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Sino-Indian Diplomatic Negotiations: A Preliminary Assessment

Sujit Dutta

Introduction

Of all the border disputes and territorial negotiations that China has encountered since the formation of the new state in 1949, it is with India that it has had the most protracted and difficult negotiations and a compromise settlement has eluded successive political leaderships in both countries. The same can be said about India's experience. India has had little difficulty in reaching boundary settlements peacefully and amicably with all its neighbours barring China. The dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir is only indirectly territorial and boundary related—it is fundamentally related to issues of national identity.

In China's case, there were other disputed boundaries too that were difficult to resolve and became conflictual—for example, with the Soviet Union and Vietnam. The border with Russia is now virtually settled and there has been forward movement in negotiations towards a settlement of the Sino-Vietnamese land border. Sino-Soviet relations began to change following Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in Moscow and his new approach towards China. Soviet disintegration and the emergence of Russia and three new Central Asian states with borders with China only helped the process of conciliation and boundary settlement. By 1997, China had largely settled its borders with Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Only the boundary with politically troubled Tajikistan in the Pamirs remains to be settled though the bilateral relations are not volatile. Clearly a rapid decline in Russia's power and its acceptance of Chinese arguments on applying geographical principles were key to such a settlement. China also has outstanding boundary problems with Japan, Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Bhutan, and Indonesia. But these are not yet volatile and negotiations in most cases have only begun or are yet to be initiated though the process could easily become difficult as the Mischief Reef incident showed.

With Vietnam, the problem is more acute and there are several

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similarities with the Indian case. The clash between Vietnamese and Chinese nationalisms since the early 1970s emerged over ties with the Soviet Union and the United States. It became acute in the context of Vietnam's insistence in maintaining an independent stance and pursuing its interests. China's forcible occupation of the Vietnamese held Paracels in 1974, its armed and diplomatic support to the Khmer Rouge which had become increasingly hostile against Vietnam since 1975, China's 1979 invasion to "teach Vietnam a lesson" which in the end turned out to be self-defeating, and the 1988 and 1992 attacks and takeover of Vietnamese held and claimed islands in the Spratlys were the key features of an escalating conflict between the two states in the 1970-1992 period. However, in recent years, the two sides have taken steps to contain their differences and a temporary agreement in principle to settle the land boundary was signed in 1991 and reiterated in 1997. The maritime boundary remains more difficult and problematic.

But despite normalisation of relations, many rounds of talks, visits at the highest levels, and the signing of major agreements on confidence-building measures (CBMs), a Sino-Indian agreement remains elusive. Indeed, even the agreement the two sides reached first in 1988 and then in 1993 to delineate the Line of Control (LOC) as a building block towards confidence building and a final boundary settlement has been difficult to implement.

Why has Sino-Indian boundary settlement been so difficult when in many ways their relationship in the 1950s, soon after the founding of the two new states, was the harbinger of a new type of relationship between socialist and non-socialist, non-aligned states, and which also provided major diplomatic milestones—Panchsheel, Afro-Asian movement and Bandung, and an agreement to reconcile conflicting positions on Tibet. This paper argues that the intractable nature of the Sino-Indian boundary dispute can be attributed to three major factors.

- (i) A clash of major Asian nationalisms that confronted each other for the first time in history as modern states—each convinced about the righteousness of its territorial limits and determined to win the clash of interests and wills.
- (ii) A clash of strategic goals and interests in an overlapping geopolitical region (Pakistan, Tibet, Nepal Myanmar) that bred insecurity and led to failure to build trust—essential for a compromise on the border.
- (iii) Contrary traditions in strategic cultures and world views that were brought to dispute resolution—one realist and *realpolitik*, and the other legalist and significantly idealist.

