

# China's inroads into South Asia: Impact on India

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### Abstract

*India and China rank among the world's largest developed nations and fast growing economies. The first phase of India-China relation was marked by an in depth warm friendship, relation between contemporary China and India are characterized by border disputes, leading to the military conflicts, however the war of 1962 brought both the side in direct confrontation with one another, which resulted in freezing of relations between them for a few decade. China has systematically bolstered its influence in Southern Asia through political, economic and military assistance to the smaller states of the region. China played economic and military card to reinforce its area of influence in South Asia. In South Asian region, the incremental political, economic, tactical role has been played by China and constantly accentuated that how the smaller South Asian region has its interests with China in terms of security, economic interests. But on the other front, it has also been noticed that China has been building close relations with the South Asian region only inquest for countless strategic impact with in the region and thereby diminishing Indian impact on their decision making. Both India's and China's overall strength are enhanced which is now widely perceived. The main purpose of this paper is to highlight the relations between China and South Asia and what is their impact on India. Further this paper focuses on the most of the contentious issues between India and China in South Asia and what attempts should be taken by these two entities to resolve the problems. This paper evaluates the recent developments in Indian and Chinese foreign policies with reference to the South Asian region. Finally the aim of the paper is to explore the status of conflicts, disputes and cooperation between India and China in South Asia*

**Key Words:** India, China, South Asia, China's South Asia Policy, Chinese Geostrategic Foray, Conflict, Cooperation, Border Disputes, Indian Concern.

### Introduction

The South Asian region has the maximum languages in the domain. This region is coupled by historical and ethnic ties in linguistic, conviction, belief, customs, civilizations and literature and structures a standard intention. It is within the common interest of South Asia that the region develops to become strong, stable and economically prosperous. India's security and the policy every time became the central points for the South Asian region. India occupies a singular position within the South Asian region. India undertakes a natural leadership role in the region, only by the asset of its dimensions, position and economic nascent.

Immediately after independence, India rises as a largest supremacy in South Asia to reconstruct the South Asian neighbourhood. India is the major regional power in South Asia merely by its economic potential and military proficiencies.(Chakravarty,2014) India has given its new definition and redefine itself by adopting the political role internationally and extended its neighbourhood also. Within the South Asian region, India has assumed a massive push to substitute connectivity and stimulated mutual assurance in several extents, including trade and investment.(Kher,2012) The policy adopted by the India has been discouraged by the South Asia because of their personal interest.

Almost all the South Asian region started blaming India to uplift and facilitating the regional development in South Asia and in world affairs also. The faster growth of the India became the apprehensions of aspirants in its neighbourhood. India has faced the opposition from the rising South Asian region. As viewed by the South Asian Countries the Indian regional policy mechanism is empowering to develop the India. The South Asian countries facing threats from India because of the dependency of the small South Asian countries over India. (Hamdani,2013) India has entered into various bilateral agreements along with South Asian neighbours.(Voice of India,2010).

India is the only democratic country has not seen behind after its independence and rising itself in different fields by developing its relations with South Asian countries and has also extended its hands for executing the bilateral agreements with the regional countries to rise its economic and political growth and has also taken steps to strengthen the defence, paramilitary, naval and air forces by procuring the latest high-tech equipment's from the different countries. The neighbouring countries like the China after looking into the growth of India has also started reflecting its extra-regional powers in the South Asian region. The boundary of Tibet is playing an important role for the two regional countries like the India and China which became the strategical point of their neighbourhood, as the China is sharing many borders with the neighbouring countries of the India that became the main cause for the China to compete with India. Tibet due to its geographical location plays the role of a buffer state between India and China. Strategically it occupies a physical position both for India and China. Tibet lies between two huge populous and powerful neighbours i.e. India in the South and China in the East. China strategically included the Tibet with in its own region, which became the cause to alter the relations of Indo-China, which was criticised by all over the world, but was not became sufficient for people of Tibet to force Chinese to leave Tibet. India opposed China's entry into Tibet as military action could cause unrest and disturbance in her own border. In 1962, China broken out the massive attack over the India. Being the two super powers in the region India-China has undertook to settle the dispute by dialogue instead of further indulging themselves into war. For the last few years, China tries to include itself into the South Asian region, which causing a great challenge for the India to strengthen its relations much stronger to the South Asian region unlike earlier. For the last few years the South Asian region is also diverting towards the China and the India is facing a challenge to compete the

China in a diplomatic way and for this the India is executing the bilateral agreements and also increased frequent visits in the neighbouring countries. China using the shoulder of the neighbouring countries to target India with an object to settle its disputes by the following the 1988 Sino-Indian rapprochement agreement to develop a balance in the region by extending military and strategic cooperation.

