alliance against Western-led world order. India however, uses BASIC and BRICS as a useful policy instrument for deepening relations with other great powers, for defending the interests of developing countries and by promoting a more democratic multi-polar world order democratically. In 2009, both countries further increased their political leverage in global climate governance through BASIC grouping (India, China, Brazil and South Africa) to discuss and align their position during COP-15 Copenhagen conference to achieve a broader consensus on various socio-economic issues of developing countries (Mathai, 2012).

Under the broader Indian network, India and China need to develop the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor (BCIM) simultaneously for the development of Indian "Andaman & Nicobar Islands" as a shipping hub for the Bay of Bengal basin. In the meanwhile, India should link up Chabahar port to the west with "International North-South Transport Corridor" (INSTC) and "Eurasian Transport Corridor" while India needs to link up Trincomalee port to the east with the "Bay of Bengal littoral ports" and "Mekong-Ganga Corridor" with Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam; and "kaladan multi-modal transport corridor" in Myanmar, as well as the port of Sittwe (Saran, 2015). Because of this reason, India signed China led sub-regional group Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) in August 1999 to enhance trade and investment and to facilitate the construction of a 2,800-km economic corridor from Kunming (China) to Kolkata (India) via Mandalay (Myanmar), Manipur and Assam in India, and Dhaka and Jessore in Bangladesh. In January 2000, China became a dialogue partner of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for pursuing economic and non-traditional cooperation in the Indian Ocean region (Panda, 2014). Additionally, while India is a full member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the 21-members Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the 35-members Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), China is either an observer or a dialogue partner in these organisations in South Asia and Indian Ocean Region. However, India refused to join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) based on sovereignty concern because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) - the flagship project of BRI passes through disputed Kashmir region between India and Pakistan.

The India-China competitive coexistence, however, can be witnessed in the proximity of South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. The small south Asian states playoff between India and China to maximise their economic benefits hence, the ruling elites of these small south Asian states try to balance their relations amid domestic opposition in their excessive concessions from both Asian giants. These small states and islands in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region are in Indian geographical proximity, while communication and transport technology increased their economic cooperation with China. By 2017 all small south Asian states except Bhutan have joined Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under the BRI, China has subsidised large infrastructure projects to these small states and islands for building harbours, ports, highways, bridges and telecommunication projects to integrate these small south Asian states into the Chinese economic sphere more closely (Garver, 2012). These small nations and islands aspire to have an independent nation-building process. Despite the geographical proximities of India, the best interests of these small south Asian states lie in to maximise their bargaining power vis-à-vis both Asian giants, India and China (Wagner, 2016). Indian strategists, however, are cautious about China's expanding military presence, security roles and involvement in dual-use infrastructure projects (civil and military) in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region (SA-IOR). Indeed, these transports and communication technologies created competition for India, but it's an overstatement to say that Indian security and strategic interests will be in jeopardy because both India and China have enough strategic space to protect their security interests in SA-IOR. In these contexts, only future holds the answer for how long, these small states in SA-IOR can manage to acquire a substantial amount of investment without losing their sovereignty and national interests (Paul, 2018)?

Now, India and China are discussing cooperation on oil exploration in African and Central Asian republics. Amid rising oil prices, both countries (as the largest importers of oil) are in constant touch and considering the joint purchase to negotiate the reasonable price on their placed order. Indeed, the bilateral relations of both countries are multifaceted which aligns and differs in a various range of issues (Reischer, 2012). Both Asian powerhouses share a common position on climate change. Both countries insistence on their “right to development” and rejection of binding emission targets for their economies share common concerns in the previous climate change conferences so far (Prys & Wojczewski, 2015).

V. The Way Forward

Like all modern nation-states, India-China bilateral relations are multifaceted that converges and diverges on different sets of issues depending on their world-views. Some scholars still wonder about contemporary dynamics in India-China relations - is its common economic interests or boundary dispute continued to shape India-China bilateral relations? However, one does not see any reason why both neighbouring Asian giants should not encourage to improve socio-politic-economic-cultural interactions when both can equally complement their core strategic interests in the multipolar world order. Indeed, the new era of the strategic partnership is crucial in upholding Asian equilibrium and the multipolar world order.

