

Indo-China Rapprochement: Its Impacts on Regional Security of South Asia

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Abstract

India and China are now seeing each other as an opportunity rather than a threat. It has been observed that mutual mistrust remains on security and geostrategic issues making both wary of each other's military and economic growth. However, driven by the changing international trends, India and China recognized the need to cooperate for long term interests of regional and global peace and stability as well as their own economic prosperity. This study aims to revisit the issue of security, defense and war in South Asia region with reference to recent agreement in India "Look East" policy. The paper is based on historical evidences. It highlights the dynamics of India China relationship from hostility to détente. Furthermore, the research aims to construct a scenario about impacts of India-China rapprochement policy on regional security and insecurity. Theoretical framework of this paper is taken from Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory.

Key Words: India, China, Rapprochement, South Asia, Regional Security Complex

Introduction

The paper explains the rapprochement between India and China. These two countries are major stakeholders in South Asia region. Besides India, there are seven other countries in the region; Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. India is economically, politically and militarily most powerful country in the region. China is an important state for South Asia as most of its countries share borders with it. Relations of both countries started when India accepted it as People's Republic of China on 31 December 1949. India was the second non-communist country to accept People's Republic of China (Rao, 2014). Relations of both countries saw many difficulties in the past which were cordial in start but this phase did not last for long. Therefore, both countries fought a Sino-Indian War in 1962. In this period, relations of both countries were not friendly but both states did not take too much time to come out of this trauma. The two countries started economic relations and after short time relations between India and China were on track again (Malone & Mukherjee, 2010). The main reason behind India-China good relations is India's 'Look East' policy given by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao in 1990 (Shahin, 2003). From the very first day, China was ready to improve its relations with India but there were some problems from Indian side because it always saw China as a threat. Indian Defense Minister gave statement that "China was India's number one threat". Therefore, in India's 'Look East' policy, it shows its willingness to improve its relationship with China to enhance rapprochement process.

India and China started cooperation in economic field but after a short time, both countries started cooperation in political sphere as well as strategic defense and security, energy security cooperation and combating terrorism. So due to economic relations, the level of cooperation was increased between the two states.

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When two major countries of any region cooperate, they have spill over impacts on the relations of other small countries. Therefore, this paper explains the rapprochement between India and China, two major stakeholders in South Asia, and its impacts on other countries of the region.

Regional Security Complex Theory

This paper revolves around the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) presented by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 2003 (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The RSCT claims that international security depends upon regions and regular and patterned relations between the states of a particular region. According to the Regional Security Complex Theory, a region is defined area where two or more states interact and affect each other on the concept of amity or enmity. Regional security is important for every state rather there is amity or enmity. According to RSCT, the concept of amity and enmity depends upon the history and culture of those states. The main idea of RSCT is how the security is clustered in the regions. In the RSCT, the security of one state of a region is interlinked with the security of the other states. This has been confirmed that regional pattern of security has become more important in the world politics after decolonization. Regions and their security are now more self-directed and more important now. Countries which live in a conflicting region, are not directly involved in conflict that is why regional power has more room to maneuver. According to RSCT, regions got importance after decolonization. As per Barry Buzan, states feel more threat from its neighbor states rather from the far state. When states share borders, there must be cooperation between those states in every sector because states are working on the concept of interdependence and the level of interdependence depends upon the distance between those states and their position in the international system. The level of security interdependence will be high in the states which are in security complex than those which are not.

According to RSCT, major powers have interests and capabilities so they can interfere in other regions and small powers always remain confined to their own region due to lack of capabilities and small interests.

According to the RSCT, there are four level of analysis. Domestic, regional, inter-regional and global level. In the domestic level, the focus is on internal economic position and internal stability of the state. In the regional level, state-to-state level is viewed because these relations make the region. In inter-regional level, the interaction among regions is important. In the global level, the attitude of the global power is determined (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

In the RSCT, whole system revolves around the regional level. According to the theory, global power interferes in other regions on the rivalry already exist between the regional powers and the reason of that rivalry might be culture and history.

Another point of the RSCT is the presence of rivalry between regional powers, so they invite global power(s) to take their side according to already existing division between them based on history and culture to create balance of power on the regional level.