### **Strategy of China towards South Asia**

China strategically getting a benefit of common borders of the South Asian countries by using it for its trade and rising of its economic growth in diplomatic manner. China as a immediate neighbourer became the foremost important economic and trading partners for the South Asian countries. South Asian countries depending upon the aid, assistance, loans and investments of the China for the growth of their countries and the China has provided such immunities to small South Asian Countries on its own whims by maintaining a distance strategically and act as a facilitator. It became un-digest for the China to look into the economic growth of the India after independence, China left no stones unturned to develop its relations with the South Asian countries strategically with an object to reduce the influence of the India over South Asian countries. At the one hand the China is developing itself and at the other hand the China has convinced the South Asian countries to adopt their independent policies without coming into the influence of India, objectively just to reduce the Indian influence in South Asian region (Samaranayake,2014) South Asian region has been covered by China by changing the parameters of its geographical growth and has also extended its hands to provide the economic, military and diplomatic support to the South Asian countries, which causes a great impact upon the relations of India with the South Asian countries and the smaller South Asian countries are continuously tilting towards the China.

China posed itself as a one of the fastest growing country in the global and has raised its influence over the neighbouring countries by granting the loans, aids to the South Asian countries including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and continuously superseding the political and diplomatic relations of India with the South Asian countries. China by adopting the policy of “String of Pearls” wants to encircle India and to minimize its influence over the neighbourhood countries, which caused a great threat to Indian sphere. China covering its neighbouring countries by extending its boundaries strategically and also established the projects in the small South Asian countries with its own cost and have complementary established the ports, railways, highways, bridges in the said countries with intent to control their economy in a diplomatic manner and also to give setback to India. China has invested huge amounts in the smaller South Asian countries as comparison to the India. As India has announced seventeen billion US dollar and the China announced twenty five billion dollar to the South Asian countries - those within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 2012. Prima-facie, it has been cleared that the China has invested the huge money in the South Asian countries in the form of infrastructural developments and made the good

relations with the said countries, who are in the dire need of developments in their countries because of lack of their own financial resources. Pakistan is one of the countries came easily under the influence of China. (Kelegama, 2014) China cleverly spreading its power by developing the relations with the political parties of the smaller South Asian countries and have also shown affection by providing the arms and ammunition to the militaries of various countries at a very lowest prices. China has also sent various delegates to the neighbouring countries to develop its relations with the communist parties. In Pakistan army is playing a great role, as it always setback the democratic rule in the country and being itself ruling over the country, the Pakistan army is indirectly supporting China. Above all, the other countries also favour China, as China is granting loans and aids to such countries only for the sake of its own interest. In Pakistan, the China is the foremost vital supplier of weapons, followed by Bangladesh. Pakistan is lacking to establish the infrastructures, experimental laboratories for manufacturing and preparing the nuclear weapons like China and China got the benefit of the same has made very cleverly executed nuclear agreements with the China to strengthen the securities of the country. Not only this the China has supplied the submarines to Bangladesh navy also.(Raghuvanshi,2016)

For the last few years China has increased its economy rapidly by establishing the manufacturing units and also by supplying the goods to the neighbouring countries at the cheaper rates than the other South Asian countries and the said amount has been used by the China to establish and construct the roads with an object to a direct access to the neighbouring countries. China is using the said roads for giving the frequent supplies to the South Asian countries and the policy for constructing the road was named as Belt and Road Initiative. The object of the China is to lurell the South Asian countries to use the cheaper products of the China and increased its economy by diverting the stakeholders of all the South Asian countries towards the China and also proved the China as successful in its policy. With the increasing of the economic growth of the China the China reluctantly has not followed the terms and conditions of The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. China is the only country, who is giving financial aids and loans to the South Asian countries without fearing for the debts and reimbursement of the loans strategically to change the political and democratic graph of the South Asian countries with an object to lead the supermacy over the debted countries. Pakistan is one of the victim of the China, who has not only been debted, but also got the arms and ammunicions from the China.(Chansoria,2013) China is continuously covering the sea ports of the neighbourhood countries like Pakistan in which the China got the access in Gwadar alongside the Arabian sea coast, which became a privilege for the China to get itself enter into Pakistan and also find the way from Karakoram to get access for Beijing to Eurasia, which give the strong setback to India. India also trying to get access in the nations of Central Asia and West Asia.(Sering,2012) Pakistan has not strong resources to compete with the neighbouring countries in international borders and the China is indirectly supporting the Pakistan to challenge the neighbouring countries.(Niazi,2015)

