

An Analysis of Sino-Indian Relations: *Modus Operandi* or *Modus Vivendi*

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- p- ISSN: 2520-0348
- e-ISSN: 2707-4587
- ISSN-L: 2520-0348

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Abstract

China and India celebrated their embryonic relations with a documented modus vivendi i.e. "The Panchsheel Agreement". This concord highlighted five principles of peaceful co-existence between India and China. The Tibet region was the nucleus of this agreement. Nevertheless, after four years of its celebration, eyebrows raised from both sides in 1959 when China started its unification process and India welcomed the Dalai Lama, a separatist leader of the Tibetan region. This caused bitterness between India and China and both the states reversed to their retrospective modus operandi, which later on graduated into a full-fledged war between the two countries in 1962. Despite their limited modus vivendi in the 21st century, both the states tend more towards their intrinsic modus operandi. This analytical study is discussing the Sino-Indian relations through the lenses of Modus vivendi and Modus operandi and its implication for Pakistan.

Key Words: Sino-Indian Geo-strategic competition, Modus Vivendi, Modus Operandi, Synergy,

Introduction

China and India are neighboring states. But despite sitting in the immediate neighborhood and having mutual diplomatic and economic relations they are strategic and economic competitors as well. The modern political structure of India and China emerged during the same era. The former got independence from

Modus Operandi

Modus operandi is the natural propensity, attitude and instinct behavior of a state to pursue its national interest.

British imperialism in 1947 and the latter emerged out of its indigenous imperialism as a modern state in 1949. Both the states have their particular civilizational lineage, cultural legacies and philosophical backgrounds, and cohabited in close proximity for centuries. Historical blueprints picture China and India as the centers and routes of international trade and commerce, in one way or the other. The modern morphology of international politics also pictures these two neighboring states as emerging economies blessed by their bulk of work forces.

China and India despite their limited but growing cooperation are geostrategic/geo-economic competitors in the region. This analytical paper discusses the immediate zones of concerns/conflict/competition and synergy between these two emerging economies and nuclear powers in the South Asian ambience.

Modus Vivendi

Modus vivendi is a mutual concord between the two conflicting states for peaceful co-existence, either indefinitely or until an absolute agreement is developed.

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The decade of the 1950s was both a *spring of hope* and a *winter of despair* for China and India. This period witnessed both the initiation of friendly *modus vivendi* between the two states [for peaceful co-existence] and their volte-face, in terms of following their own *modus operandi* due to the breach of the same agreement respectively. In 1954, a documented understanding evolved between China and India for peaceful co-existence. This mutual concord is known as the “Panchsheel Agreement”. This bilateral agreement specifically highlighted the Tibetan region as the Chinese territory and India recognized the Chinese authority over this region. Nevertheless, when China started the occupation of Tibet, India welcomed the Dalai Lama, a separatist leader of the Tibet region and gave him political asylum (Lal, 2006). Despite the fact that Tibet was the central part of the Panchsheel agreement and India recognized the Chinese authority on it, nonetheless, India violated the agreement and welcomed the Dalai Lama. In addition, China also blamed India for “stoking the insurrection in Tibet” (Kenney, 2015, p. 5).

The Tibetan uprising and the ensuing Dalai Lama issue implanted a seed of perpetuated mistrust and competition between China and India. These sprouting and embryonic factors, later on, translated the Sino-Indian relations into the Sino-Indian 1962 month-long war. This war caused the protracted rivalry between the two neighboring states. A well-defined territory is one of the essentials of the modern Nation-State System. Nevertheless, India claims the Chinese controlled area and China claims the Indian controlled area. These counter-claiming behaviors of both the neighboring countries are strengthening their intrinsic *modus operandi*, instead of their ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ and ‘false promise’ *modus vivendi*. The territorial dispute between these two major powers in the Asian context delimits every collaborative effort at both the regional and international levels. Das (2014) rightly puts, “despite a large number of agreements, summits, and confidence-building measures, the border dispute endures because it has never been tackled at its root” (p3).

The Sino-Indian war of 1962 planted a seed of perpetual rivalry and competition between the two countries. This war gave birth to an ambiance of mistrust and mutual suspicion between the two states, where both the states hectically translated and channeled their behaviors in strategic dynamics against each other. China started its nuclear program in 1964 and at that time, “India had already built the basic facilities and the requisite plutonium to produce the bomb” (Luk, 2016, p7). Although, India started its nuclear program during the Nehruvian era, nevertheless, India strategically connected it with the Chinese factor. In 1998, India formally expressed its nuclear capability and it brazenly connected it with China, to provide justification to its nuclear tests (Zhang & Li, 2013).

