

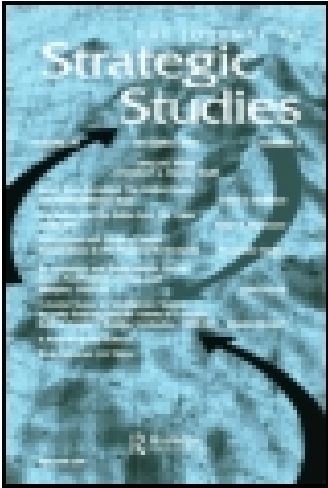
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The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India

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The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India

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ABSTRACT This paper evaluates to what extent the improving Sino-Indian relations coincide with a mitigation of military threat perceptions. A critical review of the demilitarisation of the border, the military strategies with respect to the Indian Ocean and nuclear arms programmes, reveals that the two countries are still locked in a military security dilemma. Distrust still results in military balancing. The outcome is a complex and multi-level military balance of power that might not bring about peace but enhances stability.

KEY WORDS: Security Dilemma, Disarmament, Deterrence

This article examines military competition between China and India. In particular, it questions whether both countries have eased their distrust of each other's military intentions that lays at the basis of a long-standing security dilemma. For sure, Sino-Indian relations have evolved from open hostility towards a relationship that is characterised by growing shared interests and expanding exchanges. Between 1997 and 2007, bilateral trade increased from 1.6 to 38.7 billion US dollars.¹ China is now India's fourth largest and fastest growing export market. Both sides have cleared the way for investments. The Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry has set the target for attracting Chinese imports at five billion US dollars by 2010. In 2007, already 2,900 Chinese contract workers were employed in India.

¹Jayanta Ray and Prabir De, *India and China in an Era of Globalisation: Essays on Economic Cooperation* (New Delhi: Bookwell 2004); Biswa Bhattacharyay and Prabir De, 'Promotion of Trade and Investment Between People's Republic of China and India: Toward a Regional Perspective', *Asian Development Review*, 22/1 (Jan. 2005), 45–70; Wu Yanrui and Zhou Zhanyue, 'Changing Bilateral Trade Between China and India', *Journal of Asian Economics* 17/2 (March 2007), 509–18.

The growing interdependence also appears from the intensifying exchanges between both states. Bilateral visits had grown tenfold to more than half a million. The average annual number of ministerial exchanges that increased from two in the 1990s to four in the years afterwards, as well as the total number of bilateral agreements that grew from five in 1990 to 81 in 2006, and the cumulative number of track I and II dialogues which in the same period has grown from two to 12. Chinese and Indian leaders have reawakened the idea of *Chindia*, a partnership in which interdependence is so strong, that cooperation and peace are inevitable.²

The question rises whether this has indeed spilled over to the security relations. Both powers have a long history of disputes and rivalry. The first dimension of this protracted contest has been formed by the persistent conflict over 130,000 square kilometres of border area in the western region Aksai Chin, taken by China, and the eastern area of Arunachal Pradesh, which is controlled by India.³ China and India have been negotiating for 20 years, but a final settlement was hampered by India's insistence on the definition of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), while China pushed for a final swap deal right away. Apart from these differences, progress is obstructed because of domestic political pressure on subsequent weak Indian government coalitions not to make concessions for the sake of national security. Scholars also emphasise that China will not give in because of security in Tibet.⁴ The presence of a monastery that is key for the election of a new Dalai Lama in Tawang, a part of current Arunachal Pradesh, has made Beijing insist that this strategic area should be excluded from a swap

²For instance: Jairam Ramesh, *Making Sense of Chindia: Reflections on China and India* (New Delhi: India Research Press 2005); Kamal Nath, 'India, China Economic Ties Poised to Grow', Statement at the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, 27 Jan. 2005. Also quotations in: Ren Ria, 'Zhongguo yu Yindu Jingmao Guanxi de Fazhan ji Qianjing' [China-India Trade and Economic Relations: Development and Prospects], *Nanya Yanjiu* [South Asian Studies] No. 2 (May 2005), 15–19; Wang Jiqiong, 'Zhongyin Guanxi zai Quanjihua Jiasu Shiqi de Xinfazhan' [Sino-Indian Relations in the Era of Globalization], *Nanya Yanjiu Jikan* [South Asia Studies Quarterly] No. 3 (June 2006), 51–7; Jonathan Holslag, 'Progress, Perceptions and Peace in the Sino-Indian Relationship', *East Asia* 26/1 (2009), 41–56.

³John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: OUP 2001).

⁴Steven Hoffman, 'Rethinking the Linkage Between Tibet and the China-India Border Conflict', *Cold War Studies* 8/3 (June 2006), 165–94; Lee Jiyang, 'Tibet and the South Asian Border Trade Status', *Nanya Yanjiu Jikan* [South Asia Studies Quarterly] No. 4 (Aug. 2006), 61–76.

arrangement.⁵ In addition, a flexible posture on Arunachal could weaken China's bargaining position with regard to its numerous other territorial disputes, including Taiwan.⁶ All in all, it is agreed by most experts that historical conflicts, nationalism and security concerns have allowed China and India to make a process rather than progress towards a final solution.

The second layer of Sino-Indian contests relates to Pakistan. This country has remained the epicentre of indirect competition. While China has called upon Islamabad and Delhi to check their conflict over Kashmir and lauded both sides' confidence building measures, it is found that Beijing continues to use Pakistan as a distant balancer towards India and that therefore it is still deepening its military cooperation with India's arch rival.⁷ Despite the fact that the United States has become the main source of financial aid since 2001, China continues to be Pakistan's most privileged military partner as it is the only power that has invested substantially in the country's nuclear programme. Beijing's support to Pakistan's medium and short-range ballistic missiles is well documented.⁸ After the United States pushed its nuclear cooperation agreement with India through, China responded swiftly by announcing a 'step-by-step' approach to fulfilling Pakistan's aspiration for an expanded nuclear programme.⁹ That Beijing continues to back the Pakistani military in spite of the political turmoil also appears from recent decisions to provide it with new frigates and J-10 fighter planes. As usual these deals are backed up with financial support. The Chinese government has also used its privileged ties with Islamabad to get access to the South Asian Community (SAARC), against the will of Delhi.

A third dimension concerns the vehement race for regional influence, both for geopolitical and economic purposes. In countries like Nepal and Myanmar (Burma), traditional buffer states between the East and South Asian regional security complexes, Delhi and Beijing are entangled in a tit-for-tat game.¹⁰ Each alteration in the balance of

⁵Liu Zhaohua, 'Proceedings of the Forum on the China-India Border Issue', *Nanyang Yanjiu* [South Asian Studies] No. 2 (April 2007), 56–79.

⁶Sujit Dutta, 'Revisiting China's Territorial Claims on Arunachal', *Strategic Analysis* 38/4 (Sept. 2008), 449–81.

⁷J.N. Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace* (New York: Routledge 2006); T.V. Paul (ed.), *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (Cambridge: CUP 2005).

⁸Swaran Singh, *China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers 2007).

⁹'China Aiding Pakistan's Nuclear Ambitions', *South China Morning Post*, 16 Oct. 2008; 'China to Help Build 2 Pakistan Nuclear Plants', *International Herald Tribune*, 18 Oct. 2008.

¹⁰Manish Dabhade and Harsh Pant, 'Coping with Challenges to Sovereignty; Sino-Indian Rivalry and Nepal's Foreign Policy', *Contemporary South Asia* 13/2 (April

power in these states triggers countermoves such as new diplomatic agreements, enhanced economic cooperation, military support, etc. China's maturing partnerships with other states such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka too were perceived by India as an offensive foray into its sphere of influence.