Relations between India and China have seen many phases. Their relations started improving with China's succession as People's Republic of China on 1st October 1948. India was a nationalist country but in China, there was Communist government. When China became the People's Republic of China then India was the second non-communist country to recognize China as an independent state on 30th December 1949 (Rao, 2014). India was always eager to improve its relationship with China so India appointed K M Panikar as ambassador to China in 1950. (Panikkar, 1956). Nehru was an idealist leader and he was in favor of friendly relations with China. Therefore, Nehru supported China on the Korean conflict and did not support USA's stance. Nehru also supported China on its entry in United Nations and on Taiwan issue. India supported China's stance of unification of Taiwan with mainland China and opposed the Japanese Peace Treaty. Nehru was offered power of veto but he denied (on USSR's desires) that we do not need it as we are non-aligned country and recommended People's Republic of China to be given this veto power (Harder, 2015). These were the points which changed Chinese perception towards India.

India and China were making their best efforts to improve their relations. The both countries had many border issues which remained source of friction between India and China. In spite of these issues, both India and China decided to put those issues at back and decided to start cooperation in economic field. With this commitment, high-level contacts started between both countries and their relations started to improve. On 29th April 1954, India and China signed "Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India" (Mishra, 2004). According to this agreement, both the parties agreed to establish trade agencies in each other's country. Subsequently, China established trade agencies in New Delhi, Kampong and Calcutta and India established trade agencies in Gyantsa, Gartok and Yatung. Both countries had permission to trade in each other's country but there were some specific areas where they could operate (Sharma, 1999). This was a landmark agreement between India and China. This agreement set the foundations for friendly relations between the two countries. This agreement also set the foundations for another most important agreement called 'Panchsheel'. According to Panchsheel agreement, both countries have to follow some points for peaceful relations. "The five points (Panchsheel) are as below; (Arpi, 2015).

- Mutual respect for each other territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Mutual non-aggression
- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- Equality and cooperation for mutual benefits, and
- Peaceful co-existence"

This was the time when relations of both countries were very friendly. In 1954, Prime Minister Nehru addressed in parliament and said that relations of India and China are improving very quickly. He also gave the concept of "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" (Burke, 1963) in his speech. This was ideal phase in India-China relations.

Both countries were enjoying the good relations and heads of both states were making regular visits to each other's country. However, India and China's relations got tense in 1959 with Tibet uprising and disputes over India-China border (Lüthi, 2012). As they share long boundary, there are many border disputes between them. The border between these two countries is divided into three sectors; western, eastern and middle sector.

In the western sector, main issue is India's Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir with Xinjiang and Tibet region of China. These areas have remained under the control of China and are claimed by India.

In the middle sector, dispute is on various points between Tibet-Kashmir-Punjab border junction and Nepal-Tibet-Uttar Pradesh border junction.

In the eastern sector, there is North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and now Arunachal Pradesh, on the Indian side and Tibet on the Chinese side. India claimed McMahan Line as legitimate borderline but China does not accept it. McMahan Line was decided in Simla Agreement in 1914, between the representatives of British India, Tibet and new but weak Republic of China. Therefore, China does not accept the Simla Agreement and argue that we were not part of that agreement (Kalha, 2014).

Along with border issues, some water issues also persist between the two countries. Four rivers are flowing from Tibet to India. India mainly depends on these four rivers for its agriculture. According to Indians, China is constructing dams on these rivers. India states that with the construction of dams, China is making us desert which is not acceptable. On the other hand, China claimed that Tibet is our integral part so they have authority to construct dams on these rivers so that is why Tibet is important for both India and China. Secondly, India complains that China did not provide the hydrological data of these four rivers in the flood seasons. Therefore, when the flood season comes, huge infrastructure damage occurs in India due to these rivers. If China provides the hydrological data to India, it can prepare the resources to minimize the loss. Those four disputed rivers are Brahmaputra River, Sutlej River, Indus River and Ma Cha

Khabab. These all rivers are important for India but Brahmaputra River is the main source of irrigation for India.

Main territorial dispute between India and China is Tibet issue which is coming from the period of British India. Most important reason for border disputes was McMahan Line which was drawn in the Simla Agreement in 1914 and has not been accepted by People's Republic of China. PRC claims that we were not part of that Simla Agreement so we do not accept these boundary demarcations with India (Kalha, 2014). The relations of both countries were going towards destruction in 1959 when most popular leader of Tibet, Dalai Lama, started making problems for the Chinese control in Tibet. When Tibet uprising started, China sent its forces to control the situation. Dalai Lama thought that Chinese forces will capture him and kill him, so he ran away to India with his almost one million followers (Latson, 2015). Dalai Lama requested the Indians to give him asylum. India accepted his request and set one refugee camp for the protection of the Tibetans.

These Indian actions were not acceptable to China. Chinese authorities said that India violated the Panchsheel agreement and India is interfering in the Chinese internal affairs. These tense relations of both countries took them both to the point of destruction and both countries fought a Sino-Indian war in 1962. China won this war comprehensively and announced unilateral ceasefire (Chellaney, 2012). This was worst time in Indo-China relations. These tense relations remain for thirty years.