A more systematic dialogue, high-level visits and acknowledging differences facilitate a better understanding of the domestic compulsions that drive the two countries’ foreign policies to help in managing their nationalist impulses, transforming public perceptions and learning to stop situations before they can develop into an armed confrontation (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010). Both India and China are looking towards expanding the generally stable bilateral relationship both quantitatively (in terms of areas of cooperation and convergence) and qualitatively (in terms of the type of collaboration). To push economic reforms, India needs Chinese investments in sectors such as manufacturing, assistance in infrastructure development, greater access to the lucrative Chinese markets, and so on. India’s policy towards China is in the predisposition of non-alignment and strategic autonomy along with the specific degree of mitigation on global issues such as climate change, energy security, counter-terrorism WTO reform for raising voices and concerns on behalf of the all developing countries in regional and multilateral forums (Tiang-Boon, 2016). John Garver rightly mentioned that India needs to break away from its low growth track and produce ingenious and confident policies leveraging its strengths in South Asia and Indian ocean region in the light of Chinese maximisation of security and strategic interests in Asia and beyond (John, 2001). The contemporary dynamics in India-China relations are towards the expansion of trade ties, sub-regional economic and connectivity projects and interactions in regional and global multilateral forums (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018). Both countries need to cooperate as they confront common non-traditional challenges such as the depletion of resources, environmental degradation, and pandemics in addition to traditional security challenges in contemporary times. China is observing not just current trends and directions in Indian foreign policy but, India’s rapid economic growth, military exercises and strategic partnership with major powers, as well as the rapid modernization of military, missile, space program and growing naval capabilities in South Asia and Indian Ocean region. However, the primary focus of Chinese strategic and military planning is towards the East China Sea, the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. China’s primary concern is to prepare for a military conflict in the case of Taiwan contingency (Pardesi, 2010). For these reasons, India needs to engage constructively with China to minimise their differences and maximise their opportunities in bilateral relations. India needs to safeguards its political influence, resources and markets; while India should modernise its armed forces, enhance its nuclear deterrence and space technology, to form strategic partnerships with other major powers like Japan, Russia, European Union and the United States. India should cooperate with China for cooperative security architecture, with the caution to safeguards Indian security and strategic interests from increasing China’s comprehensive national power in Asia and beyond (Wojczewski, 2016).

However, the only credible way to address core security and strategic interests is first to define Indian security interest in concrete terms. Secondly, both countries need to understand the contemporary dynamics in India-China relations and adjust their policies accordingly. In restoring a semblance of equality in bilateral

relationship, it is necessary to build up India's economic and security capabilities and begin to close the power gap with China. In the meantime, India's economic engagement and security cooperation with other major powers should also remain a key objective (Saran, 2017). Most importantly, to address the mutual suspicion and strategic mistrust promptly India-China diplomatic relations need to be pro-active. Indian and Chinese leaders need to interact at a regular interval, and institutionalisation of informal annual summit (e.g. "Wuhan Summit 2018" & "Mamallapuram Summit 2019") is a significant step in the right direction (Bambawale, 2019). The main feature of these annual informal summits is that both India and China should cooperate based on the merit of each case in bilateral and multilateral level interactions. India's development of Chabahar port in Iran can link up with China led Eurasian transport corridor. The triangular highway linking India-Myanmar-Thailand can link up with China led north-south rail and road links in the Laos-Cambodia-Vietnam with Mandalay as a nodal point. India should invite China to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which is an essential area of energy cooperation (Saran, 2019).

The former Chinese ambassador to India, Luo Zhaohui mentioned four action plans to address mutual differences, which includes stepping up efforts to manage differences, keeping up the warmth of bilateral relations, raising the speed of cooperation in diverse fields and increasing people-to-people and cultural exchanges (Zhaohui, 2019). The contemporary Indian foreign policy is multi-aligned issue based, which gives the capacity to be flexible, and the ability to maintain Indian strategic autonomy in terms of the foreign policy decision-making process (Gokhle, 2019). Therefore, Indian foreign policy must keep equidistance from great powers like the US, China, and Russia to preserve their strategic autonomy in the multipolar world order.

To summarise, both India and China should try to configure different equations to complement their investment and connectivity projects for economic growth and social change in the multi-polar world order. The need of our time is to work towards connected Asia based on commonly agreed international norms, rules and practices for the global commons. In this regard, the "United Nations Charter" should be the guiding force for the freedom of navigation, use or use of threat of force and peaceful resolution of disputes (Jaishankar, 2016). This leads to the crucial question - Does national interest determine the way sovereign nation act & communicate, or vice versa? Probably the answer to this question lies in both state's mutual need to reconcile their domestic priorities with external priorities, which require strong political will, judiciousness and civilisational wisdom to address any contradictions promptly in their diplomatic relations.

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