Fourth, competition is stirred because of the growing pressure to gain access to overseas markets. It is increasingly feared that industrialisation will oblige China and India to enter into fierce economic competition and to use all the means at their disposal to maintain a competitive edge vis-à-vis each other.¹¹

Hence, while interdependence has led to new opportunities for synergies, it has not mitigated the security dilemma.¹² A security dilemma is rooted in a state's uncertainty as to its neighbour's intentions.¹³ In its basic form such a predicament stems from the anarchical international order that causes countries to be anxious about other states harming their sovereignty and national interests. The result is a penchant for self-help, which can take the form of mercantilist economic strategies, power politics, etc. A first variable that determines the outcome of a security dilemma is the evolution of material capabilities. It is the relative change of economic or military means, shifts in the balance of power, which intensifies the security dilemma. Mutual perceptions form a second factor of importance. A security dilemma is aggravated when an increase in capabilities of another state is identified with hostile intentions or negative historical precedents.¹⁴

Robert Jervis argues that in particular when the distinction between offensive and defensive military developments cannot be made, the

2004), 157–69; Marie Lall, 'Indo-Myanmar Relations in the Era of Pipeline Diplomacy', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28/3 (June 2006), 424–46.

¹¹For instance: Zhao Gancheng, 'The Significance of India's Look-East Policy', *Contemporary Asia-Pacific* (Sept. 2007), 10–16; Fu Xiaoqiang, 'India's "Look East" Policy: Geopolitical, Historical and Perceptual Changes', *Contemporary International Relation*, (Sept. 2004) 21–9.

¹²Garver, *Protracted Contest*; John W. Garver, 'The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations', *India Review* 1/4 (Jan. 2004), 9–31.

¹³For theoretical interpretations: Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2007); Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics* 30/2 (March 1987), 167–214; John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Univ. of Chicago Press 1951); Ito Masashi, 'Duality of Deterrence: A Security Dilemma in Deterrence', Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, June 2004; Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Oxford: OUP 1951); Thomas Schelling, 'Deterrence and Perception', *International Security* 7/3 (July 1982), 3–30.

¹⁴Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: CUP 1999).

offense will have the advantage over the defence and renders security relations unstable.¹⁵ Self-images are important too. A state's definitions of its privileges and interests form important lenses through which the other is perceived.

This article concentrates on a fifth dimension of Sino-Indian relations that, apart from the nuclear issue,¹⁶ has remained underexposed, namely direct military competition. To what extent does the military security dilemma persist? China and India have already made progress by means of various confidence-building measures, but do we also see a decreasing penchant towards military balancing? Are the proliferating military exchanges reducing the likelihood of an arms race or armed conflict? After an overview of recent initiatives to build confidence among both countries' armed forces, a critical assessment is made of the demilitarisation at the border. Subsequently, we discuss how India and China approach each other's military plans in the Indian Ocean. Finally, the role of nuclear deterrence is looked into.

As such, this article is a case study of the persistence of military security dilemmas in a world of globalisation and growing interdependence. It is also an attempt to add value to the scholarly debate on the Sino-Indian relations that tends to overlook the hard military issues in China and India's direct bilateral relationship. Extensive terrain research, a review of both Indian and Chinese literature, and various interviews with key officials contribute new empirical material and allow us to add the nuances that are key to grasping the meaning of the ensuing military distrust. Finally, this study goes beyond the traditional Indo-centric approach.¹⁷ While China is still perceived more suspiciously than the other way around, it will be demonstrated that Chinese views too are getting gloomier too.

¹⁵Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma'; and Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton UP 1976), in particular Chapter 4.

¹⁶Lowell Dittmer (ed.), *South Asia's Nuclear Security Dilemma: India, Pakistan, and China* (Delhi: Pentagon Press 2005); John W. Garver, 'The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity following India's Nuclear Tests', *The China Quarterly* 168/4 (Sept. 2001), 865–89; W.P.S. Sidhu, *The Evolution of India's Nuclear Doctrine* (Delhi: Centre for Policy Research 2004); Arpit Rajain, *Nuclear Deterrence in Southern Asia: China, India and Pakistan* (New Delhi: Sage 2004); George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press 1999).

¹⁷Reviews of such asymmetrical attitudes: Steven Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press 1990); John W. Garver, 'Asymmetrical Indian and Chinese Threat Perceptions', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 25/4 (Dec. 2001), 109–34; Zhang Guihong, 'The Rise of China: India's Perceptions and Responses', *South Asian Survey* 13/1 (Jan. 2006), 93–102.

From Pacification to Confidence Building

The Sumdorong Chu incident in 1986 was the last massive troop mobilisation along the border that brought China and India to the brink of war. Nearly 200,000 Indian soldiers were sent to the strategic valley in the north of Tawang after having discovered a newly built helicopter platform and an increased presence of Chinese infantry. During the subsequent two years of gradual diplomatic rapprochement, the first initiatives to prevent new sabre-rattling started to take shape. During Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to the People's Republic, military exchanges were discussed, but not yet formalised in an agreement.

In 1990, the Chinese and Indian military tentatively started mending fences by exchanging middle-rank officers from the National Defence College in New Delhi and the National Defence University in Beijing.¹⁸ The 1991 Communiqué on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the LAC expressed the hope that confidence building would be enhanced. Five months later, Sharad Pawar called on China, the first ever visit by an Indian Minister of Defence, and reached an agreement on the further development of academic, scientific and technological exchanges.¹⁹

In 1993, during Rao's stay in Beijing, this premature commitment was cemented into a more operational agreement that stated that both sides would refrain from using violence, gradually reduce troops, improve communication between commanders, pull back troops from forward areas, etc. This breakthrough was followed by a significant rise in high-level visits. In 1996, during Jiang Zemin's visit to India in November that year, the two countries inked the Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control. The agreement included specific provisions to reduce military presence, which included the withdrawal of offensive weapons. Exercises involving more than one division were prohibited, and all manoeuvres with more than 5,000 soldiers needed to be announced in advance and combat aircraft were banned within a distance of 10 kilometres from the LAC except after prior permission. China and India also agreed to withdraw their forces from the disputed area by 200 metres on either side, pending a final clarification of the LAC.

¹⁸Sujit Mansingh, 'India-China Relations in the post-Cold War era', *Asian Survey* 24/3 (June 1994), 269; Deng Ruixiang, 'Shifting Obstacles in Sino-Indian Relations', *Pacific Review* 6/1 (Jan. 1993), 66.

¹⁹Chien-Peng Chung, *Domestic Politics, International Bargaining and China's Territorial Disputes* (London: Routledge 2006), 122–67.

Only two years afterwards, the Indian government detonated experimental nuclear devices in an atmosphere of xenophobic China bashing by key politicians. While the test was awaited for decades and multiple motivations had driven the experiment of 1998, China was publically invoked as the main justification. However, China's mellow reaction to the Indian nuclear tests in 1998 was a strong reassurance for the political and military elite in Delhi that China had slaked its thirst for confrontation. Military exchanges were restored a year after the crisis. In 2003, new initiatives related to joint military exercises and the war against terrorism came to the fore. These exchanges like port calls and observation during military exercises developed steadily in the following years, culminating in the first time that the Chinese and Indian armies joined forces in a military exercise on land in China's Kunming Province in December 2007. Earlier, in 2006, China and India agreed to conceive an annual programme for exchanges, to establish a mechanism of study tours for each other's senior and middle level officials, to organise an annual defence dialogue and to hold 'military exercises and training in the field of search and rescue, anti-piracy, counter-terrorism and other areas of mutual interest'.

Both sides have made progress to allow the border zone to look less like a battlefield. Troop numbers were trimmed and main offensive systems redrawn. Especially in the Eastern Sector, border meetings have become routine and less tense. Cultural events, mountaineering expeditions and sports have helped to break the ice. These developments all seem to herald the advent of true 'mountains of peace', as Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh likes to express it.