The dawn of the twenty-first century brought a polycentric international system, where the multi-conceptual-multi-polar transformation got more strength and vigor. This new transformation, especially in the Asian context is bringing both the hope and despair feelings for regional states, in terms of the Sino-Indian *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* respectively. The post-9/11 scenario provided an excellent ambiance to China and India, to develop a collaborative environment for cooperation and symbiotic relationship. In 2013, China announced its Belt and Road Initiative to connect regional and extra-regional countries through infrastructure-building connectivity projects. This mammoth connectivity initiative can bring both China and India closer to each other through mutual collaborations. India, however, expresses concern about the Chinese BRI (Belt & Road project), particularly regarding CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), being passing via Kashmir. **First**, India instead of clubbing with the Chinese initiative, announced its own projects, in terms of the Mausam Project, Spice Project, Sagarmala Project, and Bharatmala Project (Pandit, 2015; The Economic Times, 2016). **Second**, India and Iran signed the Chabahar Port agreement (Dawn, 2016). **Third**, India signed LEMOA [Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement] with the US for defense and military purposes (i) to gauge the Chinese influence in the Asian context and (ii) to tackle terrorism (Iqbal, 2016). **Fourth**, both India and China engaged in a two months-long standoff at Doklam in 2017 (Joseph, 2018). **Fifth**, on August 5, 2019, India stripped off the special status of Kashmir, poured in thousands of its Army personnel, disconnected it from the rest of the world *en masse*, imprisoned Kashmiri political leadership, including Mehbooba Mufti (the ex-Chief Minister of

Kashmir) and imposed an illegal curfew in the region (Gittleman, Raj, Schultz & Kumar, 2019). These counterproductive measures are causing a headache for not only the people of Kashmir and Pakistan but for the whole region and the world as well. This instant paper analytically discusses the Sino-Indian competitive attitudes and its implications for Pakistan.

Modus Vivendi or Modus Operandi

Panchsheel Agreement

The Panchsheel Agreement was the first recorded modus vivendi between India and China. This accord was a trailblazer for developing entente and a cooperative ambiance between countries. This agreement magnanimously craved *Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence*, which later on merged into the *Ten Principles of International Peace and Cooperation*, highlighted by the Bandung Conference in April 1955 (India.com, 2017). This *Modus vivendi* was an apogee of Sino-Indian cooperative behaviors, which provided a sound foundation for the Sino-Indian future relations. Nevertheless, it added more to the debris of historical agreements, when both the countries started conflicting actions over the Tibetan Region (the epicenter of the agreement). On the one hand, China started annexation of the Tibetan Region, couples with arresting the key figures of the separatists and on the other hand, India offered political asylum to Dalai Lama, a separatist leader. From here, the seed of mutual suspicion between the two countries emerged and reached its apogee in 1962, when both China and India busied into a month-long direct war. This war bitterly dashed the 1954 *modus vivendi* and pushed back both the countries to their natural *modus operandi*.

Diplomatic Relations: Congenial or Conflictual

After the Sino-Indian War of 1962, diplomatic relations between the two states remained frozen until 1979. In 1979, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the then FM of India paid a momentous official visit to China, to re-establish diplomatic relations with China. This attempt was, however, half-heartedly concluded and the “Foreign Minister was told to end mission to China a day early” because of a mass protest in India due to the Sino-Vietnamese War (Trumbull, 1979 online). In June 1981, Chinese diplomat Huang Hua also visited India (Das, 2011). These mutual contacts normalized the Sino-Indian diplomatic relations. In the 1980s and 1990s, diplomatic relations were further strengthened by bilateral visits of high profile officials and trust-building process between the two neighbors reached to the apogee of agreements in 1993 and 1996 respectively, for ensuring peace over LAC (Line of Actual Control) and for establishing Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) between India and China. Relations, however, once again downgraded in 1998, when India clubbed its nuclear test with the Chinese strategic enmity, to provide justification to its nuclear move (Zhang & Li, 2013). The twenty-first century received China and India as emerging economies, fascinating markets, regional powers, and global competitors. In 2003, the then Indian Premier, Atal Bihari Vajpayee paid an official visit to China, this time as the chief executive of the country, to strengthen relations between the two countries. This high profile visit from the Indian side once again lighted a candle of hope for establishing good relations between the two strategic rivals. This spring of hope sprang and graduated into an agreement of “Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question” in April 2005, while Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier was in India (Siddiqi, 2012 online). Since 2013, relations between the two countries, however, took a new twist after China announced its Belt and Road ambitious

Panchsheel Agreement

Panchsheel Agreement between India and China in 1954 highlighted Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.