Despite major changes in the global strategic environment and in the domestic climate and ideologies in both countries since the 1962 war

and virtual normalisation of relations, these factors have persisted to undermine attempts to expand confidence building, finalise the LOC in the border region, and settle the boundary. The post-Pokhran II downturn in relations has once again underlined the contradictions between the two nations. There are other factors that bring to some relief these contradictions:

- (i) Differences in approach to map making by imperial powers—revisionist in the case of China, largely status quoist in the case of India. To the Indian post-independence leadership, British imperial map making was only following traditional and customary frontiers along the Himalayan watershed and was based on agreements and historical records that could not be denied. To China, agreements which Tibet had signed had no political or legal sanctity in the case of India. Where there was no clear agreement delineating the boundary as in the Aksai Chin and north-east Ladakh, the territory was fit for its claim.
- (ii) Misgivings in India over China's approach towards Kashmir, Sikkim, Pakistan, and now increasingly Myanmar, and in China over India's role in regard to the Tibetan question have had political impact on the boundary negotiations.
- (iii) A negative historical memory of 1962 in India. Use of force leading to a sense of humiliation or betrayal is a key element in shaping the psychological environment in which negotiations are conducted and have affected prospects of early reconciliation in Sino-Indian relations. By its invasion of India in 1962, and Vietnam in 1979, China has left a trail of bitter memories and mistrust that has become a hurdle to confidence building efforts, and complicated an already complex problem.
- (iv) Bilateral efforts for confidence-building and security, undermined by perceptions of negative consequences of military modernisation, nuclear build-up, and diplomatic acts at the regional and global levels.
- (v) Strong political groups in both countries that at crucial stages have been obstacles to a compromise negotiated settlement.

The result of these factors on decision makers has been a legacy of mistrust that is reflected in the repeated outbreak of crisis—1959, 1962, 1965, 1967, 1971, 1987, 1998.

The conflict of interest between India and China has not been resolved after many rounds of diplomatic negotiations—and some of them are not easy to resolve. The process of formal CBMs—which the two countries have pursued in general since 1988 and more specifically since 1993—has been unstable under these conditions. The CBM process and

post-Mao improvement in relations has been a reflection of the interest of both countries to pursue peaceful ties as this enhances their security while they engage in modernisation and grapple with internal security and political challenges. However, the relations have been prone to instability, uncertainty, and sporadic tensions. Sino-Indian relations could become increasingly competitive, even confrontational if China begins to pursue its huge territorial claims against India, if its commitment towards detente and peaceful resolution of disputes over sovereignty diminishes, or its arms transfer policies, defence ties, and arms build-up come to be seen as threatening by India. Relations could deteriorate if the political situation in Tibet gets out of control leading to misunderstanding over the role of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan refugees in India with consequent rise in tensions between the two countries. They would certainly become conflictual if India changes its established diplomatic stance of recognising Tibet and Taiwan as parts of China, or attempts to seize territory lost to China in the 1957-62 phase.

Since it is not in the interest of India nor, from all indications, China, to return to a conflictual relationship of the 1959-76 phase—which both countries have tried hard to set aside—it is imperative that the two countries draw the correct lessons from their five decades of diplomatic and military interactions and take measures to build long-term stability.

The Chinese Diplomatic Stance

Over the past five decades, no other state has had to negotiate and even face conflictual situations over borders and territories as has China. Two factors are responsible for such an outcome at a general foreign policy level.

One, China shares land and maritime boundaries with the largest number of states in the world—in all 19, if its claims in the South China Sea against the three Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) states in addition to Vietnam, and its *de facto* border with Pakistan on what is legally Indian territory are taken into account. Many of these boundaries were not clearly demarcated since such a concept of hard and fixed state boundaries is a recent phenomenon. Fully delineated and demarcated boundaries have their origin in the rise of the modern state system following the Treaty of Westphalia in Europe. The European powers brought the concept of delineated boundaries to their colonial territories yet vast areas were left undemarcated and without formal agreements by the time colonialism collapsed in Asia. However, China has questioned the validity of agreements even where they have existed on the grounds of unequal treaties or superior and historically longer sovereignty claims. This has kept the pot of territorial disputes boiling all around its periphery.