The China diplomatically extended its boundaries in the deep sea ports also by developing the ports in the neighbouring countries executing bilateral agreements, partnerships and memorandum of understandings to get the access in the deep sea ports apart from its countries and run its trade to the said sea ports like the Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Gwadra in Pakistan. China has extended its presence in the deep sea ports into the Indian Ocean also and developed the Sea Lanes of communications, which drastically affecting the internal security of India. The policy of the China is to generate the economy from the sea ports of the neighbouring countries by using for its trade and the maximum revenue generated by the Pakistan' s Gwadar port ultimately went to the China. Not only this, China extended its limits to Gilgit-Baltistan and also put its eyes over the Bhutan by settling the disputes and differences with Bhutan. Prima-facie, it appears that the China is encircling India strategically by covering the deep sea ports of the neighbouring countries in the name of trade and for increasing its prosperity and economic growth. Access is the only magic yardstick to reflect its presence.

Initially the China has developed its relations with the South Asia through its trade and subsequently China entered into the defence policies of the South Asian countries in such a political and diplomatic manner like Bangladesh in 2001 and executed various agreements with the South Asian countries. The access of China in Bangladesh proves a yardstick to lay claims over the Arunachal Pradesh of India.(Ibid,2014) As per information, maximum arms supply has been made by China to Pakistan in the year 2013 to 2017 and Bangladesh also got arms supply from the China.

China made the weapon supplies to Sri Lanka diplomatically for making the relations and also to give setback to India, when the China found India is reluctant to supply the weapons to Sri Lanka. During that period China also provided the nuclear power plants to Sri Lanka to fulfill its needs. Beijing made the important relations with Sri Lanka objectively for certain reasons.

The India has very strong relations with Nepal since the time immoral, but the situation today became stringent due to the diplomatic and political involvement of China in Nepal. The China significantly increasing its economic profile in Nepal like the other countries. The temptation on part of the China to intervene in Nepal in domestic politics has proved to be counterproductive for the India. Such intervention creates popular resentment and can turn friends into enemies.(Jaiswal,2014)

The strategic thought of the China to become first manufacturing hub amongst all other South Asian countries and with this intent the China has developed the trade realtions with the South Asian countries and increase its capacity of export the goods and decrease to import the goods from the neighbourhood countries like India, which primarily affects the economic growth of the India because of the trade policies of the China, which include “only export, do not import”. In the recent years 2016-2017 China has exceed its limits of trade not only exporting raw materials, but also covered the field of cyber space in India and other neighbouring countries and decreased the self-economic growth of India.

## India-China Relations

There is may be a long and sophisticated history of border tensions between China and India and therefore, the problems within the region. These problems are even before the war of 1962. India and China re-established diplomatic ties in 1976, which was broken during the war of 1962. The process of normalisation of relations started simultaneously. China now constrained itself from condemning India overtly, although covertly, it continued the old policy of containing India. There are some considerable reasons behind this just as the Indian victory in war of India Pakistan of 1971, merger of Sikkim in India restored its position as a strong country. During the post-cold war era, relations between India and China acquired good momentum and revived the hope of making the 21<sup>st</sup> century an Asian century. But the policy of China in South Asia is perceived as one of supporting India's weaker neighbours. In the post-cold war era, tremendous change has been seen in the China's attitude regarding India. A number of significant changes have been seen in Chinese attitude. China played economic and military card to increase its area of influence in South Asia. Tensions have started deepened, since the Doklam border crises in 2017. Both China and India, with their growing ambitions are bumping up against one another not only alongside of their borders, but even have been competing with one another for power on many fronts across South increasingly Asia. Both countries consider the development activities on the un-demarcated border as illegal. India is likely to build roads along the LAC, expected to complete in coming years. China is also undertaking similar activities on its side.

