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FROM 'NON-RELATION' TO NEGOTIATIONS : PROSPECTS FOR NORMALIZATION OF SINO- INDIAN RELATIONS

Introduction

The People's Republic of China and India are the two major actors in Asia. The significance of relations between them transcends the geographic areas of the two countries. A breakdown of relations between them following the border war in 1962 left an abiding imprint not only on the politics of the region, but it had its reverberation in several different parts of the world. Since then there have been significant developments in the political atmospherics with regional and global dimensions which had obvious impact on the Chinese and Indian foreign policy perspectives, its formulation and implementation. After almost two decades of wary and sullen stand-off that marked Sino-Indian relations, there have been signs of desire on their part to move toward improved relations. Hence the recent years have witnessed a lot of activities in relation between India and China. Having issued numerous gestures of goodwill and feelers they began to hold negotiations with the objective of normalizing the relationship between them.

But problems like Afghan crisis, Kampuchean tangle, China's alleged nuclear aid to Pakistan and the relationship of either of the negotiating parties with the superpowers complicate this normalization. Above all this, the stumbling block in the process of normalization of relations between India and China remains the border issue. So a big

question springs up how far is a Sino-Indian thaw likely to go and what are its implications ?

So, it is worthwhile to pursue a study of the attempted thaw in the relationship between two Asian giant neighbours. This study does not embody an interpretation of Sino-Indian conflict as such, its objective is to explore the compulsions as to why both China and India are now interested in a thaw. The paper also examines some of the recent developments in Sino-Indian relations, identifies some of the substantial limits to that thaw and scrutinises the implications of the new trends on the South Asian region as well as the super-powers.

1. Factors Behind the Recent Moves Toward Thaw

The dream of Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru that India and China could champion the cause of peace in Asia was marred by the 1962 border war between the two countries. Although they never broke off their diplomatic ties, the relations between India and China remained frozen till the mid-70s when the two countries exchanged ambassadors (1976). As noted earlier, there has been a desire on the part of India and China to normalize the strained relationship between them. What prompted them to go for that ? As the political atmospherics has undergone a lot of changes both in regional and global context since the rupture of border war between these two countries, they seem to have softened their attitude to each other. The factors that compel the two unfriendly giants to come to terms are basically of political, security related and economic in nature. Let us examine them in a bit of details.

From the Indian point of view, the benefit that is likely to flow out of normalization of relations with China is mainly political. (i) It may lead to lesser Chinese interference in the northeast (such as providing arms to hostile Nagas or Mizos), lesser political support and encouragement to Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan in their 'confrontationist' postures vis-a-vis India.¹

1. K. Subrahmanyam, *World Focus*, New Delhi, August 1981 p. 3.

(ii) India feels that her security environment has deteriorated since the Persian Gulf became the focus of global politics in the early 1970s. The situation further deteriorated following the civil war in Iran, the outbreak of the continuing Iran-Iraq war. This brought the target of superpower rivalry close to the Indian shores.² The Soviet move into Afghanistan has put India in policy dilemma. Her dilemma seems to have stemmed from the fact that Soviet military presence in Afghanistan had brought to an end the traditionally maintained buffer between Russia and India resulting in a sudden change in the strategic

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environment of South Asia. Although India did not condemn the Soviet act in Afghanistan, she could not overlook the implication of superpower's military presence in an area where she aspires for emerging as the predominant power.³ The growing militarization of the Indian Ocean and the big-power rivalry operating in Afghanistan had revived the cold war and enhanced the Sino-Pak threat leading India to feel encircled. Besides, in the mid 1970's there was a strategic shift in the South Asian triangle and India perceived the recent "turmoil" in her neighbourhood as of "wider international" dimensions.⁴ It may be noted here that Nepal's proposal for a 'Zone of Peace' is not conceded to by India, while the US supports the concept. Late Mrs Gandhi herself stated that there are problems in all the neighbouring countries. some of which will certainly get help

2. *World Focus*, Nov-Dec 1981, p. 40.

