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The Protracted Contest

THE SINO-INDIAN CONFLICT

Two of the most brilliant civilizations yet produced by humanity, those of China and India, lie side by side on the continent of Eurasia. The peoples that have produced these civilizations are both rightly proud of their histories and achievements, and determined that their nations will play a major role in the modern world. These two ancient nations emerged from long periods of foreign domination and established new states at about the same time—independent India in 1947, which became the Republic of India (ROI) in 1950, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The power and ambition of these states dwarfed the capabilities of the other states lying along their common flanks. For the next five decades the two powerful states struggled to reach a mutually acceptable accommodation. This was a difficult process, producing one limited but intense war, a half-dozen militarized confrontations, dozens of instances of sharp political-diplomatic struggle, chronic conflict over national policy, and layer upon layer of mutual suspicion. This book is about that conflict. It analyzes the protracted conflict between the foreign policies of India and China in the vast arc of land and water lying between and alongside those two great nations.

By *conflict* is meant the clash of foreign policies pursued by the national governments of the two states. Deliberate efforts by the central authorities of China and India to apply their states’ capabilities to effect developments in the South Asian region frequently had mutually exclusive objectives. This conflict has only occasionally entailed the application of military force, and on only one occasion, in 1962, did the conflict culminate in war. In the last

two decades it has culminated in a direct, militarized confrontation only once, in 1986–87. There have also been several occasions on which the domestic use of military force (to suppress internal challenges to state authority) was linked to the conflicting policy objectives of the Chinese and Indian states. Far more common and significant than military conflict has been political conflict—that is, disagreements over diplomatic policies and differing objectives pursued through the application of other, nonmilitary, forms of national power. This study is largely a chronicle of such conflicting policies.

Yet, while military instruments have not been the main form in which Sino-Indian conflict has been manifest, security does seem to have been the primary basis of that conflict. The thinking of both sides seems to have been subtly but profoundly influenced by the possibility that the other side might use military force or might be tempted to use military force. While war has not been a frequent occurrence, that possibility, and the even graver possibility of national defeat in war, has very frequently underlaid the ROI's and PRC's perceptions of each other. Although typically unspoken, deterring the use of military force against oneself and creating conditions for defeating that hostile use of military force in the event that deterrence fails have been central elements of the Chinese-Indian conflict. This has meant that creating conditions advantageous for the *possible* application of military power has been important. Often, indeed typically, this has been done through nonmilitary means: building roads, establishing legal regimes permitting or denying certain activities, and creating political alignments that make up the political context in which military force is used or not used.

This study isolates and analyzes the conflictual element of ROI-PRC relations during the second half of the twentieth century. By doing so, it presents an interpretation of the broad pattern of interaction between these two great states, focusing on the deep and enduring geopolitical rivalry between them. My focus isolates one aspect of a far more complex reality. A balanced, comprehensive account of the overall evolution of ROI-PRC relations and of the shifting weight of conflictual and cooperative elements in that relationship is beyond the scope of this study.

Isolating PRC-ROI conflict permits an interpretative and analytical approach to that relationship. The danger of such an approach, however, is simplification. The major focus of both Indian and Chinese leaders throughout the period under consideration was not foreign affairs at all but their states' internal development. Alleviating widespread and deep poverty, promoting economic development and industrialization, and strengthening internal national unification were the primary concerns of the leaders of both

countries. When they turned to foreign affairs, they thought first, longest, and hardest not about the other but, rather, about the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the alliance systems that the two superpowers led in global conflict against each other. It was the Soviet-American conflict, the so-called East-West conflict, which dominated Chinese and Indian thinking about foreign affairs, and it was this conflict that exercised the greatest influence on the international environment in which India and China operated.

An extremely valuable approach would be to explore the ways in which the Soviet-American conflict interacted with China-India relations. It would also be extremely useful to compare the ways in which the internal development processes of India and China interacted with their mutual rivalry and with the East-West conflict. These would be valuable approaches, but they are not what this book undertakes. Rather, because it focuses on Sino-Indian geopolitical conflict in the arc of land and waters lying between and alongside China and India, this study considers the Soviet-American conflict and internal development goals of the two countries only to the extent that they impinge on their geopolitical rivalry.

THE DOMINANCE OF GEOPOLITICAL CONFLICT IN ROI-PRC RELATIONS

Thus far geopolitical conflict has dominated relations between India and China. Sharp conflict between national policies erupted over Tibet in 1949 as the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) was preparing to occupy that region. Conflicting policies over Tibet contributed substantially to war in 1962 and have plagued Sino-Indian relations ever since. Disagreements over Tibet are linked to others dealing with the entire Himalayan region. From 1949 through 1999 India and China have viewed the status of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim very differently. India has insisted on establishing a special relation with those regions, one that guarantees India's security interests regarding China. Beijing, on the other hand, has insisted on its right to conduct the full range of regular state-to-state relations with those entities and has viewed Indian assertions to the contrary as acts of hegemonism. In the mid-1950s China reached a strategic understanding with Pakistan founded on their convergent interests vis-à-vis India. Successive Chinese and Pakistani regimes have maintained and deepened this strategic entente, much to India's dismay. The Sino-Pakistan entente evolved from very nearly a joint Pakistan-Chinese war against India in 1965 to covert Chinese assistance to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program after India's first nuclear test in 1974.

Across the Indian Ocean and South Asian region, India watches warily as

China expands its military and political roles, fearing that it is sliding into a state of “strategic encirclement” by China. Fundamental uncertainty is introduced into the Sino-Indian relationship by an unresolved territorial dispute, with China claiming virtually an entire Indian state and India claiming a strategically important western route into Tibet. That territorial dispute triggered a month-long intense war in 1962 in which powerful Chinese forces smashed ill-prepared Indian forces, advancing to the northern fringes of the Assam plain before halting and pulling back. Since 1962 the territorial dispute has slid several times into tense confrontation. The resolution of the territorial dispute also touches on the security of India’s northeastern states and that of China’s Tibet.

Relations between any two states cannot be reduced entirely to conflict. One can always find elements of policy cooperation as well. Even among states waging total war against each other, one can find areas of positive cooperation—regarding the humane treatment of prisoners of war, for example, or the mutual nonuse of poison gas. Certainly, in the relationship between India and China the two nations have sometimes cooperated, at times significantly. Yet, in reflecting on ROI-PRC relations over the last five decades, it seems fair to say that conflict has been the dominant characteristic of that relationship and thus requires analysis, explanation, and elucidation.

The centrality of conflict does not lessen the importance of diplomacy. Indeed, it places a premium on skillful diplomacy. In conflictual relations among states, diplomacy may regulate that rivalry and keep it from intensifying, perhaps leading to war. Solutions to some problems may even be found. Areas of cooperation may be deliberately sought out and emphasized, altering somewhat the overall balance of conflict and cooperation in the relationship. Confidence-building measures may be devised and implemented. But at bottom lies a deep and wide conflict of interests and perceptions. Periods of cooperation in Indian-Chinese relations have been brief and problematic. Repeated efforts at rapprochement have collapsed amid eruptions of renewed geopolitical rivalry, have had very limited success, or, at best, have reduced somewhat the level of tension and danger of miscalculation associated with Indian-Chinese conflict. Over the decades Chinese and Indian leaders and the analysts who advise them have also learned the rules of their rivalry. This greater understanding has facilitated diplomatic efforts to moderate tension. But the same processes that have educated leaders have also created lingering perceptions about the negative policies and intentions of the other side.