- Mutual respect
- Mutual Non-aggression
- Mutual Non-Interference
- Equality
- Peaceful Co-existence

project in broad-spectrum and CPEC in particular (World Bank, 2018; Toppa, 2018). Diplomatic relations between these two countries are fluctuating between the congenial and conflictual extremes. The defining factor of their diplomatic relations is a territorial disagreement between the two states.

Border Dispute

The border dispute between China and India is the defining factor of their conflicting behaviors. The 1962 Sino-Indian war brought morphological changes in the physical contours of both the neighbors. China claims the Indian administered the Arunachal Pradesh area while India claims the Chinese administered the Aksai Chin area. Both the neighboring countries have conflicting claims about the Sikkim region, the Ladakh region, and the Tibetan region. China blames India for meddling in Tibet while India charges China for interference in Kashmir. These conflicting claims in territorial context are graduating into a geostrategic competition of a cul-de-sac nature, leaving very little room for all-out cooperation between these two major powers in a regional context. In 2017, China and India engaged into a 73-days standoff at Doklam, an intersection among China, India, and Bhutan (Ahlawat & Hughes, 2018, p. 7). The New York Times termed this stalemate “one of the worst border disputes between the regional rivals in more than 30 years” (Myers, Barry & Fisher, 2017, online). The Times further commented, “The messaging is eerily similar to the countries’ 1962 slide into a war that was also over border disputes”. India boycotts the Chinese Belt and Road Initiatives because of its territorial concerns. India considers it a Chinese project, overlooking territorial concerns, in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity (Myers, Barry & Fisher, 2017). India deems, the CPEC a violation of its sovereignty, the claim that in turn is becoming a source of abrasion and competition between the two countries (Kazmi, 2017). The territorial dispute between the two countries is graduating into the diplomatic, geostrategic and maritime competition.

Diplomatic Competition

Strong diplomatic weight is a sign of regional as well as international influence. Global competitors try to moderate each other’s diplomatic behaviors in both regional and international contexts. China is speedily expanding its economic and diplomatic relations in the world by following the ideology of former Chinese President Mr. Deng Xiao Ping, who actually realized for the first time to shake hands with the neighboring states in order to win their trust. Now, new studies suggest that China has outstripped the United States in global influence. China has 276, while the United States has 273 diplomatic positions (Bley, 2019 online). Economic relations and infrastructure-building initiatives are the two important milestones of Chinese diplomatic traveling. Strategic rivals like India and the United States feel trepidation about the Chinese fast-growing diplomatic influence and thus try to expand their strategic and economic influence accordingly. Congressional Research Service (2018) rightly puts that India strengthens its relations with Japan, Australia, the United States and other strategic cohorts in the Indo-Pacific region, to counterbalance China. It further highlights that the United States uses “geo-economics to further its geopolitical interests” (18). This diplomatic race between China and India is causing a diplomatic headache for the whole area in *en masse* and Pakistan in focus. Pakistan, being the strategic partner of China is in the focus of Indian diplomatic dynamics. In 2016, the 19th proposed summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in Pakistan was canceled due to the Indian boycott of the summit. Seeing this, other Indian diplomatic zones of influence like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan also boycotted the summit (The Indian Express, 2016). On one hand, the Sino-Indian competition in the South Asian region is causing political, diplomatic and strategic bitterness and on the other hand, it is translating into an amphibious headlock. India and China are expanding their areas of influence to both lands and water.

Maritime Competition

Alfred Thayer Mahan assumes, “the use and control of the sea is and has been a great factor in the history of the world” (p. 2). Seapower and controlling the sea lanes of communication (SLOC) are tremendous

for harnessing and influencing regional and international politics. Nonconventional security, in terms of energy and safe trade routes, are the two essential needs of Major Powers. In the polycentric and anarchic international system, major powers compete with others for securing both their trade and energy requirements. China and India, being strategic rivals, having territorial disputes couples with their emerging economic and major power nomenclatures are amphibiously competing with each other. The Strait of Malacca is a watercourse linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Britannica, 2014a). It is an important strategic chokepoint and an easy route, bridging the Indian and Pacific Oceans. China fulfills its approximately 85 percent energy requirements through this Strait (Nadeem, 2018 online). In 2003, Chinese President Hu Jintao expressed his concerns, in terms of “certain major powers were bent on controlling the strait”, tacitly signaling towards India, Japan, and the United States, which “permanently stationing military forces in the strait” (Storey, 2006 online). This Chinese concern about the presence of its strategic rivals in the Strait of Malacca is popularly known as the Malacca Dilemma. To secure its trade and energy requirements, China moves towards the Indian Ocean Region, through the Gwadar port of Pakistan. This Chinese move, in turn, stimulates the geostrategic dynamics of India. **First**, India toughens its relations with Afghanistan and Iran and uses both these western neighboring countries of Pakistan as intriguing hubs for sabotaging the peace of Pakistan and disturbing its relations with Iran and Afghanistan. **Second**, it unilaterally strips off the special status of Kashmir and imposes indefinite curfew in the region. This Indian move bitterly damages the Indo-Pak already weakened relations. In February 2019, both India and Pakistan engaged in a brief war, which caused a wave of fear and anxiety in the region because both are nuclear powers and a slight miscalculation on any side can give birth to a major conflagration, having global consequences. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan on September 27, 2019, at his 74th United Nations General Assembly Session, highlighted this concern by mentioning, “When a nuclear-armed country fights to the end, it will have consequences far beyond the borders. It will have consequences for the world. It is not a threat; it is a fear and worry” (Khan, 2019).