Evaluating the Demilitarisation of the Border Area

Despite the absence of large-scale troop movements since the 1991 Communiqué on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity, minor incursions continue to upset bilateral relations. Every month, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police reports around a dozen unannounced Chinese military patrols in the disputed border area, and this number has not decreased over the last decade. Most of these incidents are inoffensive. Often, border guards do not even make direct contact, but leave behind subtle traces of their presence like piles of stones, cigarette packets or cans. From time to time Chinese military officers reportedly enter the Indian side of the LAC in civilian clothes and vehicles. Almost on a weekly basis, small Chinese boats tour around Lake Pangong Tso in Ladakh. Most of these movements have been concentrated in the Western Sector of the boundary. Between 2000 and 2007, the annual number of violations observed by Indian border troops increased from 90 to 140.

Occasionally these routine infiltrations do cause diplomatic agitation, although in public, the Indian government's reaction is to downplay any of these incidents. In 2003, an Indian Army report recorded that Chinese expeditions by foot in the areas of Trig Heights in Ladakh had been replaced with vehicle-mounted Chinese patrols.²⁰ In July 2004 for instance, the Ministry of External Affairs confirmed reports that a forward-deployed Chinese patrol had temporarily arrested an Indian intelligence team kilometres inside the LAC in Arunachal Pradesh's Subansari district.²¹ In August 2007, the Indian Army was alarmed over intrusions into the mountainous Kingdom of Bhutan and a flight by a Chinese helicopter over the LAC in the Western Sector. In November that year, news media broadcast the alleged demolition of unmanned Indian forward posts in the Dolam Valley in Bhutan. These Chinese manoeuvres in the Chumbi Valley into Bhutan provoked public outrage and resurrected the phantom of the 1962 invasion that had pushed its way through the same passes. Bhutan has always been considered a strategic buffer for the Siliguri Corridor that connects India's north-eastern states with the rest of the country. The Chinese from their side claimed that India had built 'facilities' on its part of the boundary. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this was 'a violation of the agreement between China and India on maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border region'. This claim came a day after Indian government sources said the Chinese army personnel had demanded the removal of two bunkers on the border in Sikkim.

China's manoeuvres are designed to reinforce claims over certain parts of the border rather than to deter India. Most incursions have occurred in regions that Beijing does not want to yield to India in any case, such as Tawang or parts of Ladakh. China responds to criticism of its incursions by emphasising that these military deployments are not made on Indian but Chinese soil. However, the incidents in Bhutan and Sikkim cannot be justified with such an argument as Beijing has recognised Sikkim as a part of India and Bhutan as a sovereign state. Interviews at the Chinese and Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs have disclosed that local military officers might have acted on their own initiative and that the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs complained that the military ventures in this case had gone too far. Whatever the exact motivations were, they were perceived by the Indian security community as an act of aggression. Not only did they expose the vulnerability of the Siliguri Track; the incidents also accentuated China's mobility in this rough terrain approximately 4,400 metres above sea level.

²⁰Chinese Intrusion into Arunachal Pradesh: New Delhi Takes up Matter with Beijing', *The Hindu*, 28 July 2003.

²¹Ibid.

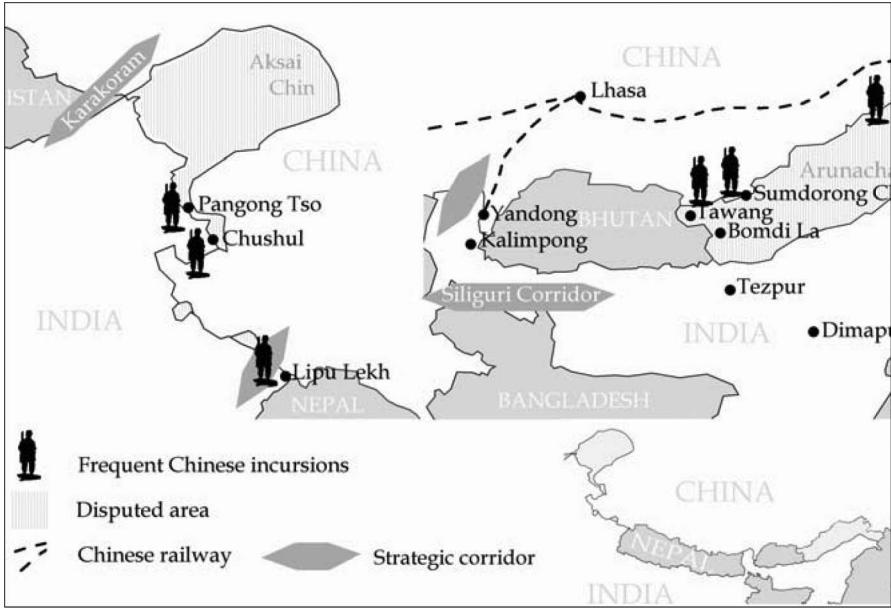


Figure 1. The Sino-Indian Border Area.

Sources: Reports of incursions from, Ramachandran, 'China Toys with India's Border'; Baghchi, 'Chinese Incursions into Indian Territory Rose Sharply in 2008'; and Kaul, 'Chinese Helicopters Enter Indian Air Space Twice'.

In fact, the entire demilitarisation process has to be seen in a larger context. While the presence of troops in the immediate border area has decreased, the build-up of conventional force does continue. On the Chinese side, the Military Regions of Chengdu and Lanzhou saw a significant modernisation of their capacity, after being overlooked for many years. Compared with the other five Military Regions, the two that border India are still modestly equipped. Together they only comprise four of China's 18 Group Armies, but their approximate 400,000 troops still represent 20 per cent of the country's total military manpower. After stepping up the firepower of the units along the east coast, Chengdu and Lanzhou have now moved up the list of modernisation priorities. The 13th Group Army, for instance, has developed into a modern rapid reaction force with enhanced logistical capacity, mobile artillery, air defence, communication and intelligence, special forces and intensive training in warfare under exceptional conditions, such as high-altitude combat.²²

²²Interview: CASS, Beijing, 7 Dec. 2007.

Airfields in the Chengdu Military Region underwent an upgrade in the late 1990s. In 2001, the 33th Air Division was reinforced with Su-27UBK aircraft that are currently based in Chongqing. These long-range air defence fighters are equipped with a state of the art radar system, display increased manoeuvrability and are, given their payload of 8,000 kg, better suited for high-altitude tasks. Since the mid 1990s, the Chinese Air Force has renovated its 14 airfields in Tibet with new communication and command infrastructure, longer landing strips and depots.²³ Several sources have revealed the experimental deployment of Su-27 multi-role fighter aircraft.

Close to the border, China has reportedly built signals intelligence installations in Aksai Chin and on the southern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. Since 2002, it has conducted several counter-terrorism operations and exercises near the Line of Control, one with the participation of Pakistan. According to open sources, China has been carrying out a programme to make its military units in Tibet better equipped for rapid reaction operations by investing in new wheeled armoured vehicles and artillery, specialised training and helicopters that are equipped for missions in the heights of the Himalaya.

Is the Chinese build-up specifically aimed at India? Not at all: the Military Region of Lanzhou prioritises security in the Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, namely suppressing so-called secessionist movements among the Uighurs, safeguarding energy facilities in the Tarim Basin and preventing a spill-over of extremism and violence from Central Asia. The 13th Group Army of Chengdu is primarily assigned to support the People's Armed Police controlling Tibet and to monitor the porous and instable boundary with Myanmar. The Su-27 aircraft are also deployable as a second-tier strike force in case of an armed conflict with Taiwan.