3. Krishna P. Khanal, Ustinov's Visit to India : A Reinforcement of Indo-Soviet Ties," *Strategic Studies Series* No. 1, 1984 Centre for Napal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal, p. 83.

4. Inder Malhotra, "Mounting Security Threat", *Times of India*, December 8, 1983,

from abroad. She felt that India was being "surrounded all around". Thus the intensification of superpower rivalry at the periphery of the subcontinent and the India-perceived changes within the region make India feel it imperative for her to build channels of bilateral interaction with China leading to normalization of relationship between them.

(iii) Sino-US-Pak triangle is a threat to Indian security. It is more so when Pakistan, India's closest neighbour, is flooded with the sophisticated US weapons system, which, as India perceives, is meant against India. So, to Indian mind, an improvement of relations with China might mute Chinese support to Pakistan.

(iv) India seems to have poised herself to assert regional supremacy and to emerge as the leader of the nonaligned movement and the developing world. Her dependence on any of the big powers is perceived in this context to tarnish Indian image resulting in difficulties to realize her national objectives. A view prevails in India that her national interests would be best served by reaching some accommodation with China and maximizing India's options within the Sino-Soviet-American triangular relationship.⁶

(v) Sino-Indian conflict does not bring good to the conflicting parties, more important, it damages the cause of the Third World as a whole. It would be apt to put here the convincing words of V. P. Dutt. He says, both India and China are "countries with similar massive problems arising from the colonial heritages, huge populations and sparsely developed resources, facing the twin evils of poverty and unemployment in a world situation of stagflation. They have common stakes in the emergence of a New International Economic Order, greater availability of trade opportunities on honourable and equitable terms from international institutions, wider cooperation between 'South' and 'South', peace and security in their environs and the ending of systems of international dominance".⁷ As India comes to

5. *Times of India*, New Delhi, January 24, 1984.

6. *World Focus*, Nov-Dec 1981, p. 88.

7. *Ibid*, p. 53.

realize this, she seems to be developing a sense of accommodation with China.

(vi) The bone of contention in relations between the two Asian giants remains their border dispute. The Indians claim that the Chinese occupy a good chunk of Indian territory in the strategically important Aksai Chin area. So it is only natural to look for opportunities to regain their territory. Settlement of their border dispute is organically linked with normalization of relation between the two countries.

On the Chinese side, also there are very significant compulsions to negotiate with the Indians for normalization of relations between them. These compulsions arise out of changed perceptions and policy objectives designed to generate benefits for the nation. Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang declared in early September, 1982, "Being a large country with a population of 1 billion, China ought to make a greater contribution to the world community."⁸

Chinese overtures to India for improved relationship is to be understood in light of the Chinese perception of the contemporary world and in the context of her global diplomacy.

(i) China has launched a vigorous programme of "Four Modernizations". To materialize this what China needs is a stable, progressive society internally, and a peaceful, comparatively friendly environment outside, both regional and worldwide in consistence with its overall foreign policy framework. Ensuring reduction of tensions on China's borders is one of the basic objectives of this policy. In tune with this, China aims at normalizing relations with India.

(ii) The Chinese seem to perceive that they are within a Soviet ring of encirclement consisting of heavy concentration of Soviet troops on China's northern border; the potential threat emanating from the Soviet Pacific fleet, and latent "Asian Collective Security System";

8. *Newsweek*, Oct. 34, 1982, p. 28.

and Moscow's special influence in Mongolia, Vietnam, India and Afghanistan.⁹ To break out of this encirclement, due to obvious reasons, China chose to normalize her relations with India. It is believed that one of the reasons why China is negotiating with India for normalization of relations is to attenuate the Indo-Soviet relationship by lessening the pressure on India and hence reducing the Indian crave for closer ties with Moscow. The Chinese seem to perceive also that good neighbourly relations between Asia's two largest countries is welcome, for it would check Moscow's bid for dominance in the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean area.

(iii) As India pursues independent nonaligned postures and diversifies its sources of military purchases, China reassesses India not to be a subservient collaborator of one or the other superpower. Hence China sees reasons in normalizing relations with India.