ROI-PRC rapprochement advanced steadily in the decade after 1988. In December Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi made a pathbreaking visit to China, signaling an important reorientation of India’s China policy.¹ Premier Li Peng

made visits to Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh a year later, conveying Beijing's desire for more cordial Sino-Indian ties. Then, in December 1991, Li Peng reciprocated Gandhi's 1988 visit by going to New Delhi. High-level Sino-Indian exchanges became routine during the 1990s. During Prime Minister Narashima Rao's visit to China in September 1993, agreements were signed on maintaining peace and tranquillity along the line of actual control on the border. In November 1996, while PRC President Jiang Zemin was in India, the two countries agreed to a set of confidence-building measures to be implemented along the border. Many other agreements were signed to increase bilateral trade, foster cultural and technology exchanges and military-to-military links, and promote other cooperative ventures. Yet deep tensions remained. Shortly after Jiang Zemin's 1996 visit, one of China's most authoritative analysts of China-South Asia relations found that, in spite of the progress in bilateral relations over the previous decade, "mutual understanding and trust between the two countries is still far from adequate, especially because in India a considerable group of people (*xiangdang yibufen ren*) have been influenced by the 'China threat theory' disseminated with ulterior motives by the West, and still have suspicions about China. Added to which is the fact that the negative influence of the 1962 war has not been entirely eliminated. This creates a certain market for rumors [about China] disseminated with ulterior purposes."²

The annual defense reports of the Government of India during the period of post-1988 ROI-PRC rapprochement show a deep undertone of concern about China's military power and links with India's neighbors. The 1993-94 report, for instance, noted that "China has embarked on an ambitious programme of modernization of its armed forces. China was supplying weapons to Sri Lanka and developing close ties with Myanmar especially economic-commercial and in the field of military cooperation." The 1994-95 report noted that "Beijing is engaged in building strategic roads from . . . border towns to rail-heads and seaports of Myanmar. . . . China has also been rapidly modernizing its armed forces and is equipping them with sophisticated aircraft, air defense weapons, and enhancing its blue water capabilities." China's transfer of M-11 missiles and allied technology to Pakistan was also a "cause of concern," according to the report. The report for 1995-96 noted China's continuing "extensive defense collaboration with Pakistan," including assistance to Pakistan's nuclear and missile program, and concluded that this arrangement "has a direct bearing on India's security environment." The 1996-97 report repeated earlier statements of concern about Sino-Pakistan links and Chinese military modernization and added that "upgradation of China's logistic capabilities all along the India-China border [and] for strengthened air

operations has to be noted. China's posture in the South China Sea has implications for the region." China's "strengthening defense relations with Myanmar need to be carefully watched in view of the geostrategic location of Myanmar," the report said. Finally, the 1997–98 report, the last one issued before India's May 1998 nuclear tests and before the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government took power on March 3, 1998, said:

India is conscious of the fact that China is a nuclear weapon state and continues to maintain one of the largest standing armies in the world. Its military modernization programme is rapidly transforming the technological quality and force projection capabilities of its armed forces in all aspects. China's assistance to Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme and the sale of missiles and missile technology to Pakistan also directly affect India's security. India is aware of military collaboration between China and Myanmar, including the development of strategic lines of communication. India will continue to engage China through bilateral discussions in a spirit of good neighborly relations to address all outstanding differences with a view to enhancing mutual understanding and building a relationship of constructive cooperation based on a recognition of India's legitimate security concerns.³

India's May 1998 nuclear tests and declaration of India's nuclear weapons status surprised many American observers who had not been tracking Indian concern over China's growing power. Many analysts attributed India's nuclear decision to the BJP's idiosyncratic views and domestic political imperatives. While these factors played a role, as this book will demonstrate, India's nuclear decision had much deeper geostrategic roots. It was rooted in the decades-long, multilayered, and frequently sharp conflict with China over the two states' relations with the lands and peoples lying around and between them. Possession of nuclear weapons is linked in amorphous but important ways to international balances of power. Just as the Soviet-American nuclear balance during the Cold War had to do with calculations by both sides about situations arising in a half-dozen regions of the globe, so the nuclear balance between India and China could enter into the relative confidence and assertiveness of those two countries in dealing with issues related to the overall balance of power in South Asia. Stated bluntly, China's unilateral possession of nuclear weapons would make India less confident in countering Chinese efforts to move the South Asian balance along lines favorable to China and unfavorable to India. Indian possession of a credible nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis China could give India greater confidence, and thus greater assertiveness, in dealing with such Chinese efforts.

This stress on the conflictual aspect of Sino-Indian relations contrasts with the rhetoric of Chinese-Indian friendship which often decorates bilateral interactions between the two countries. Such rhetoric is, to a considerable extent (except for during the mid-1950s), an exercise in wish fulfillment. Political leaders may hope to alter negative stereotypes by using the rhetoric of friendship, helping to create a positive atmosphere conducive to better relations. By making statements about Sino-Indian friendship, well-intentioned people—including, naturally enough, people with responsibility for charting the course of Sino-Indian relations—hope it will become so. By creating a positive climate, they hope that the cooperative aspect of PRC-ROI relations will become greater and conflict lessened. The goal is to change the way things are, to find a way beyond the conflict that has thus far dominated the relationship, and thus become “friends.”

At other times declarations of Sino-Indian friendship are used to cover up deeper tensions. Interactions surrounding India’s nuclear tests in May 1998 provide an excellent and important example of the instrumental nature of the rhetoric of Sino-Indian friendship. In a letter of May 12, 1998, to United States President William Clinton, Indian President Atal Bihari Vajpayee justified India’s nuclear tests and weaponization by referring elliptically but clearly enough to China’s multiple challenges to India (this letter will be discussed in detail in chap. 11). Beijing reacted very strongly and negatively to Vajpayee’s letter, with its open talk of the Chinese threat to India. Ever since 1989 Beijing had suspected Washington of trying to cobble together a new system of anti-China containment and had spent considerable energy refuting notions of a “China threat” that might underpin such a system. In this context Vajpayee’s letter not only gave powerful credence to the “China threat theory” but suggested that India might be moving toward strategic alignment with Washington to deal with that threat. Beijing took a series of moves expressing Chinese displeasure with India’s talk of a China threat. Beijing also insisted that, since Indian actions had precipitated the deterioration of Sino-Indian relations, it was up to New Delhi to take the lead in mending relations. China’s ambassador to India, Zhou Gang, told the *Times of India* in September, for example, that, since the recent “abnormal developments” in Sino-Indian relations were the responsibility of India, New Delhi should make a “bold initiative” to unfreeze those ties.⁴ It soon became apparent that what Beijing wanted was for India to retract the assertions about the China threat made in Vajpayee’s letter.