Two, and more fundamentally, China's revisionist approach towards its territorial contours—even in cases where it actually did not insist on a revision—became a potent factor in shaping relations and conflicts. The Chinese political decision that it would renegotiate the existing boundaries with all its neighbours since they were allegedly imposed on it at its time of weakness and vulnerability in the 19th and early 20th century by the colonial powers—Britain, Russia, Japan, and France—and put forward sweeping claims on the basis of its historical boundaries have deeply affected China's relations with its neighbours, especially India. Pre-1949 borders were perceived as not having the willing acceptance of China and hence were a mark of its repeated humiliation and manipulation by the European powers and Japan. Renegotiation of the borders and acceptance by the other states that the borders were not fully demarcated, that they were a legacy of colonial history was a way for China to assert its nationalism, independence and overcome the memory of defeat and humiliation. China was introduced to international law during the Manchu dynasty; during discussions with the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century; during negotiations with Russia leading to the Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689; and during the series of "unequal treaties" the West imposed on China in the 19th century.¹ Its approach towards pre-1949 treaties, agreements, and international norms was deeply coloured by that memory, assertive nationalism of its revolutionary elite, and an expansive territorial conceptualisation of the new state. US containment strategy that resulted in the People's Republic of China (PRC) being denied the China seat in the United Nations till 1971 and kept out of international organisations only sharpened the feelings of victimisation. Such an approach was entirely one-sided since it overlooked the territorial expansion of military acquisition of the Qing dynasty against neighbouring states.

Two other sources of major influence on its foreign policy and diplomatic practice have also been important in shaping its approach towards India and others. One, Marxism-Leninism as codified by Stalin and Mao's own interpretation of its dynamics was essentially suspicious and contemptuous of bourgeois regimes and non-alignment, and was significantly conflictual in its essential approach. Two, China's traditional, *realpolitik* strategic thinking that perceived a recalcitrant state on its periphery as an enemy suitable for a diplomatic and military "lesson" and use of force.² Diplomacy and military power are thus closely intertwined in the conduct of foreign policy and in shaping the context of negotiations on sovereignty and boundary related issues.

These ideological factors have shaped China's approach towards boundary disputes and the conduct of negotiations. The practice of negotiations themselves has been characterised by four characteristic

features aimed at advancing China's interests, adopting a moral posture, and shaping the contours and contents of diplomatic relations.

- (i) *The Role of Principles:* The appeal to principles is characteristic of the Chinese negotiating style. At the first stage of negotiations, Chinese negotiators tend to avoid detail and instead seek to reach agreement on broad, apparently philosophical, principles. The "five principles of peaceful coexistence" are the most prominent of its foreign policy principles and outline the political and moral world in which China would like its diplomacy to be perceived. They are the antidote to the actual practise of realism and *realpolitik*, symbols of nationalism, and are also adequately flexible to advance its strategic interests, and permit face saving compromises to both sides. In boundary negotiations China has used one significant principle: mutual understanding and mutual accommodation—to ensure a favourable bargain and agreement, and to leave the stamp of its political will.³
- (ii) *Ensuring Claims:* Through actual territorial possession and continuous propaganda to establish the legitimacy and publicity for its claims so as to be positioned for a final, favourable bargain. It occupied large parts of Aksai Chin and beyond in Ladakh as precursor to formally advancing its territorial claims, captured the Paracels (1974), several islands in the Spratlys (1988, 1992) before formally announcing the real dimensions of its sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and the Pacific in the shape of the Territorial Waters Law (1992).
- (iii) *Tactical Flexibility:* It engages in continuous negotiations to control and shape the nature of a diplomatic relationship. It could reach a tactical compromise on a festering territorial issue and even surrender large claims over territory it does not control if there are tangible gains in other areas of the relationship—security, economic, military, political—and if its minimum diplomatic goals are met.
- (iv) *End Game—Reaching an Agreement When the Time is Ripe:* Deng Xiaoping in his meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in December 1988 called for the setting aside of mutual differences, expansion of cooperative relations and mutual trust. When the political and strategic conditions, on the other hand, are seen to be favourable, China has moved quickly to settle issues.
- (v) *Insistence on dialogue and exchanges at the highest political level to facilitate diplomatic negotiations and dispute resolution.*

- (vi) Use of coercive diplomacy when the other side is seen to be non-cooperative and aggressive.