(iv) The honeymoon with the West and "Strategic alignment" directed against the Soviet Union had the effect of downgrading China's image amongst the developing nations who were either disappointed or alienated. China's decision-makers apparently also recognized the NAM as a link to Third World nations and an important body in terms of China's bid to gain a leadership role in the Third World "bloc"¹⁰ and develop a self-appointed godfather relationship with Third World revolutionaries and radical state leaders. It was stressed by the words of Premier Zhao Ziyang lauding the role of NAM during its 7th summit in New Delhi in March 1983.¹¹ Prior to that Zhao in a statement in Kinshasa said, "China will reinforce its solidarity and cooperation with the countries of the Third World and will deploy its efforts to maintain peace in the world and the establishment of equitable and rational economic relations."¹² An improvement of her relations with India—one of the leaders of the NAM and the Third World for that matter—may

9. *Current History*, Sept 1984, p. 245.

10. *Current History*, Sept 1983, pp. 245-246.

11. *Beijing Review*, March, 1983.

12. *F.E.E. Review*, Feb 3, 1983, p. 24.

obviously be expected to be instrumental in achieving these Chinese objectives.

(v) It is presumably a Chinese realization that while superpowers can maintain a functional relationship with each other, why not China and India, so as to develop commercial and cultural relations with a view to reaping economic benefits and grow people-to-people contacts leading ultimately to full normalization of severely strained relationships.

It is uncertain whether China is prompted by her intention of pulling India out of the Soviet orbit or serving bilateral interests. But it should be noted that the Chinese overtures to India for improved relationship is to be understood in light of the Chinese perception of the contemporary world and in the context of her global diplomacy.

2. Issues Involved

There have been exchanges of visits by parliamentary delegations, scholars and scientists, business representatives, sportsmen, cultural troupes to develop people-to-people contacts between Beijing and New Delhi with an objective of improving the climate for more formal official intercourse. But normalization of relations means not only these exchanges, it envisages resolution of some of the outstanding issues for any long-term settlement.

i. Border Issue

The road-block that continues to stand in the way of a potential settlement is the Sino-Indian border issue. The dispute over the border which in a minor fashion had started in 1954 suddenly took a serious turn in the fall of 1959. The subsequent developments widened the rift between India and China resulting in an armed border conflict between them on 20 October 1962.¹³ China and India have some 2500 miles of common frontier extending from northwest Kashmir

13. T. Karki Hussain, *Sino-Indian Conflict And International Politics in the Indian Sub-Continent, 1962-66*. Thomson Press (India) Limited, Faridabad, Haryana, 1977, p. 6, pp. 19-20,

to the tripartite junction of India, Burma and China near Talu Pass. Along this frontier the two states have advanced conflicting claims to approximately 50,000 square miles of territory¹⁴ in three different locations.

The Sino-Indian relations were under the severest strain since the border war. Notwithstanding the egg-and-chicken controversy on whether Sino-Indian relations have soured because of the border issue, or the other way round, Chinese leadership in the post-Mao period has emphasised on the need for improvement of Sino-Indian relations. But the talks initiated in this light in February, 1979 when the then Indian Minister for External Relations A. B. Vajpayee visited China, suffered a setback as China invaded Vietnam. It was only in December 1981 that the two sides began formal and official talks on border and other issues in Beijing. The Chinese leadership has emphasised improvement of the bilateral relations. To the Indians, improvement in relations with a neighbour can be a worthwhile objective in itself but not at the cost of weakening claims to, or giving up territory.

During 1980-81 China floated two approaches, First, Deng Xiaoping made proposals in June 1980 and April 1981 of "package deal" to settle the border problem. Second, in the absence of any agreement on the proposal the two sides should strive to develop relations in other areas. The "package deal" was, to a large extent, a nonstarter because it sought to settle issues on the basis of *status quo*. As regards the second aspect, India had some reservations because India did not seek the development of relations in other areas exclusively leaving aside a settlement on the border question.¹⁵ As the first round, the modalities for discussing the border question were also raised by India. The two sides however agreed to develop relations in other areas.