Domestic and international pressure quickly mounted on Vajpayee’s Bharatiya Janata Party government. Indian critics faulted Vajpayee for his ineptitude in having spoken so plainly and in writing, rather than using purely

oral or oblique statements, which are more normal diplomatic fare. Others suggested that Vajpayee had been duped by the Americans, who for sinister purposes had leaked a letter that the Indian side had expected to remain confidential. As for Washington, rather than being sympathetic to Vajpayee's appeal, it levied economic sanctions against India. As pressure mounted, the BJP government began to assuage Chinese anger. In late October 1998 Vajpayee's principal secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, issued a statement declaring, *inter alia*, that India did not view China as "a potential enemy." As Indian-Pakistan tension mounted over Kargil on the Kashmir border in the spring of 1999, Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh further satisfied Beijing, reiterating that India did not see China as a security threat. Beijing was finally placated, and movement toward Sino-Indian friendship was resumed. A member of the Chinese Foreign Ministry made the point that "the prerequisite of the development of Sino-Indian relations is that the two sides do not consider themselves threatened by each other."⁵

In a sense this entire book is an elucidation of the Indian worldview embodied in Vajpayee's letter to Clinton. It is unlikely that leaders of the BJP government altered their views about China as a result of pressure from Beijing. It is more likely that China's harsh reaction confirmed the wisdom of India's securing a nuclear guarantee in the face of possible future Chinese pressure—though not necessarily the wisdom of talking frankly with American leaders about such matters. For reasons of diplomatic expediency BJP leaders reverted to more benign-sounding formulations. The underlying Indian perceptions, embodied in Vajpayee's letter, remained unaltered but once again safely camouflaged within the rhetoric of friendship.

Having stated these skeptical propositions, I must immediately qualify them and clarify that they apply only to relations between the Chinese and Indian states—not to bonds between individual Chinese and Indians. Between individuals there may be, and often is, genuine and warm friendship. An objective analyst must also recognize that few enmities among states are permanent. Almost always, conflictual relations among states eventually give way to more cooperative relations. After examining in depth the nature of Sino-Indian conflict, in the final section of this book I will speculate about the conditions under which a qualitatively different Sino-Indian relation might arise.

The phenomenal growth of China's national power in the period after 1978, plus Indian apprehensions about that growth, suggests that genuine Sino-Indian rapprochement may come later rather than sooner. If the conflict between Indian and Chinese aspirations and interests is as deeply rooted as it seems, it may well increase further before eventually undergo-

ing a qualitative transformation into a cooperative relationship. The growth of Chinese capabilities may lead to the further expansion of ties between China and India's neighbors. India may feel increasingly vulnerable and seek ways of countering China's advances. China no doubt would take a negative view of these Indian counter-measures. Unless India is willing to become a junior partner of China in the emerging world order, Asia and the world may well see further Sino-Indian rivalry in the first part of the twenty-first century.

CONFLICTING SPHERES OF PERCEIVED NATIONAL GREATNESS

There are two taproots of PRC-ROI conflict. One is conflicting nationalist narratives that lead patriots of the two sides to look to the same arenas in attempting to realize their nation's modern greatness. The second, and more substantial, root is a conflict of fundamental national security concepts resembling a classic security dilemma.

Regarding the first, modern nationalism typically involves narratives—stories—about a country's past which are widely shared by the people constituting the national community. These stories are conveyed in various ways to the individuals constituting a nation. If the nationalism is successful, these stories are accepted by the individuals, become part of their belief system, and are associated with the individual's own concept of self-identity. These shared narratives thereby become an important part of the "imaginary community" that makes up the nation. Such narratives provide emotional fuel that powers the quest for international position and may be manipulated by states to rally popular support. Key symbols are embedded in narratives and used to evoke positive and negative sentiments. A successful nationalist doctrine achieves affective identification of living individuals with the postulated symbols of "the nation." This encourages individuals to obey and sacrifice on behalf of the state's nationalist efforts. The nationalist narratives of both India and China conceive of these countries as great nations that have historically exercised substantial influence over large areas beyond their boundaries. There is also substantial overlap between the perceived traditional spheres of influence of these two nations.

At the core of modern India's nationalist narrative is the notion that India is a great nation whose radiant influence molded a wide swath of the world beyond its boundaries. The creators of modern Indian nationalism looked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for a story of Indian national greatness comparable to those told by European nationalists. Indian thinkers found in their national history only brief periods of great empires

and far longer periods of fragmentation and internecine war. This did not discourage them, however, for they turned to the religious, linguistic, and other cultural influences that emanated from the subcontinent, flowing over and deeply influencing other lands. The historic stage on which India had played out this great, creative role extended from the Himalayan Mountains in the north to the seas in the south, into Southeast Asia on the east, to Persia in the West, and into Central Asia in the northwest.⁶

The geographic scope of India's traditional sphere of influence was neatly presented by a series of exhibitions set up at the First Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in March–April 1947. This conference was one of India's first major ventures into international politics. Although carefully nonofficial, it was a high-profile affair, attended by over two hundred representatives from twenty-eight countries, and organized and hosted by the proud leaders of soon-to-be-independent India. This pride was expressed in a series of exhibitions organized by several museums in association with the conference, illustrating India's influence on neighboring areas. The world-view presented through these exhibitions is especially valuable because it can be taken as an unalloyed expression of nationalist pride. Soon after they assumed responsibility for the nation's foreign relations, India's post-independence leaders discovered that declarations about India's historic influence on neighboring countries roused suspicions about its current motives. Indian representatives quickly learned to be more circumspect in their public expression of nationalist pride. Yet, while India's leaders became more restrained in publicly extolling India's greatness, the underlying vision remained.

The exhibition at the 1947 Asian Relations Conference identified Burma, Siam (Thailand), Malaya, Cambodia, Champa, Sumatra, Java, and Bali as regions of Southeast Asia which had received "strong influences from India in the domain of religion, language, art and architecture . . . The orbit of India's cultural empire once embraced these distant lands for several centuries."⁷ According to the narrative describing the display, "Burma owes to India her script, religion and its sacred literature." Champa, a kingdom encompassing what later became southern Vietnam and eastern Cambodia, "was for a thousand years (ca. 3d to 12th c.) a land of mixed Indo-Cham culture." During much of that period "Champa was virtually a province of India in respect to its art, its Sanskrit language and Brahmanical religion." On Java and Sumatra, Hindu and Buddhist rulers looked to India for religious instruction and political support. "Indonesian contacts with India seem to have continued right up to the 15th century," that is, until they were disrupted by the arrival of the European imperialists. Ceylon was specified as

another area historically within the ambit of Indian influence. "Ceylon owes to India its religion, sacred language, and some of the inspiration of its art and architecture." The son and daughter of India's great emperor Asoka were themselves missionaries "responsible for converting Ceylon to Buddhism." To India's north Nepal was shaped by interaction with India. "The Nepalese language and script, religion and art, have all been deeply influenced from India." Beyond Nepal, Tibet came within India's sphere of influence. Tibet in the seventh century "borrowed from India Buddhism and also the Indian script preserved with little change since that time." A series of Indian teachers also deeply influenced the development of Tibetan Buddhism, "serving as lights to people both in India and Tibet." Finally, in Central Asia "four civilizations, Greco-Bactrian, Iranian, Indian, and Chinese, met and mingled with one another round the central theme of Buddhism." "India's share in this [Central Asian] cultural inter-mixture predominated over the rest mainly through the influence of Buddhism and both the artistic and literary remains furnish important material for reconstructing substantial chapters in the history of Greater India."