All these factors have been at play in China's diplomacy towards India since 1976. At several junctures in the post-1949 phase, Beijing has seen considerable value in improved, cooperative relations with India to be in its political and security interests. However, its decision makers have also simultaneously sought to ensure a status and power for China hierarchically above India in the international arena. Moreover, its wider strategic aims of establishing itself as a great power—political, diplomatic, military and economic—in Asia with wide influence and military ties, has repeatedly created tensions for its goal of improved relations with India. These factors have in turn shaped Indian perceptions of an "unfriendly," self-serving China that seeks to establish a superior-inferior relationship. Two quotations from mainstream Indian commentators are sufficient to make this point. The first commentator argues that China does not view India as an equal. Instead Beijing "tends to equate India and Pakistan and contributes to Pakistan's missile and nuclear capabilities so that India could be effectively counterveiled."⁴ The second stresses:

"China wants to deal with India mainly in the framework of South Asia, where it can rein in Indian ambitions through Pakistan and Myanmar. It would like to engage India globally only on issues that aid Chinese strategy, including on WTO, human rights, environment and multipolarity in international relations. Beijing is unwilling to make any unilateral moves that could help ease Indian concerns and build mutual confidence and trust. Even though Chinese interlocutors voice disbelief and dismay that their country is seen as a threat in India, they do not support China offering New Delhi a specific no-first use nuclear pact modelled on the 1992 Sino-Russian agreement. Yet they warn that Indian development of long-range missiles will be seen as a threat to Chinese security, and are inimical to India building a nuclear deterrent. A forward looking Chinese policy on India's (permanent) membership in the Security Council and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) will help better Sino-Indian relations, but Beijing is reluctant to lift the ambiguity in its position...(on these two issues)."⁵

A closer examination of China's posture indicates that in the post-Mao phase of negotiations, China's stance has been characterised by the following features:

- (i) China sought better relations in order to improve its security environment and promote modernisation. However, it insisted on normalisation on the basis of "keeping aside differences" and a settlement on the basis of "mutual understanding and mutual accommodation." It has ruled out what it calls "unilateral concessions" and has instead called for Indian

concessions in the east in return for Chinese concessions in the western sector. It has not favoured a sector-by-sector agreement as proposed by India in 1982-83, and as carried out by Beijing in the Russia-China case, and has sought an overall bargain in which its diplomatic and military leverages could be fully brought to play:

- (ii) It has not recognised Sikkim's merger with India; has continued to claim the entire Arunachal Pradesh province; denied visas to the Arunachal Speaker and MPs to international meetings in China. Even at the peak of good relations with India in the 1950s, it did not recognise Kashmir's legal accession to India. It recognised only the *de facto* situation and even signed a border agreement in occupied Kashmir in 1963.
- (iii) It has continued to help Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes and engaged in missile transfers to it. It has helped setting up of listening posts in Myanmar, and has developed close military ties with countries around India—Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand. It even attempted to open up Nepal for arms transfers with the aim of undermining the Indo-Nepal security agreement in the late 1980s.
- (iv) It has not undertaken serious efforts to settle the Tibetan problem by granting autonomy. This has meant that 150,000 Tibetan refugees and the Dalai Lama continue to live in India since 1959. China has instead repeatedly insisted on, and secured, Indian commitment to disallow political activity by the Tibetans in exile.

Overall, it has been a conservative diplomatic approach that failed to take advantage of the improvement in relations in the post-Tiananmen era to settle the boundary issue through a positive compromise where it could have either offered to settle those sectors in which the dispute is small—the central sector, and Sikkim where no boundary dispute exists. It could also have recognised India's claims on Arunachal in return for recognition of its claim on Aksai Chin. The additional territory China occupied in 1962 not required for the security of the road system in Aksai Chin could have been returned and the entire agreement given shape through watershed and other recognised geographical principles. Instead, the relations were allowed to move only very gradually.

There has been another aspect to China's diplomatic stance that affects the relationship and negotiations. Since relations deteriorated in the 1960s, China has often contested India's dominant role in the subcontinent and sought to undermine India's diplomatic and security interests by three methods:

- (i) harping on "regional hegemonism" and repeatedly playing on the differences between India and its neighbours in its media reportage (Xinhua);
- (ii) by military transfers and military ties with Pakistan;
- (iii) support to the Pakistan-proposed South Asia Nuclear Free Zone; and Nepal as a peace zone. The aim has been to enhance its diplomatic position with India's other neighbours and simultaneously curb India's attempt to become a nuclear power or undermine security ties with specific neighbours.