Over the years, China has emerged both as an economic and a military powerhouse. It has a trade surplus with most of the countries in Asia including India. China's One Belt Road (OBOR) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR), though promoted as economic initiative have strategic undertone. China strategically has raised its influence over the Indo-Pacific region. China's deepening relation with South Asian countries, poses significant challenge to India's position within the region. Chinese naval bases in Gwadar and Djibouti, within the Indian Ocean and therefore, the appearance of Chinese submarines within the Bay of Bengal and Sri Lanka are seen as Chinese intentions to create a network of military and commercial facilities to encircle India.(Blanchard,2017)

It is important to know how the two countries methods and mechanisms for ensuring peace and tranquility have become dated and ineffective. The last four decades saw China and India as the world's leading economies. Both the countries appears as globally engaged societies and significant polities. China emerged as the world's largest trading nation and second-largest economy. Today the India is also appearing as the world's fifth-largest economy. After three decade of coalition governments, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is constantly putting its efforts to reach the country at its highest level by making bilateral agreements with different countries with an object to raise the economy of country.

The utmost frontrunners of the India and China are aiming towards reckless progressing of their country's to new heights as they globally visualize and also altered the connections of India and China away from their historical and bilateral differences. Mutual imaginations of even bilateral issues are now viewed from the view point of their increasing regional and global interactions and initiatives. Their cost-benefit analyses are not any longer limited to their ceding or gaining a couple of miles – having unsettling the calculus could be.

There is a requirement to research India-China ties in their totality and not allow any single issue to monopolize their mutual perceptions and policies. The border disputes between India and China can only be settled by dialogues only without showing any resentment against each other.

### **Effects of China over India in South Asia**

At one point of time, India has played an important role to shape the economic and political growth of the neighbourhood countries, but now the position has been changed, the China is playing a dominant role in South Asia, it has extended its presence in South Asia through many investments under the Belt Road strategy and also through other investments. The close dogmatic connections of China with countries of South Asia. No other countries have shown their courage to settle the issues raised between the China and India and make their-selves as a silent spectators, with this India got a great setback by the act of its counterpart. The continued China-India conflict could reverberate within the South Asia, developed strange relations.

### **The Neighbourhood Policy of Modi**

After independence Modi became the first Prime Minister, who invited all the South Asian countries to India as a goodwill gesture objectively to develop the relations with the South Asian countries. The first priority of the Indian Prime Minister became to visit the neighbourhood countries and to develop the political and diplomatic relations, which became fruitful also after executing the various bonds, agreements and memorandum of understanding with the smaller South Asian countries. Not only had this, the Indian Prime Minister also visited Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan also. But the Indian Prime Minister has not attained its height as has been conceived, in the South Asian countries due to the strong influence of China over the South Asian region.

### **India's Counter Strategy**

The smaller South Asian countries requires the infrastructural developments in their countries and China got the benefit of the same has invested a large in the South Asian countries and also offered loans and aids to develop the roads connectivity to China for its trade and has also changed the geographical, political, economic strata of the South Asian region. (Chellaney,2017) The diplomatic policy of the China is to trap the neighbouring countries through its "String of Pearls" strategy and through "Debt Trap Diplomacy" not

only this the China adopted the policy of luring to borrow infrastructural loans and wants to pressurise them once the nations are indebted with the loans. China shrudely increased its force into the South Asia in multidimensional activities by convincing them to extend its support in diplomatic, economic and in military.

India has focused to give a counter attack to China, while applying the strategy of “Necklace of Diamonds” and for the said reason India has expand its naval base and improved relations with the neighbouring countries to counter the policy of China. (Haniffa,2012)

### **The Strategic Bases of India**

Changi Naval Base, Singapore: The agreement was signed by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Singapore on 2018 and got an access to Changi Naval Base. The Changi Naval Base is of strategic importance, as it is set placed near the South China Sea. Though through this agreement, Indian Navy also got access to refuel and rearm its ships.

Sabang Port, Indonesia: In 2018, the military access has been provided to India in Sabang Port. This is often among one of the most significant agreements, as India holds the strategic position with in the Indian Ocean. The Sabang Port is of greater strategic importance as it is located near the door step of the Straits of Malacca, which is in itself a major and important sea lane in the world.