14. Surya P. Sharma, *India's Boundary and Territorial Disputes*, Vikas, Publications, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 1-2.

15. *World Focus*, June 1984 p. 26.

The second round of talks were held in Delhi in May 1982. While some useful exchanges took place on other issues, on the border question no progress was made as the Chinese proposed once more a package deal, whereby they offered to surrender claims to areas in the eastern sector (approximately 33,000 square miles) in return for acceptance of *status quo* in the Western sector. The Indians favoured a sector-wise solution of the border question beginning with the Western sector instead of discussing the border problem in toto, an approach unacceptable to the Chinese.¹⁶

The Third round of talks was held in Beijing in January 1983. This round also did not produce any substantial results as issues relating to modalities and procedures could not be solved. The officials, however, discussed trade and economic relations, and exchanges in the fields of culture, education, sports, science and technology.¹⁷ It was only at the fourth round of talks held in New Delhi in October 1983 that some progress was achieved. For the first time, the two sides discussed and exchanged views on international affairs, and China agreed to discuss the border question sectorwise, a proposal that was earlier mooted by India. Although this constituted a kind of a step forward in the sense that China had agreed to a point that there could be alternatives to the package deal, the Chinese have not given up the package plan altogether, as they continue to seek Indian concessions.¹⁸ And probably because of this obvious reason, the two sides again could not make a breakthrough in the fifth round of talks held in September 1984 in Beijing. But the two sides expressed their solemn desire to continue the talks.¹⁹ In sum, it may be observed that the two sides have made some confident strides forward but there is still a long way to go.

16. *Regional Studies*, Islamabad, Vol. II, No. 3, Summer 1984, p. 55.

17. *Indian Express*, New Delhi, Feb 2, 1983, Oct 14, 1983.

18. *World Focus*, June 1984, p. 26.

19. *The Bangladesh Observer*, Sept 24, 1984.

ii. Afghanistan Crisis

It can be safely asserted that it would be to her basic national interest that because of her geo-political compulsions India would try to prevent South West Asia, especially the Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan region, from becoming a theatre of great power rivalries. It is explained by the fact that it would highten tensions and instabilities on India's western borders. Due to this obvious reason, India has decried great power interference in the region and sought the withdrawal of 'foreign troops' from Afghanistan. The Chinese also want the Soviet troops withdrawn from Afghanistan. But there is a basic

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difference between India and China in their positions over the Afghanistan situation. India links the overstay of Soviet troops in Afghanistan with support given to rebel Afghan groups by external forces (meaning the US and China) through Pakistan. Some arms appear to have been supplied by China to Shola-e-Javed, a pro-Chinese rebel group²⁰. New Delhi appears to consider that continuation of such assistance would ultimately enhance the Sino-Pak threat to her border making her encircled by hostile neighbours. As a result there is still a long way to go before the strains in Sino-Indian relationship are brushed off.

iii. Kampuchean Tangle

The Kampuchean issue remains another complicating factor in the the way of improved relationship between India and China. India recognized the Vietnam-backed Hang Samrin Government in Kampuchea in July 1980, while China supports the remnants of Pol Pot

20. *Strategic Analysis* New Delhi, Vol. III, No. 12, March 1980, pp. 431-432.

regime and for that matter, the Sihanouk-led Coalition of Democratic Kampuchea. Recognition of government is usually decided upon by various countries with reference to their national interests. India recognized Heng Samrin Government in Kampuchea because of her huge economic and commercial interests in Vietnam.²¹ Moreover, New Delhi appears to consider it illogical not to recognize Heng Samrin Government in Kampuchea on the ground of presence of Vietnamese troops while recognising Babrak Karmal Government in Afghanistan with Soviet troops present there. India is interested in a strong Vietnam and there cannot be one if it is to be faced on two fronts by China and a Chinese supported regime in Kampuchea. Therefore a regime in Kampuchea which is friendly to Vietnam is also to be interpreted to be in the interest of India.²² Thus it appears that in Indian perspective improvement in Sino-Indian relations would not be at the expense of India's ties elsewhere—a position not very congenial for Chinese interests in South-east Asia. Thus the Indian position in and around Vietnam-backed Kampuchea does not seem to very well serve the normalization of Sino-Indian relationship.