As relations improved in the 1980s and with China deeply engaged in its own modernisation and reforms, Beijing undertook a more nuanced and diplomatically non-interfering role in intra-South Asian affairs, and backed greater regional cooperation. However, its security analysis and media coverage of international relations from the region continued have a strong dose of negative reportage on India. The situation improved in the post-Tiananmen context as China sought closer and more secure ties with its neighbours in order to counter sanctions and pressures from the West, and overcome politico-security fears as a result of the collapse of the socialist bloc and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This was reflected in greater stress on high-level political and military exchanges; CBMs, expansion in trade, and a positive political attitude.

However, since 1996, as China's relations with the West, the United States, Russia and Japan normalised and strategic partnerships with Russia and the US were initiated, the relations with India stalled. The CBMs did not make the progress that they should have. China stalled on exchanging its maps on the LOC—an important CBM that the two countries had earlier agreed upon—and finally in 1998, cancelled the visit of the chief of the Xinjiang military district to Ladakh after all preparations were made on both sides, in sympathy with Pakistan's protest that Kashmir is a disputed territory. At the international level, as China actively cooperated with the West on arms control, it insisted that India sign the entry into force clause (eif) to make the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) effective. These had left their mark on the relationship even before the Indian Defence Minister's outburst against China after the new government came to power. The nuclear issue was clearly emerging as a major irritant in India-China relations and China's refusal to discuss that issue clouded the atmospherics. The process of CBMs has now been vitiated by mutual acrimony on both sides and ad hoc political statements that are not grounded in clear strategic goals.

Diplomatic Posture: India

India's overall political approach towards China articulated by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was sound. It emphasised that good relations

with China were essential for India's security. It also helps avoid a two-hostile-front syndrome, to an extent neutralises the China factor in dealing with Pakistan, and keeps the possibility open for some cooperation on global issues of common interest. However, competitive nationalisms, absence of a common enemy, and a history of discord and mistrust has made any strategic partnership or *bhai-bhai* syndrome unrealistic. The post-1976 strategy of improving relations, enhancing security through dialogue and CBMs and expanding all-round exchanges was a sound policy and remains valid. What India's diplomacy lacked was back-up in terms of build-up of economic and military capability. While India still does not have an adequate nuclear deterrence capability in relation to China, a major advance has been made in restoring some symmetry in the military relationship since May 1998.

However, Indian policy between 1947-64—the Nehru Years—suffered from severe deficiencies in terms of strategy, tactics, and approach to advance the country's foreign policy and security interests. It failed to grasp the full implications of the rise of powerful Chinese nationalism on India's borders; the role of power; and the need to maintain symmetry in power between the two major Asian states in order to maintain peace and a sense of security in the new relationship. Thus, serious diplomatic errors were committed in unilaterally recognising China's occupation of Tibet, not securing a full agreement on the boundary before such a recognition was given, and failing to appreciate that China's growing military power, especially its nuclear capability would shape the diplomatic environment and indirectly the boundary negotiation and its outcome. Continuation of a closed-door economic strategy and an inward-looking political mindset for some forty years was a serious error that constrained the nation's economic, technological, military and diplomatic capabilities and influence with effect on India's China policy. Moreover, India's approach of not raising the boundary issue with China and settling it before finalising its political map was also diplomatically unhelpful, especially when India did not physically occupy the border areas in many places. India also failed to appreciate the possibility that China would use massive force, if necessary, to affirm its claims and its political will. Thus, not only were timely military measures not taken, active diplomatic efforts to prevent war, diplomatically engage China, and engage the international diplomatic community in ensuring that war does not occur were not made once the 1960-61 talks failed.