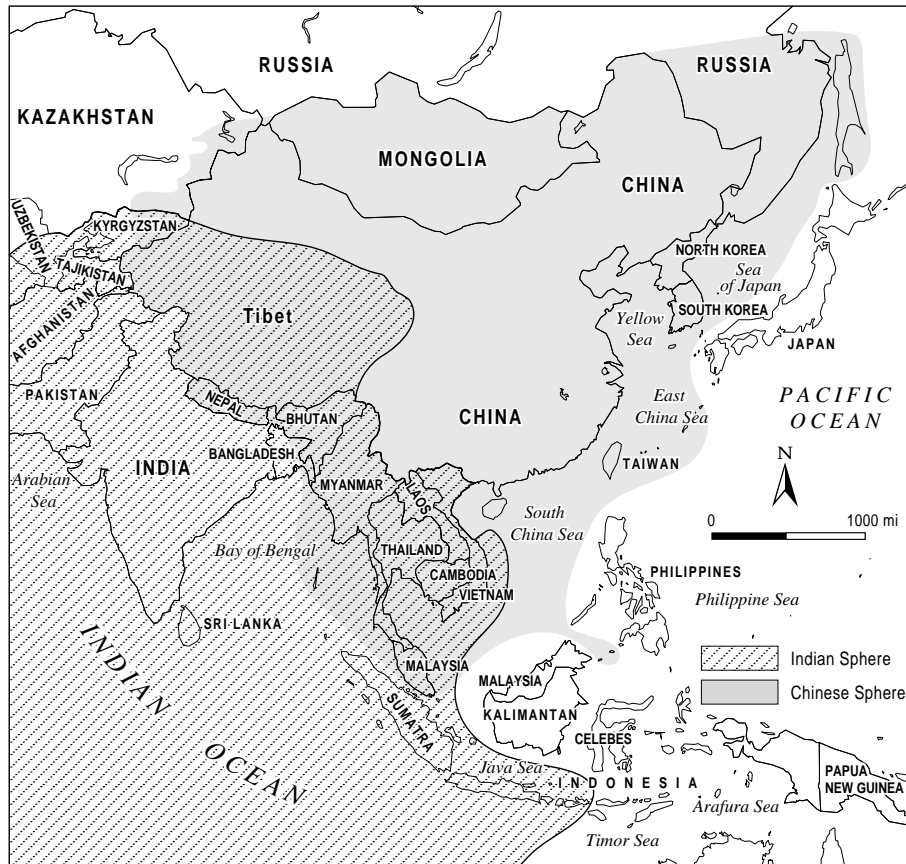
China's nationalist narrative also postulates that throughout most of its history China was a great nation and, unlike India, a powerful state whose influence extended over wide regions of Asia. The Chinese nationalist view of China's historical sphere of influence can be deduced from its inventory of tributary states. The tributary system created a highly ritualized relationship between the Chinese emperor and a foreign ruler through which the foreign ruler symbolically demonstrated his complete submission and obedience to the emperor of China—at least that was the Chinese view of things. A tributary relationship existed between the Chinese emperor, the Son of Heaven, and a foreign king or potentate, when the latter acknowledged the emperor as a superior and pledged to obey and learn from him. In return, the emperor bestowed benevolent protection and instruction on his loyal vassal. Representatives of the foreign ruler, and occasionally that ruler himself, traveled to China, bringing tribute for the Chinese emperor. In doing this, and by performing certain carefully prescribed rituals along the way, the tribute bearer demonstrated his ruler's humble subordination to China's emperor. After completing the prescribed rites, including presenting the vassal's tribute to the emperor, the tribute bearer would receive from the emperor gifts usually worth substantially more than the tribute given to the emperor. Thus was the benevolence of the emperor demonstrated and a very practical incentive established for the tributary state's submission to China. A tributary relation with China's emperor was not necessarily onerous and was often quite profitable for foreign rulers. A tributary relation with China also opened chan-

nels for acquiring useful Chinese knowledge and techniques—calendars, manufacturing crafts, and so on. It also provided an imperial writ of office, which helped ward off domestic and foreign rivals. Nor did a tributary relationship necessarily mean a Chinese military presence or civil administration. Yet in theory it meant that the ruler was subordinate to the emperor, and in fact it meant that the country was open to a degree of influence by China's powerful culture.

In the modern Chinese nationalist view of the situation, China's traditional tributary system encompassed wide portions of Inner Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. Maps are often important nationalist symbols that can be used to establish emotionally laden pictures in the minds of modern men. A map produced in Chinese textbooks in 1954 neatly illustrated the geographic scope of China's lost tributary system.⁸ This particular map—showing China's territorial losses at the hands of Western and Japanese imperialists during the century between the Opium War in 1839 and China's "Liberation" in 1949 and selected for classroom use by PRC educational authorities—was intended to create a sense of bitterness, wounded pride, and thereby popular support for the PRC's efforts to wipe out the "humiliation" of the past. According to the map, China's traditional sphere of influence included both Inner and Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, parts of Central Asia, the entire Himalayan-Karakoram region including Hunza and Gilgit in northern Kashmir, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim in the central Himalayan region, the small kingdoms of what later became India's northeastern states, Burma, Bengal, Vietnam, Thailand, and Sulu Island.

When the 1954 Chinese map and another constructed on the basis of displays at the 1947 Asian Relations Conference are superimposed—as in map 1.1—the overlap between perceived Indian and Chinese historic spheres of influence becomes clear. This is one key base of the chronic Sino-Indian conflict. Chinese and Indian nationalists both perceive the same areas as rightfully falling under their influence. A corollary of this is that they see the influence of the other country as a challenge to their own.

A sense of urgency exacerbated this clash. In the second half of the twentieth century India and China reemerged with a strong sense of lost time and grievance against a world order that had denied them their rightful place for too long. Both countries wanted to put things right as quickly as possible. Nationalists in both the ROI and the PRC believed that the time had finally come for them to reestablish their nations in their long-lost, but rightfully deserved, place of eminence in the world. Nationalist architects of Indian independence in 1947 and those who established the PRC in 1949 viewed these events as decisive turning points. A century or more of Western (and, in the



MAP 1.1 Overlap of Perceived Indian and Chinese Historic Spheres of Influence.