India and China were mature countries and they knew the importance of Indo-China good ties so both decided to normalize their relations. Both countries did their best to come out of this trauma and put their best efforts to normalize their relations. These efforts became successful in 1970s when both countries restored their diplomatic relations. In 1976, both countries restored their ambassadors in each other's countries after 14 years. In 1978, both countries started economic relations. Both countries were making their efforts to normalize their relations and many back-channel steps were taken by the both sides to improve their relations. Track-II level diplomacy, group of eminent people, academia and analysts played very important role to improve Indo-China relations. The most important reason for improving Indo-China relations was change in stance of both countries towards each other.

The rapprochement process started when both countries declared each other Most Favored Nation in 1984. The bilateral negotiations between India and China were on the peak during this period. The number of bilateral negotiations between India and China were increasing on the regular basis and both countries made eight rounds of negotiations from 1981 to 1987.

The border issues were main problem between India and China rapprochement so in 1988, Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi visited China and tried to minimize tensions on the Sumdorong Chu valley and sent its troops back on the original positions (Bobb, 1989). He also drew the framework to establish trade between India and China and set framework to start cooperation between both countries in the field of science, technology, culture exchange and education. Most important decision in this meeting by both leaders was to minimize tensions on the Line of Actual Control which is an obstacle to the bilateral relations. After this achievement, the bilateral visits by the heads of both states to each other's countries were increased. Premier of China Li Peng made a historic visit to India in 1991 and met Indian President Ram Swami Venkataraman. In this visit, both leaders decided to enhance bilateral trade.

In 1992, President of India Ram Swami Venkataraman visited China. In this visit, both countries decided to start border trade and to reopen their consulates in each other's countries. After this visit, border trade started in 1992 after 30 years and consulates of both countries reopened (Liping, 2018). In this visit, both countries signed different Memorandums of Understanding in banking sector, custom exchange and border trade.

In 1993, Prime Minister of India Narasmha Rao visited China and signed agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquility along the "Line of Actual Control" (Driver, 1993). In 1993, both countries signed some protocols to open extra border trade routes. In this context, the protocol was signed

to start the trade from Shipki La border pass (Makhaik, 2012). The bilateral trade of both countries was improving day by day.

In 1994, trade relations of both countries were on the peak, their cooperation in the economic field and bilateral trade was increasing. In 1994, both countries signed historic agreements to avoid double taxation, agreements for cooperation on health and medical science (Smith, 2010). The most important development between India and China in 1994 was the start of maritime trade.

In November 1996, President of China Jiang Zemin visited India along with high-level delegation which included Vice Premier, Foreign Minister and Minister of Economic and Trade. In this visit, both nations signed an accord on “Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India China Border Areas” (Xinhua, 2005). This was a historic agreement between India and China to resolve border issues.

With the collaboration in economic field, areas of cooperation between India and China increased. Both countries started cooperation in the field of science, technology, health and medical science, civil aviation and cultural exchange. For the promotion of bilateral trade and trust, both countries started joint ventures in different areas like drugs and pharmaceuticals. In this field, Ranbaxy of India created the joint venture in Guangzhou. Dr. Reddy’s laboratories and Aurobindo Pharma created joint venture in Datong in Shanxi. Another joint venture was made by top information technology industry of India ‘Tata Consultancy Services Limited’ established its joint venture in China in 2006 (Ribeiro, 2007).

Both countries took many steps to defuse tensions in the border areas and to enhance cooperation and bilateral trust. Both India and China made Joint Working Group (JWG) to discuss and resolve the border issues (Tien-Sze, 2002). The main purpose of this JWG was to highlight the available options and take good look of each other’s concerns. This JWG is still working to resolve border issues between India and China.

In June 2003, Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited China and met top Chinese authorities (Chawla, 2003). In meeting with his counterpart, Premier Wen Jiabao, both leaders decided that they should not stop economic cooperation due to any border dispute and they should put their border issues on back. In this visit, a Joint Study Group was also formally signed by leaders of both states. The purpose of this Joint Study Group was to examine hidden opportunities for trade and economics so that they can enhance level of trade and cooperation between both countries. In 2003, both countries signed an agreement to start trade through Silk route (Rahman, 2006).

This was the time when relations of India and China were touching the sky. Both countries were enjoying very friendly relations. In 2004, the concept of “Chindia” was very prominent. This concept was given by Indian Minister of State Jairam Ramesh. This is combination of China and India (Gancheng, 2009).