Yet, the modernisation in the two Military Regions does take India into account as a potential challenger. The point of departure remains the so-called principle of 'active defence under high-tech conditions'. This implies that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) should be able to intervene in neighbouring countries whenever China's sovereignty is in jeopardy. The main difference with earlier decades is that military units are no longer devoted to a specific threat in a specific area. Instead, they should be able to operate quickly in many places, inside and outside the People's Republic, and to deal with various conventional and non-conventional challenges. 'We don't have the luxury anymore of having to address one single enemy', a Chinese military expert summarises,

²³'Sukhoi Base in the East to Counter China', *Times of India*, 28 Sept. 2007; Deng Guilin, 'Air Force in Tibet Sets Up a Comprehensive Logistics Support System', *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 17 July 2007.

‘but for the troops in Chengdu and Lanzhou, a potential war with India is still central in our military planning and scenarios.’ Hence, although India is not the sole target, the maintenance of a capacity of 400,000 soldiers, with a strong presence of offensive arms systems, at short distances from the Indian border remains an important source of conventional deterrence.

‘They Shall Not Pass’ is the motto of the 2nd Mountain Division, one of the Indian Army formations that has been watching China for almost half a century. Yet, even more than the PLA, the capacity of the Indian armed forces is severely overstretched. With an alarming proliferation of armed resistance in the north-east, an expansion of the Naxalites’ rebellion in the east of the subcontinent, and instable states all along the border, units such as the 2nd Mountain Division are struggling to counter these perils. The Eastern and Northern Commands that are authorised to secure the Chinese border shifted most of their capacity to contain the insurgency in Kashmir and the rebellious north-east. Under the Calcutta-based Eastern Command the Army has three corps at its disposal, but these are all severely depleted.

After increasing activity of small Chinese units at the end of 2007, the Minister of Defence, the National Security Adviser, and the Chiefs of the Eastern and Northern Command agreed to step up the Army’s strength at the border. This meeting also followed a strategic reassessment of China’s capabilities, which shortened the preparation period for a potential Chinese assault from six months to only a few weeks. In December 2007, the 27th Division from 33 Corps was relocated to its home base in Kalimpong, just outside Sikkim, after being deployed for more than ten years in Kashmir. While this move is also a consequence of the efforts to pacify the border with Pakistan, interviews with high-level officers revealed that, located near the strategically important tri-junction between Bhutan, India and China, this move sought to address the mounting presence of Chinese soldiers in this area.²⁴ In addition, it was also decided to boost the returned troops’ capacity. General C.K. Saboo, the Corps Commander, subsequently reported that more ‘sophisticated weapons with a range of up to 100 kilometres or more’ would be deployed in his area: ‘105mm field guns and howitzers and 155mm Bofors howitzers are already deployed on the border’, he stated, ‘these guns are fitted with additional facilities like laser and radar jamming systems. These guns can penetrate up to 30 kilometres inside China.’²⁵ Reportedly, the Minister also approved plans to revamp the 4 Corps, based in Tezpur

²⁴Interview: Ministry of Defence, New Delhi, 18 and 19 Jan. 2008; interview with high-level military delegation, Brussels, 15 May 2008.

²⁵‘Natha Lu Amidst Guns and Roses’, *Himalaya Review*, 11 June 2007.

(Assam) and the 2 Corps based in Dimapur (Assam). In 2007, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, authorised to monitor the LAC, increased its manpower with 20 new battalions, and commissioned six new sectoral headquarters.

The Indian Air Force follows this trend. The strengthening of Eastern Air Command's capacity has been impressive. The Command's task is to defend Indian air space from external attack with additional responsibilities to deliver offensive air support to counter insurgency operations.²⁶ It covers the eastern states that border the countries of Bangladesh, China and Myanmar. Yet, most modernisations were aimed at beefing up deterrence against intruders and to support forward operations. The Indian government decided to base squadrons of its most potent fighter jets, the Su-30 MKI 'Flanker', in the Eastern Sector from 2008 onwards. These Sukhoi aircraft increase India's preparedness to launch air-denial operations. The jets have an operational radius of approximately 1,500 kilometres, and are equipped with an in-flight refuelling facility that extends their radius by another 500 kilometres. 'Buddy-refuelling, a Su-30 tanking up another, gives us the tactical advantage of refuelling in enemy territory', an officer explained.²⁷ The first two squadrons with 36 fighters will be based at Tezpur airbase. The shelters and runway of this base were recently renovated.²⁸ Apart from the Sukhoi, Tezpur will be strengthened with new air defence systems and advanced combat helicopters that are better equipped for high-altitude warfare and the lifting of advanced landing groups.

In addition to Tezpur, the Indian Air Force is also in the process of upgrading its other airbases in the Eastern Sector. The length of runway at the base in Kalaikunda in West Bengal state has been extended to back forward operations in Arunachal.²⁹ The Command is also refurbishing its forward airbases at Chabua, Jorhat and Hash Mara.

These measures are specifically designed to counter the Chinese build-up of military infrastructure in Tibet and south China. 'We do not see any short-term threat from China on the Arunachal Pradesh border', Air Chief Marshal F.H. Major, the Chief of Air Staff, asserted, 'but in the longer run, the threat cannot be ruled out as

²⁶Handbook EAC IAF, Indian Air Force, Sept. 2008, <http://indianairforce.nic.in/RTI/rti_eac.pdf>.

²⁷Vishnu Makhijani, 'Indian Air Force Enhances Strategic Reach Against China', *IANS*, 30 Sept. 2007.

²⁸'Sukhoi Base in the East to Counter China', *Times of India*, 28 Sept. 2007.

²⁹'China in Mind, India to Boost Eastern Air Power', *Straits Times*, 8 Aug. 2007.

the economy of that country is growing as ours.³⁰ Likewise, Air Marshal P.K. Barbora, chief of the Eastern Air Command underlined:

The perception of east India has changed and our defences are at their peak to thwart any misadventure now, especially after what happened in 1962 . . . In terms of numbers, we cannot match China as their economy is growing rapidly than ours, but if we talk about specifics in the north-east, we have a deterrent force available and will be well-prepared to cater to any misadventure with the force-multipliers in place.³¹

When looking at it from a military perspective, China's numerous transportation projects in Tibet gain significance beyond that of the merely commercial as described in section two. India's security community perceives the new Qinghai–Lhasa railway and the extensions to Nyingchi and Yadong as strategic corridors that will allow the PLA to deploy rapidly all along the border with north-east India.³² Indian analysts cried foul after China's official news agency Xinhua reported that a battalion had taken the train to Lhasa for the first time, only a few days after an incident in the Chumdi Pass.³³ As a consequence of the improved logistical infrastructure in Tibet, the Indian Army revised its threat assessment. At low-level threat, the estimated time to launch on offensive with two battalions decreased from 15 to seven days. For medium-level threat, implying an assault of two brigades, this became 15 days instead of 30. For high-alert, India now assumes that China is able to mobilise two divisions in 20 days instead of 90 to 180 days.³⁴

In addition, the pledge from corporate actors for new roads along the Chinese border was suddenly supported by the Indian military, claiming that the absence of logistical infrastructure was no longer an option in the case of a Chinese assault. During a visit to Assam in December 2007, the Minister of Defence acknowledged that his government had to invest in new roads and railways to allow troops to relocate quickly. The Ministry of Defence calculated that India urgently needs to construct 72 roads, a variety of bridges and three new airstrips to address the Chinese challenge. The Ministry has reportedly

³⁰'No Short-term Threat from China on Arunachal Border', *Rediff*, 20 Nov. 2006.

³¹'China in Mind, India to Boost Eastern Air Power', *Straits Times*, 8 Aug. 2007.

³²'The Dragon has Now Got Wings', *Indian Express*, 6 Jan. 2008.

³³'Qinghai-Tibet Railway not just a Big Deal for Chinese', *Xinhua*, 2 July 2006.

³⁴Interviews, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi, 17 Jan. 2008; also additional interviews in Delhi on 4 and 5 Nov. 2008.

summoned the Border Roads Organisation to shift its priority to the north-east.