Current Indian policies stress increasing cooperation with China and reduced military tensions. A policy of engagement, detente, peaceful resolution of disputes, and enhanced cooperation is seen to be in the country's long-term interest. However, a strategic posture that only stresses diplomacy and interdependence and downgrades military capabilities is inadequate to deal with the challenges posed by a rising

China. A rapidly modernising, strong and democratic India is necessary to deal with any negative impact of the growth of China's power in the Indian periphery. For India, the growing power and strategic reach of China has significant long-term implications that are assessed to be of concern by security experts and decision makers. To improve relations with China, India has taken the following initiatives:

- (i) It restored ambassadorial ties with China in 1976. Following Chinese reciprocity and indication for normal ties during Wang Binqnan's visit in 1978, India sent External Affairs Minister Vajpayee to China in February 1979—the first such visit since 1954. It was followed in 1981 by foreign diplomatic negotiations.
- (ii) India moved away in 1987-88 from insistence on linking normalisation of high level political exchanges to a resolution of the boundary problem and also agreed to expand all-round relations while keeping aside the discussion on the border problem till after an agreement on the Line of Control and a series of CBMs.
- (iii) India indicated its readiness to move away from its maximum position on the territorial issue as articulated in the 1962 Parliamentary resolution—the vacation of all Indian territory by China—and agreed in 1988 to a 'fair and reasonable' solution.
- (iv) In 1988, India reiterated its position on Tibet as an "autonomous" part of China.

The extreme, aggressive nationalism that some in the present government have displayed, in some ways, is an over-reaction to the Congress/Janata Dal defensive nationalism. Yet both are inappropriate for the needs of the nation. It also suffers from the old anti-China mindset. The Defence Minister's outburst on China, the Prime Minister's ill-conceived letter to President Clinton, the recent pro-Taiwan pronouncements by the Urban Affairs Minister, Ram Jethmalani, and the inability to prevent the Tibetan Youth Congress to scale the walls of the Chinese Embassy and burn its flag are acts that not only go against India's overall strategic interest in stable and good relations with China, worse they are ad hoc acts without any well thought out strategic component.

India's overall policies on Tibet and Taiwan have been reiterated by successive governments since the 1950s. They can be changed only if India's overall approach towards China is to change by adopting a conflictual course and hostile policy posture. The present leadership has not given any reasoned argument as to why they should, or what are the gains in such an approach or in the mixed signals it has sent to

China. Indeed, both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, have actually reaffirmed India's commitment to good relations with China. In which case the four specific acts that have occurred on the Indian side under the new government are grave mistakes, and in contradiction to national strategy and official policy.

Clearly, what India needs is neither an over-defensive nor an offensive nationalism—but stable, confident nationalism that would forward the country's overall interests, ensure a friendly security environment in which to advance the country's rapid and overall modernisation, and advance its autonomous role in the international system. India has major stakes in building stable relations with China without sacrificing its interests. Engagement and deterrence are the two necessary pillars of a China policy that can advance India's interests, and also keep the relationship stable.

An erratic Sino-Indian relationship will only be an invitation to Beijing to step up its direct and indirect threats to Indian security. Through the current downturn in Sino-Indian relations, many analysts in India, while agreeing with the essence of the country's security concerns, have backed continued engagement with China and were critical of the Indian Defence Minister's public outburst against China in May 1998.⁶

The Chinese reaction to the test, after an initial show of restraint, has been sharply negative and out of character with its previous positions. The effect has been to convince many in India that the new leadership in Beijing has embraced the mental make-up of a candidate "superpower"—a rising Asian hegemon. China has accused India of attempting "to seek hegemony over South Asia and provoke a nuclear arms race"; said India had "slandered China by claiming it constitutes a nuclear threat," and called on the world to stop India from making nuclear weapons.⁷ Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan simultaneously made it clear to Foreign Secretary Madeleine Albright that the Chinese understanding of the term "world" really meant the US and China.

Until this statement, China had always conceded the right of every nation to take its own decisions on national defence in view of the specific security environment. It had expressed such sentiments to India, as well in the strategic and diplomatic dialogues, Beijing had itself defied world opinion to conduct a series of tests—justifying them as necessary for national security—before signing the CTBT in 1996. It ignored the fact that India had not signed the CTBT because of its lack of linkage with a time-bound plan of global nuclear disarmament and that it was not comprehensive enough since it permitted sub-critical nuclear tests. India had not only not violated any international agreement it had signed, the CTBT itself has yet to come into force. Finally, China

had consistently misled world public opinion about its nuclear and missile collaboration with Pakistan which had helped Islamabad to acquire nuclear and missile capability and it was fully aware of Indian feelings about such clandestine transactions.