SOURCES: For India, *Asian Relations, Being Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948), 302–10; for China, “A Brief History of Modern China” (Peking, 1954), reproduced in United States Central Intelligence Agency, *People’s Republic of China, Atlas* (Washington, D.C.: United States Central Intelligence Agency, 1971), 75.

case of China, Japanese) domination had crucially weakened these great nations, damaging their international influence and stature—or so nationalists believed. The once great nations would now reestablish their international preeminence. These common anti-imperialist and anti-Western sentiments were a key basis of the period of Chinese-Indian “solidarity” in the mid-1950s and emerged occasionally in the 1980s and 1990s as the proposed basis for another period of Indian-Chinese cooperation. Shared Chinese and Indian anti-Westernism has not, however, proven to be a very viable basis for cooperation, mainly because rivalries between China and India have been too great. Their common desire to reestablish lost greatness has created ambitions, but historical patterns and perceptions have often led those

ambitions into conflict. In this way shared resentment at imperialist oppression, rather than facilitating anti-Western cooperation, may in fact have encouraged Sino-Indian rivalry.

SOUTH ASIA AS INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY ZONE

The second taproot of ROI-PRC conflict is a security dilemma. To guarantee its national security, the ROI wants to keep China (and other extra-regional powers) out of the South Asian–Indian Ocean region or at least limit its presence there. Doing this, however, necessarily poses challenges to the security of the PRC. A South Asia organized and led by India would pose a far greater potential threat to China than a fragmented South Asia. Moreover, without strong links to countries of South Asia, China would be less able to defend its southern territories should that need arise.

Analysts of Indian foreign policy generally agree that India has not had a clearly defined and explicitly enunciated regional security doctrine. Raju Thomas, for example, found in the mid-1980s that “changes in the Indian strategic environment over the last thirty years have produced significant shifts in Indian defense policies. However, these changes have rarely, if ever, been officially assessed and communicated through strategic doctrines. There have been, for instance, no Nehru, Gandhi, or Desai doctrines similar to an Eisenhower, Nixon, or Brezhnev doctrine. Instead Indian defense policy has usually been characterized by flexibility and ambivalence.”⁹ Analysts have found, however, that Indian policy behavior has largely conformed to an *implicit* doctrine of regional security. In other words, even though India’s leaders did not explicitly formulate such a doctrine, they *acted as though they had*. Looking at the cases of Sri Lanka from 1983–90, the Maldives in 1988, and Nepal from 1989–90, one analyst found that India’s leaders acted to exclude foreign powers from the region and to maintain regional stability there.¹⁰ George Tanham concluded that there were two “core perceptions of Indian regional strategy” which could be deduced from India’s foreign policy behavior. First, no neighboring state could undertake any action in foreign affairs or defense policy that India deemed potentially inimical to its security. Second, India would not permit an extra-regional power to establish an “unfriendly” presence in or influence over a neighboring state. India saw itself as a benevolent protector of the South Asian region, the guarantor of peace and stability. It vehemently denied that this constituted some sort of hegemony or a threat to the security of other South Asian nations. Because the security of its neighbors was integral to its own, India’s security efforts simply could not be construed as a threat to its neighbors.¹¹

Britain had a very clear view of South Asia and the Indian Ocean as a single strategic region, stretching from the passes of Afghanistan through the Tibetan buffer to northern Burma and from the Red Sea to the Strait of Malacca, with India at the center. Independent India inherited this strategic view, but it withered under Nehru's globalistic nonalignment in the 1950s. For its first fifteen years the ROI also felt comfortable with a slowly decaying and benign British presence in the Indian Ocean, though not, of course, with the U.S. link to Pakistan. The intensification of ROI-PRC conflict in the 1960s and the beginning of China's push to build relations with the countries of South Asia revived India's regional strategic perspective. With various degrees of vigor and through various means, India contested China's advances into the region. Under Indira and Rajiv Gandhi India developed a stronger sense of its own regional security zone and of the need to minimize or exclude extra-regional powers from that region. New Delhi objected to both the U.S. and Soviet presence in India's South Asian region, but China was, and remained, India's top extra-regional concern.

India has not, of course, opposed any and all Chinese links to South Asian countries. A wide range of commercial, diplomatic, and cultural intercourse between China and South Asia has taken place without causing Indian concern. But when that intercourse shades into close political alignments or when security issues enter the picture, Indian concerns mount.

Jaswant Singh, a leader of the BJP and minister for external affairs in the government headed by that party in 1998–99, has lamented India's lack of an explicit, carefully thought through, long-term, and consistent doctrine of regional security. Producing such a doctrine was a central purpose of his 1999 manifesto *Defending India*.¹² In that tract Singh traces India's lack of an explicit policy to deep cultural and historic barriers to strategic thinking generally. This may be, but one should also note that explicit enunciation of an Indian regional security doctrine would not necessarily be advantageous to the very end sought by the doctrine (exclusion of hostile extra-regional powers). As we shall see, a major factor pulling China into South Asia is the resentment of the smaller countries of that region at perceived Indian domination. Links with China are often attractive to India's South Asian neighbors precisely because of perceived Indian efforts at domination. Thus, while proclamation of an "Indian Monroe Doctrine" might forewarn China or other extra-regional powers, it would also make links with those powers even more attractive for countries of the region. India could then prevent these "anti-Indian, pro-Chinese" impulses from being realized only by the exercise of superior power. This is not necessarily the more efficient way to approach India's regional security problem. And, if superior power is still India's ultimate bar-

rier, why not develop and quietly use that power without promulgating offensive doctrines?

This tension between asserting Indian power and encouraging South Asian resentment of Indian domination has given rise to an oscillating cycle in India's *de facto* regional policy. Periods of Indian assertiveness toward India's smaller neighbors, assertiveness partially inspired by a desire to exclude China and other extra-regional powers, have been followed by periods focused on building good-neighborliness and friendship. After a while that relaxed approach is again replaced by another period of defensive assertiveness. Thus, Nehru's 1949–50 efforts to block the PRC's military occupation of Tibet, to impose prophylactic treaties on Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim, and military intervention in Nepal and Burma to prevent instability that might be exploited by China, were followed in the mid-1950s by an effort to assuage fears of Indian domination. These good-neighborly efforts included toleration of expanding links between China and India's neighbors. By the early 1960s Indian policy entered another assertive phase, inspired by China's efforts to build closer ties with Nepal, Burma, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as Sino-Indian relations deteriorated. This assertive phase lasted until the late 1970s.

The Janata Party's displacement of Congress in 1977 marked a pendulum swing toward another period of good-neighborliness. Indira Gandhi attacked these policies during her 1979 election campaign as weak and indecisive, and her return to power in 1980 marked the start of another assertive period. These policies were continued by Rajiv Gandhi. The inauguration in 1990 of V. P. Singh as prime minister, with Inder K. Gujral as foreign minister, marked another period of good-neighborliness. Gujral sought to ease India's "big brother" image in the region by substantially satisfying the demands of its neighbors on a number of issues.¹³ Gujral's initial term as foreign minister was brief, but he returned to that position under H. D. Deve Gowda in mid-1996 and then became prime minister himself in April 1997. Throughout this time Gujral continued his policies of what his critics called "unilateral goodwill and generosity" and what he called making India's power a benefit rather than a threat to its neighbors.¹⁴

Excluding a Chinese or other extra-regional presence from South Asia has thus been a long-standing Indian concern. Like a perennial plant, it is not always in bloom or apparent but its roots are always there, ready to push to the surface when rising temperature rouses it to activity.