iv. China's Nuclear Aid to Pakistan

India and Pakistan are two major powers in the South Asian region. They fought three wars with each other since their independence in 1947. China is India's northern neighbour and the principal adversary in a broader perspective. India finds it not easy to smile at a strong Sino-Pak relationship if designed against India. It is more so, when there are reports about Sino-Pak understanding on nuclear cooperation. Hence the alleged Chinese nuclear aid to Pakistan poses an irritant in the process of mormalization of relationship between India and China. It is widely believed that since the early 1970s Pakistan had been trying to launch a nuclear programme. It is after the 1974 Indian (Pokharan) test of nuclear device that Paklstan probably thought of adding a military dimension to its nuclear programme. It

21. *Strategic Analysis* Vol. IV, No. 2, May 1980, pp. 57-58.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61,

Is evident from the justification Z.A. Bhutto made for Pakistan going nuclear. "The Christians, Jewish and Hindu civilizations have it (nuclear weapon), the Communists have it and only Islam lacked it. So ran his logic"²³ Although General Ziaul Haq made repeated assertions about peaceful objective of their nuclear programmes, the fact that the US government in April 1979 invoked the Symington amendment that no aid could be given to a country engaged in nuclear weapons production and thereby suspended all aid to Pakistan, confirms the Pakistani intention of going militarily nuclear. General Zia is said to be carrying Bhutto's banner in this respect. In the light of Afghanistan, it is conceivable that a nuclear Pakistan may act in concert with a nuclear China to force India into adverse situation.²⁴

General Zia told in an interview given to *Time* magazine on Pakistan's nuclear capability and China : "I am very categorical about this : Pakistan has no nuclear bomb. And Pakistan has no intentions of having a nuclear capability of military significance. We view China as an emerging power. It is China that has enabled us to stand on our own in the technological field".²⁵ But within a week the illustrious *Newsweek* published an information : "More recently, US official sources say they believe that China has slipped Pakistan both raw uranium and blueprints for building a bomb, a charge Pakistan denies.²⁶ There are further reports that the American decision to postpone consideration of a nuclear pact with China is because of evidence that Beijing aided Pakistan's nuclear programme.²⁷ The Indians apprehend that if Pakistan were to gain a nuclear capability, the Chinese will start dealing with the sub-continent with a weaker India. Once that stage is reached India's smaller neighbours will look to China and Pakistan thus being on a stronger bargaining position vis-a-vis India.²⁸ Thus the alleged Chinese nuclear aid to Pakistan

23. *World Focus*, June 1981, p. 4.

24. *Strategic Analysis*, Feb 1980, Vol. III, No. 11, b. 401.

25. *Time* Dec 13, 1982, p. 80.

26. *Newsweek*, Dec 20, p. 31.

27. *Current History*, Sept 1984, p. 28.

28. *World Focus*, June 1981., p. 6.

will remain a critical irritant on the way of Sino-Indian normalization process unless India is convinced of Chinese behaviour.

3. Impact of the Thaw

The interrelations of the global policies of major powers—the United States, the Soviet Union and China—and regional tensions in the area have been of significance to the emerging pattern of alignments in South Asia. Along with the differing perspectives on bilateral issues, what stands in the way of swift progress toward Sino-Indian normalization is the yawning divide between the two countries' world strategic outlook and the prevailing and potential power alignments. Between the two states stand too many actually and potentially dividing issues to permit strategic harmony to bring them close together. This would be evident from the following, wherein the impact of Sino-Indian thaw will be projected.