In sum, the confidence-building measures that were implemented over the last decade only partially alleviated the tension between the military forces that are dispatched along the LAC. The new communication channels and the withdrawal of main military systems from the border area has, to some extent, reduced the risk of tensions escalating into violent clashes. The stabilisation of the boundary has also allowed governments in the two countries to channel their military means to more pressing challenges. Yet these improvements have not cut to the core of the predicament. The defence of the border has decreased in priority, but it has not disappeared. The maintenance of the balance of power in the border area remains prominent in both countries' strategising and is still nourished by frightening reports about small-scale but provocative troop deployments and the construction of new transportation arteries that facilitate swift mobilisation. The military tit-for-tat game continues as India now seeks to catch up with China on infrastructure and troop deployment. This trust deficit also has ramifications for the political relationship. As news media and politicians bring the tensions to the fore, the scope for negotiations on a border settlement is significantly reduced.

China's Indian Ocean Dilemma

Converting the Indian Ocean into an Indian lake, that is the current ambition for India's maritime power. The control over the Ocean that surrounds the Indian subcontinent runs as a manifest destiny throughout its post-colonial history, starting with Jawaharlal Nehru's remark that 'whatever power controls the Indian Ocean has, in the first instance, India's seaborne trade at her mercy and, in the second, India's very independence itself', and the subsequent pledge by then Minister of Home Affairs Sardar Patel that 'the geographical position and features of India make it inevitable for India to have a strong navy to guard its long coastline and to keep a constant vigil on the vast expanse of the sea that surrounds us'.³⁵ Delhi's naval aspirations have been simmering for a long time, but budget constraints and other security priorities have kept a lid on it.

Only since the beginning of the new century has India been making headway with its plans to rule the waves. The budget for the Navy

³⁵Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Oxford: OUP 1956), 536; Sardar Patel 20 Nov. 1948, quoted in David Scott, 'India's Grand Strategy for the Indian Ocean: Mahanian Visions', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13/2 (April 2006), 192–211.

increased from 1.3 billion US dollars in 2001 to 3.5 billion in 2006. Despite chronic delays, New Delhi still aims for a fleet of 130 warships, comprising three aircraft carrier battle groups, by 2020. In total, the Navy has asked for 40 new ships. Many of these orders can be considered as routine replacements, but the qualities of India's future fleet, including various combatants with a longer range and more firepower, confirm the objective to anticipate new challengers. The modernisation of the fleet is complemented by a significant improvement of onshore infrastructure. The home ports of the Western and Eastern Fleets were removed from the congested docks of Mumbai and Vishakhapatnam to new bases in Karwar (INS Kadamba) and one other base 50 kilometres south of the current port of Vishakhapatnam in Rambilli. In 2000, the Indian government approved the opening of a Joint Forces Command at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, only a stone's throw away from the Strait of Malacca. At Port Blair the Far Eastern Naval Command is expanding its facilities both for berthing larger vessels and dispatching naval aviation. The Navy has also beefed up its surveillance capacity. All along the Indian shore, new intelligence installations were erected to penetrate further into the Ocean.

India's maritime power advances under the banner of cooperative security. Apart from vessels and infrastructure, naval diplomacy is another element of India's grand maritime strategy. New Delhi has concluded cooperation agreements with all island states in the Indian Ocean. At several points in time, the Indian Navy succeeded in using its 'soft power' by reacting rapidly to humanitarian crises. It also reached out to the coastal states of Eastern Africa and initiated joint training programmes and educational exchanges with the navies of South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique. In 2004, the Indian Navy provided security support to the African Summit in Mozambique. 'Increasing our influence in the Indian Ocean Region entails more than just showing the flag', an official at the Ministry of Defence asserted, 'it asks for a permanent effort to increase our soft power via comprehensive cooperation with as many countries as possible from the Rim.'³⁶

The aim to maintain stability in the Indian Ocean goes to the heart of India's economic interests. More than 95 per cent of its exports are shipped through the surrounding waters and India actually drills up to 70 per cent of its hydrocarbons in offshore blocks.³⁷ However, these activities are exposed to various threats such as piracy and unstable island states. Non-conventional threats alone, however, do not explain

³⁶Interviews, Ministry of Defence, New Delhi, 17 Jan. 2008.

³⁷Ministry of Petroleum and Gas, see <<http://petroleum.nic.in/ps.htm>>.

India's naval muscle flexing. The capability of most new arms systems goes far beyond chasing pirates and poachers.³⁸

Most of the Navy's increasing budget has been used to boost India's capacity to deal with threats from other states. The huge amount of money that is used to purchase and develop submarines clearly indicates that India does not trust the maritime ambitions of other countries. The *Scorpene*- and *Amur*-class submarines show an increasing capacity to mislead detection systems from potential rivals and their firepower is unequalled by most other navies in the region. The P-15A *Kolkata*-class destroyers will be armed with 16 BrahMos cruise missiles, increasing air defence and anti-submarine warfare systems. The stealthy P-17 *Shivalik*-class frigates are only frigates in name. These ships' firepower equals that of a destroyer and enables them to engage in both defensive and offensive tasks.

The ultimate outcome of this modernisation is a navy that will be capable of pursuing both strategies of sea denial and sea control. Sea denial, blocking other countries' access to sea lanes of communications

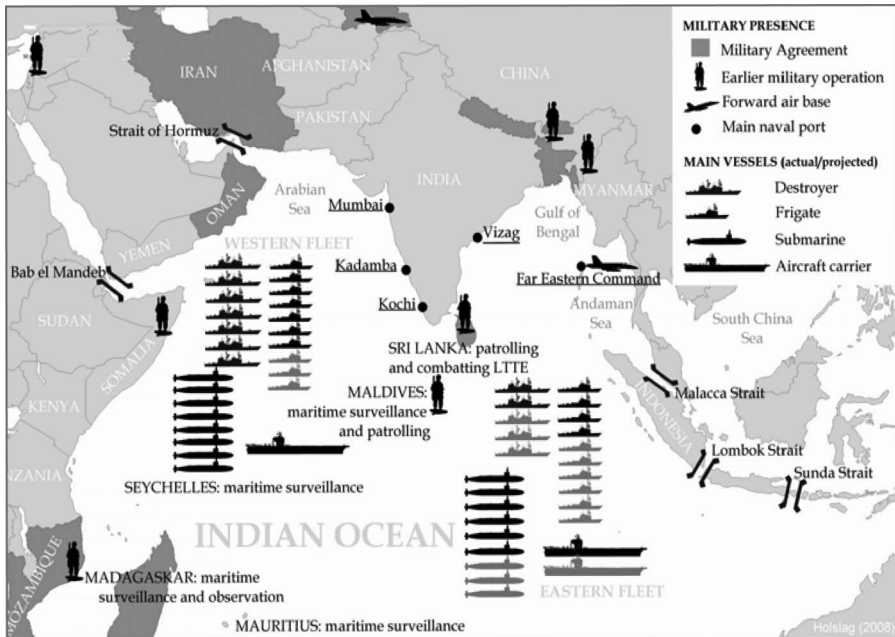


Figure 2. India's Military Presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

³⁸K.R. Singh, *Maritime Security for India: New Challenges and Responses* (Delhi: New Century Publications 2008), 58–114.

(SLOC) would lead to a situation of parallel deterrence. On the one hand, India will be able to deter other states with its nuclear force, but on the other hand, it has now also acquired the capacity to cut their economic lifelines. Sea control goes further, and implies that India might use the Indian Ocean for various operations, ranging from sea denial to the projection of power into littoral states. The BrahMos cruise missile, the aircraft carrier battle groups, the Joint Command at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and new landing platform docks certainly might fulfil an important role in such operations.