PRC policy toward India's links with other South Asian nations has also varied over time. The core Chinese perception has been that India is an aspiring hegemonic power seeking to dominate the entire South Asian–Indian Ocean region and all the countries in it. India has been prevented from achiev-

ing this by the resistance of China, Pakistan, and other countries of the region. An authoritative, classified 1990s Chinese study of the 1962 war traced that conflict to Nehru's assimilation of the British imperialist mentality and strategy. Nehru's core ambition was to establish a "greater Indian empire" (*da yindu diguo*) within the realm of the old British Empire and stretching from Southeast Asia to the Middle East. Afghanistan, Burma, and Tibet were to be "buffers" (*huan chong guo*) within this imperial framework. The countries around India were to become subservient to Indian power. Indian security strategy under Nehru was premised on achieving this empire.¹⁵ A second authoritative 1990s Chinese study of the 1962 war also traced the root of the problem to Nehru's embrace of British imperialist thinking, leading to Indian policies of expansion and attempts to dominate neighboring countries. The ideological glue of the Indian independence movement had been "pure nationalism"; India had sought to become leader of the smaller countries in the region. Nehru's "regional expansionist policies" (*dichu kuozhang zhuyi zhengse*), plus his "nationalist" ideology, led the nation to want to establish its leadership across the Indian Ocean region.¹⁶ From the Chinese perspective the root cause of the 1962 war and the chronic tension that has plagued the PRC-ROI relationship is India's desire for imperial dominion. The link between this underlying Chinese perception and PRC policy has not always been direct or simple. The limits, form, and content of this support varied depending on circumstances, but the broad policy direction was there.

During the period between 1962 and 1979 Beijing encouraged and supported virtually all anti-Indian struggles in South Asia. Under Deng Xiaoping, China's policy became more complex. Deng understood something of India's fears of Chinese activities in South Asia and moved to assuage those fears to open the way for improved PRC-ROI relations that would serve both China's development and its security objectives. During the twenty years between 1979 and 1999 the leaders of the ROI and the PRC both desired better bilateral relations and worked toward that goal. China's links with South Asia and India's policies toward other South Asian countries were major obstacles in this regard. Neither country was willing to give the other *carte blanche*. India insisted there were limits beyond which China could not and should not go. China denied the right of India to specify such limits and frequently denied that it had, in any case, transgressed the limits stipulated by India.

In contrast to India, China *has* an explicit, enunciated (indeed a frequently enunciated) doctrine detailing relations between China and the nations of South Asia and relations between India and the other South Asian countries. First enunciated in a Sino-Indian agreement of 1954, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial

integrity; mutual nonaggression; mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and coexistence. According to Beijing, the Five Principles should govern relations between all countries in the world, including China and those countries that happen to be located in South Asia or on the Indian Ocean. All countries big or small are equal in terms of their sovereignty and have an absolute right to regulate their internal affairs and their relations with other countries. No country should attempt to dictate to another country regarding internal or external policies. To do so is completely unacceptable power politics, or hegemonism. For India to attempt to dictate or limit relations between China and China's neighbors is tantamount to an Indian attempt to exercise hegemony over the South Asian region. So long as relations between any two sovereign countries are peaceful and do not involve aggression against some third party—as is the case with China's links with the South Asian countries, as Beijing sees it—the governments of those two countries are entirely within their rights to undertake those relations. India may not fairly interfere. For it to do so is a violation of the sovereignty of China and other smaller nations and, therefore, a violation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

To this day the Five Principles remain China's standard rhetorical stock-in-trade. In a high-profile speech in Pakistan in December 1996, for example, President Jiang Zemin said: "We sincerely hope that . . . South Asian countries will treat one another as equal and live harmoniously, thus becoming exemplary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence in practice; and that they will settle their differences and disputes peacefully in the spirit of seeking common ground while reserving differences, mutual understanding, and mutual accommodation." These words were a two-edged sword. On the one hand, they signaled Islamabad that it would not have China's support for conflict with India over Kashmir. On the other hand, they signaled New Delhi that China expected India not to coerce its neighbors. Jiang also underlined in his talk the PRC's determination to continue expanding its "multi-dimensional exchanges and cooperation" with South Asian nations: "To solidify our friendly and good-neighborly ties with the surrounding countries is our sincere wish and unswerving policy . . . the multi-dimensional exchanges and cooperation between China and the various South Asian countries in many fields have grown steadily from strength to strength. We are ready to join hands with the South Asian countries in building a friendly and good-neighborly relationship that is long-term, stable, and oriented towards the 21st century."¹⁷

There is a tendency among international affairs analysts steeped in the realpolitik tradition to smile when they hear the frequent Chinese references

to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, seeing Beijing's fondness for the Five Principles as reflecting the Chinese notion that, while foreigners have interests, China has principles. This conclusion is understandable but not entirely well founded. Emphasis on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence accords well with China's interests in South Asia. The exercise of power is almost always linked to values. Those exercising power typically need to believe that their exercise of power is, in some basic sense, fair and that the actions of the people being coerced are, in some basic sense, unfair. Values deriving from existing moral codes combine with beliefs about the behavior of others to justify one's own exercise of power. If those ideas are persuasive to others, the exercise of power will be easier and more effective. There is good reason to take seriously the moral code underpinning the exercise of power. In China the symbols associated with the Five Principles are linked to extremely powerful emotions—China's own "century of humiliation." These beliefs can evoke deep and bitter sentiments among modern Chinese. If those sentiments can be roused and associated with Indian actions through the use of certain verbal symbols, such as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, this may provide an effective justification of power, at least in Chinese minds. The extent to which the justification would be effective with those living in South Asian countries is another matter. Given that public opinion in South Asian countries is shaped by resentment at Indian "bullying," the symbolism of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence may be effective in generating support for Chinese policies.

Beijing combines the Five Principles with its "friendly neighbor policy" (*mulin zhengce*) especially to foster friendly, cooperative ties with countries neighboring China. Such relationships, including cooperative security relationships, reduce the danger posed to China by hostile powers. The rub in the case of ROI-PRC relations is that, in strengthening its own security by developing military or security relations with its neighbors, China ipso facto diminishes India's security situation. In pursuing policies premised on the Five Principles, China has repeatedly come into conflict with India's South Asian security zone and chipped away at the stage on which the drama of Indian national greatness is to be enacted.