Chasing the Historical Blueprints: Connectivity or Competition

India and China are the oldest civilizations, lived together in the immediate neighborhood for centuries. In the retrospect, both were economic hubs for the rest of the world. Historically, traders visited from across the world to China and India for trade purposes. Modern borders have wiped off the old relics of trade and commerce. In the 21st century, both India and China are once again becoming economic centers in the global context. Both are emerging economies and both have global ambitions. Scholars argue that the 19th century was the century of *Pax Britannica* (Britain Peace), the 20th century was the century of *Pax Americana* (American Peace) and the 21st century is showing the signs of the Asian century. India and China have a civilizational lineage and both are the remnants of the oldest civilizations, established alongside the Yellow and Indus rivers respectively. Both China and India were connected with the world through trade and commerce. China was famous for silk and India for spices, which in turn connected both the countries with the world through silk and spice trades respectively (Mark, 2012; Britannica, 2014b). Historically, Greeks and Romans named China as ‘Seres’, meaning the land of silk (Mark, 2012). Later on, German geographer Friedrich von Richthofen coined the term Silk Road, signaling not towards a single road but to a network of roads, spreading like arteries and veins, which is sometimes considered as the “world’s central nervous system” (Thubron, 2012; Frankopan, 2018, p. 3). Due to domestic revolts and the rises and falls of various dynasties in China, stability vanished and thus the Silk Road officially disappeared, leaving behind “counterfeit borders and unmapped people” (Thubron, 2012, p.3). In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping during his official visit to Astana [Kazakhstan] announced the Chinese ambitious initiative, in terms of connecting the nations and people, previously connected with the ancient Silk Road (Frankopan, 2018). From here the idea of the Chinese Belt & Road Initiative, in terms of the Silk Road Economic Belt [through land] and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road [through water] resurfaced, both in the official and academic circles in regional and international ambiance. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is one of the proposed

six corridors of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The other five corridors are (i) the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC) (ii) NELB (New Eurasian Land Bridge) (iii) CCWAEC (China-Central & West Asia Economic Corridor) (iv) CICPEC (China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor) and (v) BCIMEC (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor). Out of these six corridors, India shows concerns, feels trepidations and holds conflicting views regarding CPEC, both in terms of territorial nature and strategic designs.

To counterbalance the Chinese ambition of chasing the historical blueprints, India also announced its own projects, to follow the blueprints of the spice trade. India announced the Mausam Project, Spice Project, Sagarmala Project, and Bharatmala Project. The Mausam Project is based on historical sea routes adopted by merchants and traders in the Indian Ocean in alignment with the direction of seasonal Mausam [weather], in which seasonal winds facilitated the traders to sail towards India for trade purposes. The Spice Project is intended to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa [these continents are also the part of the Chinese B&R Initiative]. The Sagarmala Project is planned for the consolidation of ports and the Bharatmala Project is intended for road connectivity.

Both China and India are trying to chase the historical blueprints of trade and commerce for connectivity purposes. Nevertheless, neither is ready to merge its proposed planning of rebuilding the old trade routes and connectivity projects in each other's proposed programs. Instead of cooperation, both China and India are competing with each other. China took the initiative by announcing its belt and road initiative; hence, India should club its proposed projects with the Chinese connectivity project. Contrary to this, India started its own strategic moves, in terms of announcing its own projects and signed the Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the United States aiming to use each other's basis for military purposes and to counterbalance the Sino-Pak geostrategic rapprochement. India also signed the Chabahar Port agreement with Iran (i) to expand it to Afghanistan and further to the Central Asian States, (ii) to bypass Pakistan and (iii) to counter the Chinese ambitious initiative, especially the CPEC.