Hence, the Indian Navy is developing the capacity to play both the role of friendly policeman and sturdy guardian. Again, the origins of this evolution go back to Indian's recent military history. Many naval strategists refer to the British Empire and the Cold War, when Delhi was forced to sit back and look how alien states took the role of dominant maritime power in the region. India remains suspicious of intrusion by external navies in the Indian Ocean. The Maritime Doctrine that was issued in 2004 asserted that 'all major powers of this century will seek a toehold in the Indian Ocean Region... There is, moreover, an increasing tendency of extra regional powers of military intervention in littoral countries to contain what they see as a conflict situation.'³⁹ The 2003 Annual Defence Report stressed that 'the seas surrounding India have been a theatre of super power rivalry in the past, and continue to be a region of heightened activity from and by extra-regional navies on account of global security concerns'.⁴⁰

To which extent is China a focal point of this distrust? Admiral Suresh Mehta, appointed as Chief of the Naval Staff in 2006, has downplayed allegations that India wishes to dissuade China from building up its military presence in South Asia. 'We do not consider China as an adversary at any point of time. We would like to have cooperative relations with it as we do with other countries.'⁴¹ Yet, other statements have sounded less reassuring. On Indian television he declared that 'China has very extended lines through which its oil has to flow, and they have to ensure that their oil supplies remain unhindered. And therefore as a policy they are doing what they are doing.'⁴² Nearly at the same moment Admiral Mehta underlined that China:

³⁹Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (New Delhi, 25 April 2004).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

⁴¹'India Wants Cooperative Ties with China: Navy Chief', *The Hindu*, 11 Jan. 2007.

⁴²'India Not Competing with China: Navy Chief', *NDTV*, 26 Dec. 2007.

is shaping the maritime battlefield in the region. It is making friends at the right places. If you don't have the capability to operate in those waters, for a length of time, then you need friends who will support your cause, when the time comes, so definitely China is doing that, as there are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and down below Africa. So it is a known fact that we are ringed by states which may have a favourable disposition towards China.

Appraisals like these are also present in the reports of the Ministry of Defence. The 2006 Annual Report for instance said that it will continue to monitor 'China's military modernization, including in the maritime sector'.⁴³

That China is a concern has also become apparent in the Navy's look east policy. At the beginning of the new century, the Ministry of Defence started to shift its maritime presence from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal. Since 2000, more and more exercises have been carried out in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean, even in the South China Sea. The Navy also wants to bring the Eastern Command on a par with its Western counterpart. The shore base Indian Naval Ship (INS) Kadamba and the new base south of Vishakhapatnam are expected to become equals.⁴⁴ Whereas the Western Naval Command has been reinforced with the supply of the most advanced surface combatants such as the *Talwar*-class frigates and the *Delhi*-class destroyers, the Eastern Command is likely to profit from the new generation of vessels. Its homeport will reportedly berth two aircraft carriers, support ships and new *Scorpene*-class submarines. 'China has fuel interests of its own as fuel lines from Africa and the Gulf run through these waters, and so they are also building up their Navy', Vice Admiral Raman Suthan, commander of the Eastern Fleet claims, 'we keep hearing about China's interest in Coco Island[s] and are wary of its growing interest in the region, and we are keeping a close watch. The naval fleet in east India has long legs and, with the government's emphasis on the look east policy, we are strengthening the east now'.⁴⁵

Officials from the Ministry of Defence also acknowledge that the Far Eastern Command (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) will expand its capacity beyond maritime policing, and that India 'should maintain control over the Andaman Sea as China's principal maritime gateway'.⁴⁶ This objective explains the increasing presence of main military

⁴³Singh, *Maritime Security for India*, 13.

⁴⁴Interview: Ministry of Defence, Navy, New Delhi, 18 Jan. 2008.

⁴⁵'India Upping Antennae in Bay of Bengal to Counter China', *ZeeNews*, 14 Nov. 2007.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

systems. The Command's Chief Air Marshal Raj Kumar has disclosed that there are plans to include fighters, bigger ships and more army troops, and that the facilities on the islands will be developed 'in bits and pieces'. At least four Jaguar deep-penetration strike fighters and two Su-30 multi-role fighters would be stationed at Port Blair.

India's naval diplomacy seeks to pre-empt China dropping its anchor in strategic places. Military exercises and the supply of naval systems creates operational compatibility that in turn contributes to privileged partnerships and makes tactical military exchanges with the People's Republic more difficult. In 2005, the Indian Navy successfully prevented the Seychelles from accepting naval assistance from China, by organising a high-level visit by its Naval Chief, Admiral Arun Prakash, and the donation of the fast attack craft INS *Tarmugli* to the Seychelles Coast Guard. The Naval Headquarters allegedly considered this gesture so urgent that it ordered to pull the ship out of its own fleet barely three years after commissioning. The stopover of Chinese President Hu Jintao in the Seychelles in 2007 added to the suspicion of many Indian security analysts. The Chinese presence in the Maldivean port of Marao, the Sri Lankan harbour of Hambantota and the Burmese Coco Islands is watched with great suspicion and is considered as one of the drivers of India's naval charm offensive.⁴⁷

Is the Chinese Navy indeed trying to strengthen its military presence in the Indian Ocean? Several Indian and Western analysts have hinted that China is supplying itself with a chain of naval hubs along the sea lanes of communication.⁴⁸ This 'string of pearls' strategy would bring the Chinese Navy to strategic locations such as Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Seychelles, Pakistan and Eastern Africa. Other experts have argued that Beijing is determined to build a blue sea navy to counterbalance India's naval strength and eventually to break through an Indian maritime blockade. The People's Republic certainly has good reasons to fret about the protection of its economic lifelines in the South Asian seas. Approximately 62 per cent of the country's exports and 90 per cent of its oil imports are shipped through the Indian Ocean. The Ocean also acts as a conveyor belt for other natural resources that are excavated in China's new-found mining empire in Africa. It has been proved

⁴⁷Interviews: IDSA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Delhi, 16 and 18 Jan. 2008.

⁴⁸David Walgreen, 'China in the Indian Ocean Region: Lessons in PRC Grand Strategy', *Comparative Strategy* 25/1 (Jan. 2006); Vijay Sakhuja, 'Strategic Shift in Chinese Naval Strategy in the Indian Ocean', *IPCS Issues* (New Delhi: IPCS 2005); Jae-Hyung Lee, 'China's Expanding Maritime Ambitions in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean', *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24/3 (June 2007), 553-4.

that China tried to obtain a naval base in Sri Lanka's port of Trincomalee in the early 1980s. Nowadays, the People's Liberation Army sees it as its responsibility to guard maritime corridors even if these are far away from the Chinese shores.

Yet, China's naval presence in South Asia is not as advanced as many spectators assume. Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in port calls to Indian Ocean states, from an annual average of two between 1995 and 2000, to four between 2001 and 2006, but this is not particularly more than the stopovers in other regions.⁴⁹ The so-called string of pearls thus far appears to be more a chain of commercial ventures rather than military stepping-stones. The supposed Chinese intelligence facilities on the Burmese Coco Islands turned out to be based on exciting media stories rather than real projects.⁵⁰ Chinese engineers did contribute to the construction of a string of naval bases at Sittwe (on Akyab Island), Hianggyi, Khaukphyu, Mergui, and Zadetkyi Kyun, and the Navy trained Myanmar's naval intelligence officials and assisted Yangon in executing surveys near India's territorial waters; but in spite of that, none of the formal agreements related to these ventures included access rights for the Chinese Navy.⁵¹

Moreover, since 2002, the military junta in Myanmar has diligently attempted to move closer to the Indian Navy in order to reduce its military dependence on its neighbour in the north. In September 2003 for instance, the chief of the Indian Navy, Admiral Madhvendra Singh, paid an official visit to Myanmar. This visit coincided with their first joint military exercise. Since 2003, India has been training Burmese naval officers.⁵² The port of Sittwe, assumed to be a bulwark of the PLA in several reports, seems rather inundated with businessmen from Calcutta now.⁵³ Interviews with staff from China Harbour Construction Corporation have also revealed that no military considerations played a role when it was negotiating with Islamabad for the port infrastructure project at Gwadar in 2001.⁵⁴ Analysts at the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences have stressed that in a crisis a naval anchorage such as Gwadar would be too vulnerable, faced as it would

⁴⁹Visits registered by Xinhua.