Duqm Port, Oman: In 2018, the military access has been provided to India in Duqm Port. India got the important port for trade through Persian Gulf. Additionally to the present, this port is of greater significance to India as it positioned between Djibouti and Gwadar port.

Chabahar Port, Iran: The bilateral agreement between both sides signed in 2016. As this port is important for India for its trade, economic and strategic activities.

### **India’s Foreign Policy: Strategic Cooperation**

While taking into considerations the omission and commissions on part of the China the India strategically changed its foreign policy. India got the direct access to Naval bases and also developed its old relations with other nations to garland China.

### **India, East Asia and South East Asia**

Mongolia: This is first time in the history of Mongolia that the Indian Prime Minister visited there. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s fruitful visit to Mongolia reached to new heights. It’s been actively looking to widen its relations with other countries, also referred as its “Third Neighbour Foreign Policy”. The relationship between India and Mongolia has been seen as a mutual beneficial connection. Both the countries

have come closer than ever before and India also considered Mongolia as a primary part of act East Policy of India

Japan: The India and Japan mutually decided to improve the connectivity between Asia and Africa. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is also seen as a kiosk to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Both countries stress more importance on the Indo-Pacific region. Both shared their views on challenges such as climate change, global terrorism etc. They decided to work jointly for the prosperity and maintenance of the world.

Vietnam: Recently the Indian Prime Minister visited Vietnam and offered financial supports to increase the capacity of establishment of the military at different levels and also executed an agreement for the cyber security.

### **India, Asia and Central Asia**

Central Asia: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited all the five countries of Central Asia in his one visit. In this official visit many issues related to security cooperation and strategic partnership were discussed.

Ashgabat Agreement & INSTC: India joined this multi-modal transport agreement, to access Central Asian countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, which are western neighbours of China. This agreement has provided India land connectivity to Central Asia, if seen in conjunction with the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Not much more, but side by side India has sustained vigorous dealings with all the nations that falls in China's periphery. It is often said that India in recent times has worked incessantly towards asserting itself to realize a far better strategic cooperation with other countries. This reflects the India's recent policy of Non-Alignment has been shifted to Multi-Alignment.

Apart from South Asia, India is fast developing routes to succeed in Central Asian countries. A particular pattern has emerged from India's recent policy pushes that India has befriended with almost all the countries in China's periphery. Though the policy of India is not much stronger and effective than the China's "String of Pearls" policy. But anyhow, it is effective on some fronts and also a robust reply from the Indian side.

China's meteoric rise to power by capturing various essential markets in several countries across the world has made economies dependence thereon. India's allies might not be ready to free themselves of their interdependence with China. Therefore, India-China border relations aren't just about guns, but also about the rising economic power of China, which has resulted in countries being hooked into it for essential supplies including South Asia and others. Within the larger picture of worldwide politics, it is inevitably turns into a conversation about economies.

The foremost intention of China is to getting the hold in South Asia and also dominates the South Asian neighbours of India through their policy of granting loans or a brook of debts. Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan are major pawns during this squeeze play of isolating India. China has made major investments in these countries and other Asian countries and given them countless loans in times of need. Their support extended toward India could end in China's retaliation created by the facility of debt. Hence, Beijing has ensured diplomatic power within the region by putting India's neighbours in debt to China, which has turned them into its allies. China has not shied away from flexing its military muscles to determine supremacy over neighbouring countries. India must rebuild strong diplomatic relations with its own neighbours. India's best hope is to use the strengths that it's to the simplest of its advantage. The best way to settle this score through artfully crafted diplomacy.

China's emergence as a serious power, with widespread economic and interest, may be a reality, which has got to be accepted. An effort to isolate or contain China is unlikely to succeed. The relations between India China in the current years have assimilated much more development and affluence. A multi pathway "re-approachment" is undoubtedly profitable to produce the simplest outcomes. The world community, as a whole, ensures not object to its upswing and a few feel India has the precise to be a regional supremacy. One of the foremost reasons behind numerous clashes in South Asia is China's military, economic and political exertions to comprehend control vis-à-vis India. India on the one hand is an integral geo-political part of Indian Sub-continent of South Asia. China on the other hand an extra regional power as instantaneous neighbour of South Asia.

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