Sources of Cooperation

Cooperation is one of the essential features of the 21st century. It is a unique feature of the twenty-first century that states cooperate and compete with each other simultaneously. These collaborators and competitors are sometimes referred to as frenemies, meaning friends and enemies. Both China and India have areas of concern/conflict/competition and cooperation simultaneously. Both are the members of G20, the BRICS, and SCO. According to the Times of India (2018), mutual trade between China and India touches \$84.44 billion (online). Despite the fact that both the countries have many things in common, in terms of tackling the menace of terrorism, energy security, growing trade, global ambitions, peaceful co-existence, political stability, diplomatic relations, and scientific/technological development. Nonetheless, both the countries tend more towards competition, instead of all-out cooperation.

Sino-Pak versus Indo-US Rapprochement

Gilpin (1987) assumes, "once the nation-state exists, it behaves in accordance with the logic of the competitive state system" (p. 85). State adopts balancing behavior, either to avert the rising hegemon or to thwart a strategic rival from gaining an important locus where it could challenge its security and survival (Iqbal & Amin, 2016). Studies suggest that the strategic designs of the United States speed up the Chinese strategic thinking, which in turn stirs up the Indian strategic advancement and which in turn pushes forward the strategic dynamics of Pakistan. Under the 'like attracts like' formula, states having similar strategic objectives come closer against them otherwise. To "ensure security" and "maintain strategic stability" in the Asian context, China, India, Pakistan & the United States develop a "strategic chain", in terms of the Sino-Pak vs Indo-US strategic rapprochement (Einhorn & Sidhu, 2017, p. 42). China and India are strategic adversaries in the region. The United States, being the strategic rival of China moves closer to India, to contain China. India welcomes the United States to counter China and offset the China-Pakistan strategic

comradeship. Pakistan the strategic foe of India develops good relations with China, to compensate and counterpunch India.

For both the United States and India, a strong China can challenge the Indo-US strategic designs in the region. To contain the Chinese geostrategic and geo-economic advancements in the region, both the countries speed up their strategic relations. **First**, the United States renames the Asia-Pacific as the Indo-Pacific, to strengthen the Indian narrative and to counter the Chinese rise (Jaipragas, 2017). **Second**, the United States, Australia, Japan, and India developed a quad dialogue in Manila, to counter the Chinese strategic expansion, which China strongly cautioned (Jiangtao & Zhou, 2017). **Third**, India and the United States signed the Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), to counter the Chinese influence and imbalance the Indo-Pak balance in the region (Iqbal, 2016). **Fourth**, India stripped off the special status of Kashmir and imposed an indefinite curfew in the region, to cause a headache for Pakistan and to disturb China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China, however, requested a special meeting of the United States Security Council in December 2017, to discuss the Kashmir current situation (Aljazeera, 2019). **Fifth**, US assistant secretary of state for South Asia, Alice Wells “warned Pakistan of the long-term risks to its economy if it embraces China’s massive infrastructure project” (Awan, 2019 online), to disturb the Sino-Pak relations. The Sino-Pak versus Indo-US strategic race in a regional context is creating a headache for Pakistan. On one hand, the Indo-US presence in Afghanistan and Iran [Indian presence] is disturbing the Pak-Afghan and Pak-Iran relations. On the other hand, India increases the strength of its forces in Kashmir and thus disturbs the peace of South Asia. Kashmir is a sticking point between India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

India and China are neighboring countries and strategic adversaries. Both countries have shared borders, civilizational backgrounds, large populations, and territorial disputes. Both are emerging economies and both have global ambitions. The territorial dispute between India and China is a sticking point, which in turn provides little room to pooling cooperation between India and China. Despite the fact that both these neighboring countries are glued by the G20, the BRICS, and SCO, but these collaborative ambiances, due to their longstanding territorial disputes cannot facilitate them to move towards pooling behaviors and all-out cooperation. China is a fast-growing economy and its economic ascendancy couples with the Sino-Pak growing strategic partnership causing trepidation for both India and the United States. To balance the strategic clubbing of China and Pakistan, India and the United States speedily strengthen their strategic dynamics. These counterproductive dynamics are giving birth to a strategic race among the major powers, especially in the amphibious ambience of the South Asian region. To abridge and translate the Sino-Indian relations into a compendium understanding, they revolve around the Four Cs i.e. Conflict, Concerns, Competition & Cooperation. Both the countries have immediate zones of conflict [territorial disputes], which in turn gives birth to concerns and competition between India and China. Limited cooperation between the two countries is also intact. Nevertheless, the Sino-Indian zones of conflict, concerns and competition leave little room to all-out cooperation between them.

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