⁵⁰Andrew Selth, 'Chinese Whispers: The Great Coco Island Mystery', *The Irrawady*, 1 Feb. 2007.

⁵¹Interviews: Ministry of Defence, Bangkok, 14 Nov. 2007; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Delhi, 18 Jan.

⁵²Jonathan Holslag, *Myanmar in the Frontline* (Brussels: ESISC, 29 Jan. 2006), 8.

⁵³Interviews Ministry of Defence, Bangkok, 14 Nov. 2007; Institute of Security and International Studies, Bangkok, 15 Nov. 2007.

⁵⁴Interview by telephone, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, 3 Jan. 2008; European Official, Brussels, 22 Dec. 2007.

be with India's military dominance in the Arabian Sea and the eventual deployment of medium range missiles.⁵⁵ Likewise, Hutchison Port Holdings, the Hong Kong-based company that made a bid for the development of a terminal in Port Colombo, and officials from the Chinese and Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs deny that the Chinese Navy was involved in the preparation of the bid, or that China has plans to dispatch military vessels.⁵⁶ Even an official at the Indian Ministry of Defence has argued that Chinese naval presence in Sri Lanka 'will never survive a strike by our [Indian] maritime bombers'.

Leading Chinese officers and experts have argued that India should not take its military leadership in the Indian Ocean for granted.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, such statements do not explain recent Chinese efforts to develop a blue sea navy. Ever since Admiral Liu Haquing published his famous road map for the Chinese navy, its modernisation has been approached from the perspective of a possible conflict in the Strait of Formosa. This implies the capacity to launch an amphibious invasion, but on the other hand, an armed conflict would oblige China to deflect an American counter-strike. Therefore, the Chinese Navy seeks to develop concentric lines of defence. Initially this objective was limited to the South and East China Sea, but in the coming decade it will seek to extend this defensive perimeter far into the Pacific. This explains why, for example, the new *Jiangkai*-class frigates and the *Luzhou*-class destroyers possess the propulsion for long-distance operations, as well as the radar, air defence, command and communication systems to engage multiple distant targets on the high seas.

However, naval strategies are not static. For example, the Chinese Navy responded to the swift modernisation of its Japanese counterpart by strengthening its Northern Fleet. The Southern Fleet was slightly revamped as a response to the increasing capacity of the Vietnamese Navy. Recently, civilian and military experts have started to address this Chinese vulnerability in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁸ Zhang Yuncheng, for instance, contends that 'excessive reliance of China's oil on the Malacca

⁵⁵Interview, CASS, Beijing, 7 Dec. 2007.

⁵⁶Interview Colombo Port Adds to India's China Woes', *Rediff*, 27 Oct. 2007.

⁵⁷Wu Hongmin, 'Long you wu yang: Zhongguo junshi fazhan xin lun' [The Dragon Swims the Five Seas: New Ideas on China's Naval Development], *Chuan zai wuqi* [Shipborne Weapons], (Sept. 2005), 18–19; Chen Zhangming, Wang Jijian and Feng Xianhui, 'Yinduyang haixiao zhong de haijun xingdong' [Naval Operations in the Indian Ocean Tsunami], *Dangdai Haijun* [Modern Navy] No. 3 (March 2005), 44–5; 'Zhongguo jinjun Yinduyang guanhu guojia liyi' [China to Defend its Interests in the Indian Ocean], *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times], 10 July 2008.

⁵⁸Interviews, CASS, Beijing, 7 Dec. 2007 and CICIR, Beijing, 8 Dec. 2007: see also Ruixiang Deng, 'Assessing the Question of India's Rise', *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [Journal of International Studies] (Jan. 2006), 37–42.

Strait implies that China's energy security is facing a Malacca dilemma. If some accident occurs or if the strait is blocked by foreign powers, China will experience a tremendous energy security problem.' However, according to Zhang such a threat will be more likely to come from powers such as Japan and the United States rather than India. This assessment is also shared by Zhu Fenggang, who assumes that the United States and Japan might deny access to the Strait as a coercive measure against China. Many others have taken up these observations to justify a mercantilist, or Mahanian naval policy, which, apart from Taiwan, also takes the defence of maritime trade into account. 'We must be prepared as early as possible', Zhang Wenmu asserts, referring explicitly to the Indian Ocean. 'Ocean power is of permanent importance to the trade of coastal countries... Therefore, a modern ocean-going navy is needed to ensure open sea lanes and potential ocean resources.'⁵⁹ Hence, the debate on how to protect its maritime supply lines has only just begun. Experts have seized on China's maritime security dilemma in the Indian Ocean, and this discussion will undoubtedly inform policy choices.

China is reluctant to flex its naval muscle beyond Malacca.

First and foremost, the country's naval power will remain tied up with Taiwan until a settlement with the island has been reached. Whereas enhanced capability in the East and South China Seas does not weaken the readiness to deal with the proximate Taiwan; a shift of attention towards the Indian Ocean will certainly do so and is therefore not an option.

Second, there is still a huge difference between naval deployment in the East and South China Seas on the one hand, both considered historical spheres of influence, and the Indian Ocean on the other hand. There, apart from the expeditions by Zheng He in the early fifteenth century, China does not dispose of any plausible argument to explain to its neighbours why the area should also historically belong to its maritime area of interest. Even countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh would respond to such a posture with distrust.

Third, it is doubtful that the People's Republic would render itself more vulnerable to an Indian sea denial operation by sending its fleet westwards of the Strait of Malacca. If a major crisis occurred, a Chinese naval counter-offensive would be easy prey as the ships would

⁵⁹Zhang Wenmu, 'Sea Power and China's Strategic Choices,' *China Security* 2/2 (April 2006), 22. See also: Zhang Wenmu, 'The Global Geopolitical System and India's Future Security', *Zhanlue yu Guanli* [Strategy and Management] 30/3 (June 2001), 49; Xu Qi, 'Maritime Geostrategy and the Development of the Chinese Navy in the Early 21st Century', *Zhongguo junshi kexue* [China Military Science], No. 5 (Nov. 2004), 75–81.

inevitably have to sail through the narrow straits of South-East Asia. Even if the Chinese Navy were to succeed in overcoming the Eastern Fleet, thanks to its strategic depth India's Western Naval Command would theoretically still be able to block oil supplies from the Persian Gulfs for days, weeks, if not months.

In any case, costs for a Chinese counter-operation would be too high, so it looks more plausible for the People's Republic to try to raise the costs India would incur were it to deny access, and simultaneously to reduce its dependence on the shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean. Instead of building up a naval presence in South Asia to balance India, it would be easier to deter the country in other ways: along the border, via Pakistan, etc. In addition, China could diversify its supply lines. One option is the development of the new Silk Road that stretches from Shanghai to Rotterdam and the Middle East. Another possibility is a logistical corridor through Pakistan that reduces the exposure to risks at sea. Such connections, in particular a gas corridor to Central Asia and the Middle East, might significantly improve China's energy security, but due to their limited freight capacity, roads and railways will not offer an alternative for the export and import of other goods. The ultimate alternative for the Indian Ocean would be the Arctic Sea. If these waters became navigable, China would not only be able to spread the risks, but also to reduce the average time for transportation. Since 2000, the People's Republic has been investing more in scientific research in the North Pole. It has opened a research base and the expeditions north of the Bering Strait have been stepped up.