i. Impact on South Asian Nations

It is probably characteristic of the South Asian nations that they reach out their hands for external help to meet their perceived security concerns. In this backdrop India and China are trying to mend their fences after a long period of strained relationship. So, as the two Asian giants are moving towards normalization of their relationship, it creates its impact and reverberation in many parts of the world, primarily in South Asia, where India is a preeminent country. It wants to be the predominant one as well. So when India is negotiating with an extra-regional major power like China (having the Soviets already as time-tested friends), it is an obvious concern for other smaller South Asian nations. In consistence with the over-all framework of China's independent foreign policy, proclaimed in 1982, China's recent policy towards South Asia evinces a shift envisaging, *inter alia*, normalization of relations with India and encouragement to bilateral settlement of outstanding problems between India and its neighbours. Pakistan is no doubt, worried about the prospect of better relations between China and India. A question,

therefore, springs up, whether China is going to develop relationship with India at the expense of the existing good relations with other South Asian countries. Pakistan is China's formal and closest ally in the region. This alliance acts as a counterveil against Indo-Soviet ties and it is more so in the wake of the developments in Iran and Afghanistan as Pakistan acquired a West Asian dimension. In this context Pakistan figures prominently in Chinese world outlook. Chinese attempts to win over Pakistan throughout the 1960s reached its climax when the two countries signed an agreement for the construction of the Karakoram highway which has recently been completed. The 800 km highway passes through one of the most difficult terrains in the world and is strategically very important to China. China has secured a kind of back-door entry to the Indian Ocean. China might use this highway to intervene in the politically unstable and conflict-ridden South West Asian region. Recently the Chinese are reported to have used road network to supply arms and equipment and training to Afghan guerrillas operating from the Pakistani side of the Durand Line. Moreover, the Chinese might try to obstruct a Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean. China has also obtained some service facilities for its ships at Karachi port.²⁹ So it can be safely argued that China would not build friendship with India at the cost of Pakistan. It is possible, as India wants to have more than one friend in South Asia, of course, without antagonizing Pakistan.

In 1975-1976, the South Asian triangle began to shift. Due to the role China had played during the Bangladesh crisis and after, China obviously could not develop good relations with Bangladesh. But after the change of government in Bangladesh in August 1975, China opened diplomatic relations with and extended full support and cooperation to Bangladesh. Since then, the Sino-Bangladesh relation have continuously grown. There have been frequent mutual visits at all levels including the summit meetings. The two countries signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement and a trade

29. *China Report*, May-June 1984, Vol. XX, No. 3, pp. 19-20.

and credit agreement. More significant, the Chinese have offered military supplies to Bangladesh and training facilities for the Bangladeshi Armed Forces personnel.³⁰ The present Bangladesh regime is also of opinion of having good relations with China and they exchanged high level delegations and held summit level meetings. The Indians accuse the Chinese of their militant friendship with Pakistan and the military aid and economic assistance to Bangladesh as they are indicative of the Chinese will to create an environment detrimental to the interests of India and the Soviet Union. They further accuse Bangladesh foreign policy in regard to Sino-Bangladesh relations, of pro-western stand damaging Indian interests.³¹ What is important to note here is that in context of South Asian triangle Bangladesh is important to China. So China is not likely to go for normalization with India without having this consideration in mind.

China's forging a close relationship with Nepal and the construction of the Kathmandu-Kodri highway and Kathmandu-Bhaktapur highway, her support to Nepal for overland route through India underline Chinese strategy. China has for a long time been pressing

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for naval facilities in Sri Lanka's Trincomalee port (which is important if viewed against the intense superpower naval presence in the Indian Ocean). China also helped Sri Lanka strengthen her navy and forged closer economic ties with her.³² So China has good relations with all South Asian Countries. And when she goes for normalizing her relations with India, the smaller South Asian countries are genuinely concerned over the nature of Sino-Soviet thaw. If

30. *Current History*, April 1979, p. 157.

31. *China Report*, March-April 1984, Vol. XX, No. 2, p. 13-14.

32. *China Report* May-June 1984, p. 29.