In concluding these introductory remarks, a final caveat is necessary. The following pages and chapters will focus on Indian fear of China and especially of China's links to South Asia. China, of course, has not been India's only extra-regional concern. Arguably, India has sought since the mid-1960s to exclude *all* extra-regional powers. Following the deployment of the Enterprise battle group to the Bay of Bengal during the December 1971 war, when Indian forces intervened in East Pakistan to detach that region from Pakistan and

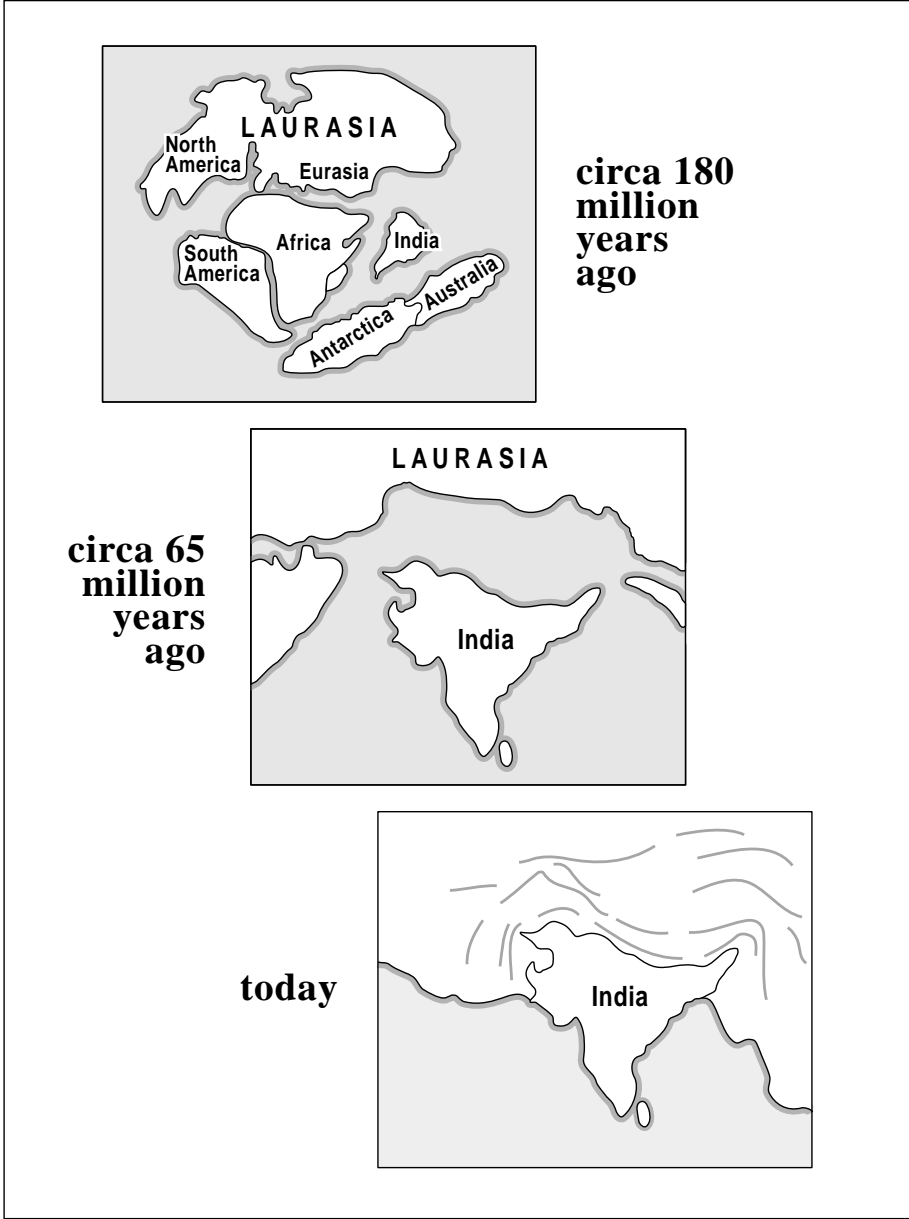
create the new state of Bangladesh, India's fears regarding the growing U.S. presence in South Asia may, for a period, have exceeded its concerns with the Chinese presence. China took a relatively low-key approach to this Indian dismemberment of Pakistan, in contrast to the United States, which undertook the act of naval diplomacy on Pakistan's behalf. Once again, this study will leave to others the task of balancing the weight of Indian concerns with Chinese "encirclement" against India's concern with the "American threat" at various points. (In fact, New Delhi saw these threats as tied together in the "Beijing-Washington-Islamabad axis" during the 1970s and early 1980s.) Assessing the balance of various Indian concerns over time and as reflected in Indian foreign policy is not the task set for this book. Rather, it seeks to isolate and analyze PRC-ROI conflict per se. Intellectual honesty requires, however, that I reiterate at the outset my belief that, if this is done, the analyst will find that among the extra-regional powers that have played a role in post-1947 South Asia—including the United Kingdom, the United States, the USSR, the Russian Federation, France, Portugal, the Netherlands—concern with China's looming presence weighed most heavily with Indian leaders even if it was not always at the top of their explicit foreign policy agendas.

THE GEOGRAPHIC STAGE

The conflict between Chinese and Indian concepts of national greatness and security has been played out in well-defined geographic circumstances of location, terrain, climate, and ethnic demography. These circumstances deeply influenced the pattern of interaction, and it is for this reason that we refer to it as "geopolitical conflict."

The geophysical processes that produced the absolutely unique ruggedness of this terrain have happened only once in our planet's history, as far as geophysicists currently know. With the breakup of earth's primordial single supercontinent Pangaea about 180 million years ago, the Indian tectonic plate split off and traveled northeast across what eventually became the Pacific and Indian Oceans. About 65 million years ago that tectonic plate began approaching the Laurasian plate, made up of both Eurasia and what later became North America. One of the most immense collisions in earth's history resulted, with the hard rock of the Indian plate thrusting under the softer Laurasian plate. The earth's crust rapidly thickened and rose, creating the world's highest mountains and plateaus and some of its most rugged terrain.

This rugged terrain made it difficult for ancient and modern Indian and Chinese states to assert their power in these areas effectively, heightening their