Both India's and China's naval power have always taken a backseat to the development of a strong army in order to deal with the numerous challenges on land. Nowadays, the two countries are laying the foundation for a capable blue sea navy. The plans on the drawing table reveal aspirations well beyond the safeguarding of the exclusive economic zone, or the maintenance of supremacy over their arch rivals Pakistan and Taiwan. To legitimise these projects, defence analysts mainly refer to the necessity of protecting maritime supply lines from perils such as piracy and terrorism. However, such non-state challenges cannot justify the purchase of costly offensive systems such as destroyers, nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carriers. Particularly in India, the swift modernisation of the Chinese Navy and its potential interest in taking up positions in the Indian Ocean, has been willingly invoked as justification. India does not yet figure prominently in naval strategising in Beijing, but as Indian military officers and experts continue to depict the Chinese Navy as a nascent threat, a naval race between the two powers might become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Nuclear Deterrence

In April 2007, India successfully tested its Agni III intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM). Whereas this event did not have any direct diplomatic consequences compared to the nuclear test of 1998, its impact on the Sino-Indian military balance has been considerable.⁶⁰ This missile was uniquely designed to reach China. India's previous ballistic missiles, the Agni I and II had a rather short action radius and were mainly developed to deter Pakistan. The Agni III was India's first missile that could reach China's entire territory, and in its 3,500 to 4,000-kilometre range, the People's Republic is also the only nuclear power that would be a relevant target. Although Delhi stated that this vehicle would not be equipped with nuclear warheads, the missile supports a wide range of warhead configurations with a total payload ranging from 600 to 1,800 kilograms.⁶¹ Moreover, despite financial hiccups and limited knowhow, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the agency charged with the development of India's nuclear arsenal, is continuing to work on Multiple Independently-targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) technology to enable the Agni III to circumvent Chinese missile defence counter-measures.⁶² The fact that the construction of this missile type was ordered in 2001, at a time when ties with Beijing were improving, in combination with spiralling development costs, demonstrate that the relevance of nuclear deterrence has never disappeared from India's China agenda.⁶³

Since India reached nuclear parity with Pakistan in the late 1990s, its nuclear aspirations have shifted to its northern neighbour. The priority became not to reach equivalence with China but to bolster a minimal deterrence capability. The People's Republic possesses approximately 400 nuclear missiles, and many Indian strategists believe their country is one of the targets. In 2002, India's Annual Defence Report claimed that 'every major Indian city is within reach of Chinese missiles and this capability is being further augmented to include Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs). The asymmetry in terms of nuclear force is

⁶⁰Sanjay Badri Maharaj and Arun Vishwakarma, 'Evaluating India's Land-based Missile Deterrent', *Indian Defence Review* 19/4 (Sept. 2004); Rajan, *Nuclear Deterrence in Southern Asia*.

⁶¹Arun Vishwakarma, 'Strategic Missiles', *India Defence Review* 22/1 (Jan. 2007).

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Rahul Bedi, 'India Holds Back from Test Firing Agni III', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 24 May 2006; Thapar Vishal, 'Agni-III Raring to Go, Government Not Keen', *CNN-IBN*, 15 May 2006; Varun Sahni, 'India and Missile Acquisition: Push and Pull Factors', *South Asian Survey* 11/2 (April 2004), 287-99.

pronouncedly in favour of China and is likely to get further accentuated as China responds to counter the US missile defence programme.' Several studies suspiciously go over China's assumed missile deployment in military bases in Tibet, such as Naghshuka, Tsaidam, Delinga, and other nearby places like Kunming and Datong. Analysts have also warned that China will station new short-range missiles on the Tibetan plateau and that these would be considered tactical instead of strategic devices, thus lowering the threshold for a nuclear conflict.⁶⁴

China itself is confident that its supremacy will hold, but there are aspects of India's nuclear show-off that raise eyebrows. Beijing is concerned about India's Advance Air Defence (AAD) programme that can affect the impact of its older generation of single-warhead IRBMs. It has also hinted that the new missiles could undermine superiority over Tibet, and that its relevance as a buffer will be undermined by India's gradual nuclear build-up.⁶⁵ Other Chinese observers highlight the risk that looming nationalism could make India's nuclear deterrence less pragmatic and rational. Finally, there is the consideration that India's improving nuclear power might make it more assertive towards Pakistan, and hence disturb Pakistan's counterweight that China has built up steadily in the past decades.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Concurrent with the diplomatic thaw of the last decades, the military interaction between China and India has evolved from a trench war to pacification, and since the 1990s also to confidence building. The armed forces of both countries have reduced their presence at the disputed boundary and have engaged in an increasing number of exchanges. However, though the Cold War mentality might be ebbing away to some extent; it certainly has not disappeared. An enduring security dilemma still fuels a military tit-for-tat game. This situation stems from a rational extrapolation of each other's interests into malevolent intentions. For instance, China has a reasonable interest in reducing its exposure to Indian dominance in the Indian Ocean, and thus the latter should anticipate the People's Republic's future attempts to extend its naval strongholds beyond the Malacca Strait.

⁶⁴Neha Kumar, 'India Ballistic Missile Defence Capabilities and Future Threats', ICPS, Delhi, June 2007.

⁶⁵'India Needs to Eliminate Anxiety about China', *People's Daily*, 9 June 2001.

⁶⁶Zhang Ming, *China's Changing Nuclear Posture: Reactions to the South Asian Nuclear Tests* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 1999), 46–7.

That such a negative appraisal takes precedence over more positive interpretations might be rationally inherent to a security dilemma; it is undoubtedly stimulated by several additional factors. Always in search of more means, military establishments naturally tend to underscore gloomy assessments. As they still have significant leverage among their governments in both countries, appeals are likely to be heard to some extent, and subsequent projects ultimately endorse the arguments of the defence community in the other country. Second, many military leaders were trained with scenarios that sought their inspiration in the hot war of 1962 or nuclear confrontations. Track dependency remains an important feature in strategic thinking. Third, as demonstrated in an earlier paper, civilian experts on Sino-Indian relations who tend to be more suspicious dominate public news media: in India particularly.⁶⁷ Moreover, several of these experts take part in advisory bodies such as the influential National Security Council. Fourth, strategic apprehension is generated by external powers, most notably the United States. Although India is still reluctant to team up, America's military penchant towards the South Asian juggernaut makes China very uncomfortable. Finally, distrust is aggravated because as long as traditional disputes like the border demarcation remain unsettled they will be seized for domestic political use and this way aggravate insecurity.

In their separate rankings of security challenges, China and India rank each other far below domestic perils and Taiwan or Pakistan. This means that they take each other into account for their arms development programmes, but it is not a case of extreme responsiveness, where every minor improvement in the circumstances of one of the players is directly followed by an adjustment of the other. Maintaining the military balance can be described as the monitoring of certain general thresholds, so that once they are crossed by the other camp, you may follow suit. This is the case with nuclear arms, where it is not a Cold War-like parity that is aimed for, but rather a minimal deterrence. Nor are both sides looking for military supremacy at the border; from a distance they seek to develop the capability to react flexibly to a wide range of challenges. China and India are still far from an arms race, but they will not allow each other to leap too far ahead.

The security dilemma will impede the two regional powers to move from confidence building to military cooperation. Even though they face similar challenges in many areas of Asia, self-help will continue to prevail over the development of synergies in terms of issues such as maritime security, terrorism and instability in neighbouring states. The balance of power between China and India differs in the various

⁶⁷Jonathan Holslag, 'Gloomy Perceptions Thwart Sino-Indian Relationship', *BICCS Asia Paper* 3/3 (April 2008).

dimensions of military capability, conventional and non-conventional, but on the whole they are both very vulnerable to potential acts of hostility. This situation of multi-level soft deterrence leads to a stronger security interdependence, and hence a reduced probability of armed conflicts. Therefore, in the near future, the security dilemma will not bring about peace, but it will lead to more stability as the costs of war rise significantly on both sides of the Himalaya.

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