China's attempt to forge a joint front with the United States to become guardians of security in the Indian subcontinent is a gross provocation and has been rejected by India since China is itself the major source of insecurity on the nuclear and missile front. Its call for a roll-back of India's nuclear weapon programme, and claim for itself the right to build nuclear weapons for its security and criticise India for claiming the same right has serious political and strategic undertones that will confirm India's worst fears. China also knows that as a non-signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the CTBT, India did not renege on any international treaty, commitment or agreement in conducting its tests. Moreover, even the CTBT is not in force and has not been ratified by most signatory states, including the US. China's attempt to portray itself as a flag-bearer of global public opinion is ironical given the strong justification on security grounds that it advanced for its own testing through the very end of the CTBT negotiations process in 1996 against strong global criticism, and its violation of the very NPT system and other arms control accords that it has signed and is currently swearing by in order to bolster Pakistan's nuclear and missile development.⁸

China's return to the slogan of Indian hegemony in South Asia—a regular refrain in the Maoist years—has been equally disturbing since it signals an active Chinese policy to balance India within the subcontinent. What are the effects of these developments on the relationship? Will the two countries be able to come out of the setbacks and forge a new relationship? Will nuclear weapons be a stabilising force, as most Indian commentators feel, or will they lead to the opposite, as China has claimed in its highly critical reaction?⁹ These will remain key questions in the coming years.

Conclusion

Stable and peaceful Sino-Indian relations are necessary and in the interest of both the countries. However, this can happen only if there is a general agreement on the terms of coexistence—equality, a fair compromise on territorial settlement, appreciating each other's security concerns, an agreement on nuclear security, treating each other as good neighbours without ulterior aims, and expanding economic, political and security cooperation. Only then can the two states end the legacy of mistrust, and keep their competition regulated. Positive steps are, therefore, required on both sides to repair the damage and untie the knots.

It is important that India seeks good relations and reciprocates China's good behaviour. But it is also necessary to be firm when China behaves as a rogue elephant. In order to sustain peace, India and China will need to arrive at a basic understanding of the norms of political and strategic coexistence and a shared view of security in a region where their interests increasingly overlap. It is of crucial importance to India and other states in Asia that China stays on the course of reform and gradual democratisation. Deeper Chinese engagement with the outside world, and an end to its practise of *realpolitik* would create the basis for a secure order in India-China relations. India's policies, which are undergoing re-examination as a result of the rise of a strongly nationalist government, would similarly have to remain committed to engagement with China on the basis of equality, reciprocity, and ensuring its security.

NOTES

1. Jerome Cohen and Huangdah Chiu, *People's China and International Law: A Documentary Study*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 5-6.
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3. For a discussion on this issue, see Richard Solomon, *Chinese Political Negotiating Behavior, 1967-1984* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1995).
4. "China Syndrome," editorial, *Times of India*, August 7, 1997.
5. Brahma Chellaney, "Our Babbling Power, China's Biting Power," *The Pioneer*, November 5, 1997, p. 8.
6. Defence Minister George Fernandes declared China as India's "potential threat number one" and said the country was surrounded by Chinese military and naval activities, *Times of India*, May 4, 1998. For negative reactions, see J.N. Dixit, "India's China Policy in Disarray," *The Hindu*, May 7, 1998; and J.N. Dixit, "Strange Way to Make Friends," *The Indian Express*, May 14, 1998.
7. "China Says Indian Nuclear Tests Aimed at Dominance in South Asia," Associated Press from Beijing, May 14, 1998.
8. For Indian response, see the official response by the Ministry of External Affairs, "India Rejects China's charges on N-tests," *The Hindu*, May 17, 1998; Muchkund Dubey, "Exercising the Nuclear Option," *The Hindu*, May 18, 1998; C. Raja Mohan, "China and the Indian Bomb," *The Hindu*, May 18, 1998; "BJP Criticises China for Arming Pakistan" *The Indian Express*, May 16, 1998. For a moderate opinion that stresses the importance of good relations with China, see C.V. Ranganathan, "India-China Ties after Pokhran-II," *The Hindu*, May 16, 1998.
9. See, for example, the discussion in William W. Bain, "Sino-Indian Military Mobilisation: The Potential for Destabilisation," *Asian Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 3, Fall 1994, pp. 131-147.