China sacrifices her real and potential benefits from the relationship with smaller nations of the region in favour of only the perceived gains to be flown out of Sino-Indian normalization. India's neighbours are likely to have genuine concerns. And if the Sino-Indian thaw is made not at the cost of the interests of these countries, they have only to watch how the two Asian giants behave. The Chinese will possibly prefer the latter. It is evident from the fact that in 1981 Premier Zhao Ziyang made a hastily arranged visit (before Huang Hua's visit to India) through South Asia, going to Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Zhao's one of the purposes seemed to be to assure India's neighbours that China's moves to normalize its relations with New Delhi would not be at their expense.³³ Judging the Chinese strategic perception, China, as a major power desiring to become the leader of the Third World, cannot afford to leave the South Asian stage entirely to India and the Soviet Union. So, to the Chinese, it is logical to cultivate close and cordial relations with the smaller states like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan. Zhao's three-nation mission was no doubt a step in this direction.³⁴

ii. On Superpowers' Role in the Region

The superpowers have global interests. Any development anywhere in the world might, directly or indirectly, affect the Soviet and US interest. The United States has reached a "strategic consensus" with China and Pakistan. The Soviet Union has got converging strategic interests with those of India. So, when there are attempts for improvement of relations between India and China, there ought to be waves of concern and reckoning in Moscow and Washington. It would be worthwhile to observe the impact of and limits to this Sino-Indian relationship in light of the importance and complexities in relations between the four capitals.

The Soviet concern about the possibility of improvement in Sino-Indian relations seems to heighten with visits of politically high level

33. *Strategic Digest*, London, October 1883, 656.

34. *China Report*, March-April, 1984, p. 13.

delegations between New Delhi and Beijing.³⁵ Moscow frequently reminds New Delhi of China's designs in South Asia where China advocates the permanent military presence of the United States and is opposed to making the Indian Ocean a zone of peace. It further reminds India of the fruits of Indo-Soviet cooperation in various fields.³⁶ The Soviets have supplied India with a considerable volume of military hardware thus helping India to stand up to China along the entire border. India has derived numerous other smaller but not insignificant advantages from its friendship with the USSR while dealing with the problems created by its hostile relation with China. The Soviet Union has actively helped India emerge as the primary power in South Asia.³⁷ It may be mentioned here that although India had made some attempts to diversify arms procurement channels with the United States and a few other Western countries, the initial enthusiasm in the Indo-US relations did not yield any meaningful gains for India and no basic changes emerged in India's relations with either Moscow or Washington.³⁸ Indian gains are also remarkable in economic and commercial field. India's exports to the Soviet Union are increasing rapidly, while those to the West are on the decline. While Indian access to Western markets has been obstructed by protectionism, the Soviet Union has rapidly overtaken the West to become the biggest single buyer of Indian goods.³⁹

Considering all that stated above it is the words of Bhabani Sen Gupta that can be put into conclusion : China must fully compensate India for the loss of Soviet friendship if it expects India to cultivate its friendship at the cost of India's ties with the Soviet Union. China is clearly in no position to give India a fraction of the concrete

35. See for details, *Strategic Digest*, October 1983, pp. 653-662.

36. *New Times*, Moscow, June 1981, p. 13; August 1981, p. 1.

37. *World Focus*, August 1981, p. 21.

38. *Strategic Studies Series*, op. cit., pp. 82, 88-89.

39: *F.E.E. Review* January 20, 1983, pp. 58-59.

benefits India derives from its friendship with the USSR.⁴⁰ For this, the Indians repeatedly stated their position that improvement in Sino-Indian relations would not be at the expense of India's other ties, specifically friendship with the Soviet Union.⁴¹ But the Sino-Soviet rapprochement remains a cause of apprehension in New Delhi. Probably this is also one of the factors why both the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian sets of negotiations for normalization of relations are dragging on. And given the present state of affairs in the global and regional patterns of alignment, no breakthrough in this respect is likely to be in the offing.

Another question looms larger—how great an obstacle is the strategic relationship between China and the USA to Sino-India normalization? The Indian reaction to the Sino-US-Pak triangle based on strategic consensus comes from her feeling of being insecure. Although there have been efforts to give Indo-US relations a better perspective and the two countries are in regular touch with each other, the opinion prevalent in India seems to suggest that there still exists a considerable confidence gap.⁴² This is due to the fact that India's real problem with the United States has been directly linked with its China-Pakistan connections. The Indian sensitivities have also been further aroused in recent times because of Sino-US exchange of visits on both political and defence levels, and also due to current talks regarding defence collaboration between the two countries.⁴³ What has made her more worried is the feeling that the prospects of Sino-US exchange of military cooperation would make her complicated security problems further complex. As the Indians view it, this would also have consequence on the Sino-Pakistan military cooperation.⁴⁴ In light of the developments in West and

40. *World Focus*, August 1981, p. 21.