The authorities of India and China were making regular bilateral visits to each other’s state and due to those meetings, bilateral trade of both countries was increasing day by day. Bilateral trade between India and China was \$43 billion in 1994, reached \$46 billion dollar in 2005. In 2005, China becomes India’s second largest trading partner. Trade volume between India and China was \$51.8 billion dollar in 2008 and reached \$100 billion dollar in 2015.

When the level of cooperation in economic field was so high, India and China decided to increase areas of cooperation. For this purpose, both countries started first bilateral strategic dialogues in 2005. On April 11, 2005, both countries signed India China Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity (Huanxin, 2005).

In July 2006, Nathu La Pass was reopened after 44 years which is located on 14,140 feet height in eastern Himalayas connecting Tibet in China to Sikkim in India (Giri, 2017). In 2006, relations of both countries were improving day by day and in every field like economy, politics, military and science and education. So due to this cooperation and level of trust, 2006 was declared “Friendship Year” by the both countries.

In 2006, both countries decided to start cooperation in energy sector. China’s National Petroleum Corporation and India’s Oil and Natural Gas Corporation decided to bid jointly in some areas of the world

(Reischer, 2012).

In 2006, President of China Jintao visited India. He met his counterpart in India and after meeting, both leaders issued a joint declaration in which ten-pronged strategy was given by them to enhance cooperation in different areas. The focus of both leaders was cooperative and strategic partnership (Jetly, 2006).

In 2008, Chairperson of Indian National Congress Sonia Gandhi was invited by Chinese authorities on the opening ceremony of Beijing Olympics Game. The main purpose of this visit was to enhance cooperation between both countries in games and sports activities.

The relations of India and China remained very friendly in this period. The economic bond between India and China was so strong that there was minimal slowness in trade of both countries when the world was passing through global economic slowdown in 2009 (Siddiqui, 2009).

In May 2010, President of India Pratibha Patil made visit of China and met Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao and other Chinese leaders (Ying, 2011). The President of India Pratibha Patil along with Vice President of China Xi Jinping attended the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and China. This ceremony was organized by Embassy of India in China and CPAFFC (Ratha & Mahapatra, 2014). President of India Pratibha Patil visited Luoyang to inaugurate Buddhist temple made by Indians on Indian style. President Pratibha Patil stated that this temple is a gift from Indian people to Chinese people. The President of India also visited stalls of India and China products in Expo in Shanghai City. She also inaugurated Tagore bust.

In December 2010, Chinese Premier Win Jiao Bao made three days' official visit to India. He met President, Vice President of India and Prime Minister of India. The Premier of China Win Jiao Bao also interacted with students of Tagore International School. The purpose of these visits was to enhance the cultural relations between India and China (Zhu, 2011).

Cooperation between India and China has been increasing with every passing day. The cooperation reached to the strategic level when in 2011, India and China conducted the first Strategic and Economic Dialogue in China (Bery, 2011). The purpose of this meeting was to enhance economic cooperation and to start strategic cooperation. In this meeting, both countries decided to establish 'Hot Line' contact between the armies so that they can communicate easily in any problem and boost trust level. In 2011, the trade relations of both countries were very good. India was a big importer of Chinese goods and China was also importing Indian goods and for that sake, 2011 was designated "Year of China-India Exchange" (Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, 2011).

In 2013, Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh visited China and signed a very important 'Border Defense Cooperation Agreement' (Ministry of External Affairs, 2013). This was very important agreement between both countries. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said after signing this agreement that "when India and China shake hands, the world takes notice" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2013).

President Xi Jinping made historic visit to India in September 2014. In this visit, both countries signed many important agreements. Both leaders decided to establish industrial park of electric transmission and transformation equipment in India. Chinese President also signed agreement of upgrading railway network in India, building new railway stations and railway academy for training of Indian railway staff (Jha, 2014).

The leaders of the both countries also used international forums to enhance trust and cooperation like BRICS and SCO. The level of cooperation between India and China is touching the sky. We have seen a great example of India-China cooperation in BRICS summit in 2017 when India succeeded in its mission against Pakistan to convince BRICS member countries that Pakistan is promoting terrorism in the region. In the joint statement by all leaders stated that "we, in this regard, express concern on the security situation in the region and violence caused by the Taliban, ISIS, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates including the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Haqqani network, Lashkar-i-Taiba, Jaish-i-Mohammad, TTP and Hizb ul Ahrar" (Patranobis, 2017). Pakistan strongly condemned this joint statement by the BRICS countries.