41. *Overseas Hindustan Times*, July 30, 1981.

42. *Times of India*, (Editorial), May 16, 1984.

43. *The Bangladesh Observer*, October 22, 1984.

44. *Times of India*, October 02, 1983.

Southwest Asia, Pakistan acquired greater salience in the US strategic calculations as a result of which Pakistan became an important plank in the strategic consensus of the United States. The Reagan Administration's policies towards the subcontinent and especially in respect of arms transfers to Pakistan have to be viewed against this background. China is believed to support US policy in the area, particularly US military aid to Pakistan.⁴⁵ In pursuit of neocontainment,⁴⁶ the Reaganites argue that Pakistan is willing to be counted against the Soviet Union both on Afghanistan and in the Gulf. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to say whether India will be willing to subscribe to the US neo-containment policy designed against the Soviet Union, and New Delhi will naturally consider the pros and cons before it reached a final understanding on improved relations with Beijing. On the other hand, it remains to be seen whether China could forgo its strategic consensus with the US for the sake of her relations with India.

Conclusion

In light of the above, it may be observed that both China and India are feeling the sting of certain compulsions which constitute the mutuality of interests between them. These have brought the two

Although the two recognize their mutuality of interests in improved relationship, they seem to evaluate their national interest with due appreciation of strategic interests and realities.

long-held adversaries to the negotiating table with a view to normalizing their relationship which remained frozen for about two decades.

45. *Current History*, September 1983, p. 347.

46. Neo-containment is the term now coming into increasing use to describe the Reagan Administration's global strategy, (K. Subrahmanyam, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. V, No. 7, October 1981, p. 263.)

The very fact that China and India have taken initiatives to develop multifaceted interactions and eke out a solution to the outstanding problems between them, is a positive step in respect to state-to-state relations. While there have been developments, though insignificant, in commercial and socio-cultural fields, the border and a few other issues still serve as the stumbling block in the process of normalization of relations between India and China. An explanation to this may be drawn from the difference in approach towards developing improved relations between them. The Indians hold an opinion that in solution of the border problem lies the key to the overall normalization, while the Chinese maintain that an improved relationship between China and India will automatically lead to removing of irritants concerning the border issue. Although there have been signs of flexibility, observed during holding of five rounds of talks so far, the two sides have not departed significantly from their respective original positions.

Although the two recognize their mutuality of interests in improved relationship, they seem to evaluate their national interests with due appreciation of strategic interests and realities. Before India reaches an understanding with China, the former will have to think many times over the gains India reaps out of the friendship with the Soviet Union as far as Indian's national interests are concerned. India will also have to keep a vigilant eye on the developments along the Sino-US-Pak triangle of strategic consensus. China, on the other hand, will have to evaluate how much she will gain in South and Southeast Asia and in the developing world in general, and how effectively she will use her US and Pakistan connections as regards her dealings with India. Given the convergence of her strategic interests with India's in South and Southeast Asia and her stable, durable and cordial relationship with India, the Soviet Union obviously can not hide her worries about the implications of Sino-Indian rapprochement. The problem, of course, has to be seen in light of the Sino-Soviet rapprochement as it concerns the Indians no less. While other

South Asian countries are just watching, Pakistan is simply worried about the developments in relationship between Beijing and New Delhi. However, all the concerned quarters have been repeatedly given the assurances by China and India that their overtures to each other will not affect the existing relationship between and among them. All these factors probably account for the slow pace at which the Sino-Indian normalization talks are moving along. Unless there is a change in prevalent regional and global patterns of alignment, the outcome of Sino-Indian efforts for improved relations would remain unpredictable.