There are water issues between India and China but both countries decided to resolve these issues through talks. Both countries are serious in improving their relations as they are removing every hindrance. Water issue remained a source of friction in their relations so they started negotiations on it. The Brahmaputra River is the major tension between India and China which flows from China to India. According to Indians, China is constructing dams on the Brahmaputra River which is very important source of irrigation for them and these dams will turn them into deserts. In this regard, both countries started negotiations in 2002 when both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding to provide hydrological data by China to India during flood season. In 2005, the provision of hydrological data extended to the Sutlej River (Gupta, 2018). In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao made visit of India and met his counterpart A P J Abdul Kalam. (Athwal, 2008). In this visit, both leaders decided to make Expert Level Mechanism to discuss interaction and to enhance cooperation on provision of hydrological data in the flood season and for emergency management. The high-level visits did not stop and the level of cooperation on water issues was regularly increased.

On 23rd October 2013, Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh visited China and signed a new 'Memorandum of Understanding' on "Strengthening Cooperation on Trans-Border Rivers" (Hussain, 2013). Therefore, the cooperation of both countries on the water issues is also on the peak and there are chances that in future both countries will be able to sign a water treaty.

India and China are cooperating in every field of life. The main area of cooperation is economic sector. The relations of these two countries will have a deep impact on the other countries of the region. The rapprochement between India and China will have many impacts on South Asia region because India and China are major stakeholders in the region. When we talk about the impacts of India-China rapprochement on the region then it will have different impacts on different states. First, we see the impacts of the rapprochement on the Pakistan, we find out that there will not be any bad impacts on Pakistan because of Indo-China rapprochement as Chinese focus is on economic growth and China sees Pakistan as an economic benefit. Apart from that, Pakistan is located in strategically important place for China as Gwadar Port, situated in Baluchistan province, increases importance of Pakistan as energy corridor for China. Gwadar Port is main reason for Chinese assistance to Pakistan. Due to Gwadar Port, Chinese will find easy access to Persian Gulf.

Improvement in Indo-China relations will pave the way for better relations between Pakistan and India. The disputes of Pakistan and India might be resolved because of cooperation and interdependence within the region. Therefore, there will be peace in the region and the level of trust will enhance between the nations.

There is also an international dimension of this Indo-China rapprochement as the United States of America always use India as a balancer to China in South Asia. When there is cooperation between India and China, there are minimum chances of the US involvement in the region. This low American involvement will make South Asia peaceful because history explains that tensions only arise with the foreign involvement in the region.

There are many issues in the region which are the reason for bad relations between India and China. When there will be détente between these big powers, this region will live peacefully. With the Chinese entry in the region, it has become stable. This was the reason that SAARC was practically suspended. Therefore, when there will be cooperation between both nations, there are chances that SAARC will operate with its full potential.

China has laid the foundations of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and India is the member of this bank. If India participates actively in this venture, it has to give a big share in this bank which will help the poor countries to improve their living condition as early as possible.

Cooperation between India and China will maximize opportunities for the population of both countries. The number of jobs will increase. According to a study, almost 100 million people have been employed by the cooperation between India and China (Siddiqui, 2018).

Conclusion

India and China are two major stakeholders in South Asia region and relations between them have a major impact on the rest of the countries in the region. According to the Regional Security Complex Theory, South Asia will become the Security Complex and in this Security Complex, there are two contenders of hegemony. One is China and other is India. According to the Regional Security Complex theory, India and China will divide South Asia in two parts. Therefore, same as Cold War, both India and China will decide their sphere of influence in the South Asian region. This situation will decide the future of the smaller countries of the region. The role of the smaller countries of the region will change and it will be difficult for some countries to adopt that particular role. Therefore, every country of the region must create some flexibility in their role, so that they can adopt it easily which will be changed with the new situation emerging in the future according to the Regional Security Complex Theory. If economic relations of India and China will improve then whole South Asia region will emerge as a trade block. In that trade block, India and China are big economies of the region so both states will have major share. This will increase cooperation between both countries. When both countries will cooperate then it will become easy for other countries to improve their relations. The process of rapprochement will become fast in other countries of the region and whole region will become peaceful. This rapprochement will help other countries of the region to minimize their rivalries and start improving their relations. If any country of the region will not adopt the rapprochement process, that particular country will become alone in the whole region. Therefore, India-China rapprochement provides the best opportunity to the small countries of the region to minimize their border disputes and improve their relations. The other thing, which must be done by the small countries of the region, is to be equidistant in relationship with the both powers. They must implement policy wisely following a middle path that values the interests of both India and China without creating problem for its own sovereignty and independent position. The smaller countries of the region must use neutral approach rather than clearly balance or bandwagon with either China or India. Other South Asian countries must learn from the example of India-China and must resolve their outstanding issues through peaceful ways. They must start interdependence so that they can live peacefully.

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