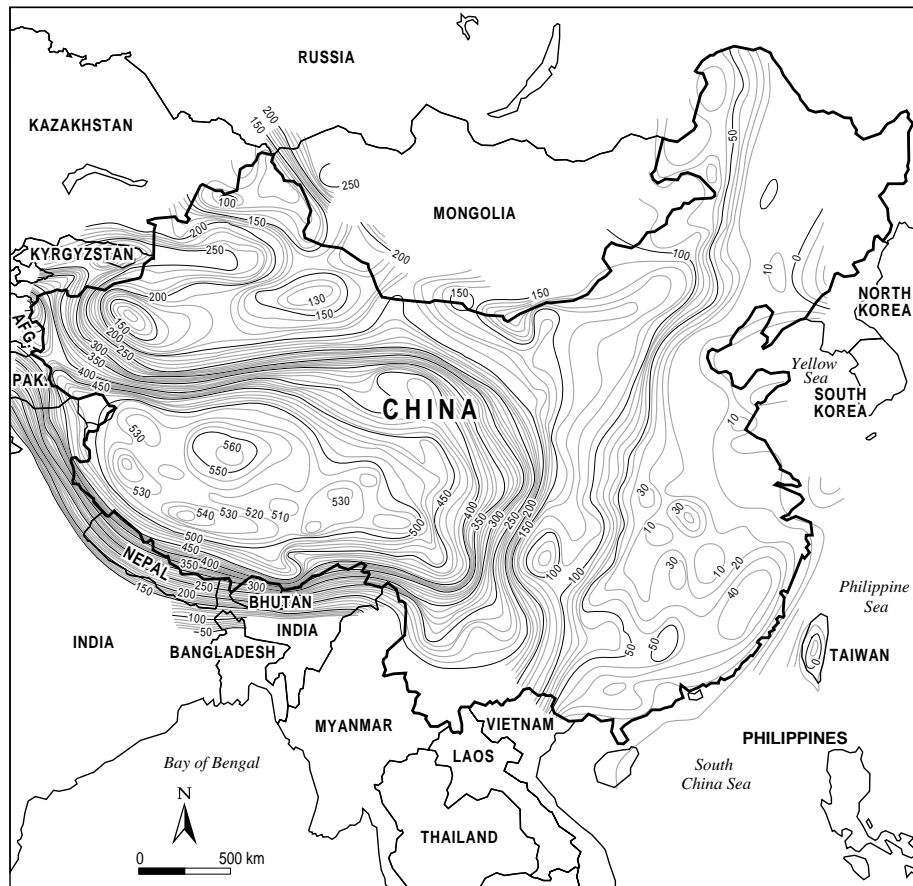


MAP 1.2 Tectonic Evolution of the Himalayan-Tibetan Massif

sense of vulnerability to the efforts of the other state to assert its influence. This was further conditioned by the relatively limited financial, industrial, and technological resources available to the two states at various points. The costs of even penetrating, let alone effectively administering, many of these regions was very high, while the economic resources available to the two states were tightly constrained. Additionally, sometimes the indigenous populations of these remote areas did not identify with the newly established Chinese and Indian states. Occasionally, they, or at least significant portions of them, were inspired by the desire for autonomy and independence from the ROI and PRC. These difficulties of national integration were greatly compounded by difficult terrain and location and by the ability of the rival state on the other side of the Eurasian continent to magnify them.

The vast belt of territory stretching from the mountainous jungles of northern Burma westward to the Karakoram Range of northern Kashmir and northward to the edge of the great Tibetan plateau—what I will call the “Himalayan-Tibetan massif”—can be seen as a single geopolitical system whose basis is the extreme ruggedness and remoteness of its land. This rugged terrain makes the movement of men and material, for either civilian or military purposes, very difficult, and it has made the modern economic development of the region unusually slow and difficult. Even as we enter the new millennium these lands remain “remote,” with transportation grids far less developed than those of surrounding areas that are lower and flatter. Because of terrain, the modern economic development of this region has been unusually slow and difficult. The significance of these basic topological facts is, of course, conditioned by technology. The transportation technologies of the late twentieth century—airplanes, railways, but especially hard-surfaced, all-weather roads with modest grades, frequent bridges, and cargoes moved by efficient internal combustion engines—have rendered these regions far more passable, far less of a barrier to civilian or military intercourse, than was the case in earlier centuries. Yet, while technology has modified the impact of geography, it has not eliminated it. Movement in and through the Himalayan-Tibetan massif remains relatively slow, difficult, and expensive.

The Tibetan plateau, ranging 800 miles north to south, is mainly above an elevation of 6,500 feet (2,000 m) with the central plateau at an elevation of 13,000–15,000 feet (4,000–5,000 m). On the southern fringe of the central plateau lie the Himalayan Mountains. These emerged as three gigantic, highly folded, parallel ranges of which the central range is the highest, with many peaks over 25,000 feet as well as, of course, the world’s highest peak at just below 30,000 feet.¹⁸ The north to south width of the Himalayan system is about 300 miles. This high ground can be depicted by contour lines, as shown in map 1.3.



MAP 1.3 The Himalayan-Tibetan Massif as Illustrated by Contour Lines.

SOURCE: Huang Jiqing et al., *Geotectonic Evolution of China* (Beijing: Sciences Press, 1987).

The Himalayan-Tibetan massif separates the densely populated, economically developed heartlands of Indian and Chinese civilization. In other words, if the rulers of Indian and Chinese states decided, as they occasionally did, to mobilize their resources for war against the other, their forces would have to go over or around that massif, as the armies of the expansionist Mongol Khanate did. Those extremely powerful armies swept outward in all directions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—over the seas to Japan and Southeast Asia, across China and into Burma and Vietnam, across the steppes of Inner Asia to central Europe and Persia. Eventually, an offshoot of the Khanate conquered India, advancing through Afghanistan. Mongol armies went everywhere but through Tibet, which they went around. In the seventeenth century the Dogra rulers of Kashmir sent armies into western Tibet—thereby laying the basis for the subsequent Indian claim to Askai Chin. In

the early eighteenth century a Dzungar Mongol army marched from the Ili Valley via Hetian in today's southern Xinjiang to atop the Tibetan plateau and thence to Lhasa. In the late eighteenth century the first genuine trans-Himalayan military expedition occurred when a Chinese-Tibetan force responded to a Nepalese seizure of Shigatze by marching on Kathmandu. The expedition of British captain Francis Younghusband to Shigatze in 1904 should perhaps be counted as a trans-Himalayan expedition. But it was not until 1962 that modern technology was used to apply large-scale trans-Himalayan military force. That year was the first time that armies commanded by the Chinese and Indian states fought each other. This fact was a testament both to the ability of the Tibet-Himalayan massif to separate the two states throughout most of history and to the modification of these geographic facts by modern technology.

Another key element making up the Himalayan-Tibetan system is the configuration of political regimes administering parts of it. Have the PRC and/or the ROI exercised adequate administrative control over one or another component of this region to prepare or deny transit through the territory? An actor who controls a territory politically can prepare lines of swift advance or deliberately not prepare them while readying fortifications to obstruct movement. It can position men and material beyond the roughest zones or prevent such forward deployment. Factors that touch on such political control include: (1) the administrative status of Tibet relative to the PRC and the ROI; (2) the location of the Chinese-Indian boundary; (3) the status of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim; and (4) the status of the north Burma flank of the Himalayan-Tibet massif.

Taken together, the regions of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan occupy about half the total distance from the line of actual control separating Indian and Pakistani-occupied Kashmir in the west to the Indian-Burmese-Chinese border trijunction in the east. Nepal and Bhutan are kingdoms, as was Sikkim until its annexation by India in 1975. Nepal is a sovereign state seated in the United Nations and conducting diplomatic ties with many countries. Bhutan was a semi-sovereign state in the 1950s but gradually expanded its range of international activity while still respecting India's key interests as regards China. Sikkim held a status roughly comparable to Bhutan's from 1950 until 1975. The status and role of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim relative to India and China has been profoundly influenced by their location on the fringe of the Tibetan plateau and wedged between those two powerful states. Their status has been a chronic source of conflict between Beijing and New Delhi.

The ethnicity of the indigenous populations of these highland regions is another factor influencing the interactions of the massif system. To a sub-

stantial degree these peoples are ethnically distinct from both Han Chinese and Hindi-speaking north Indians. These non-Chinese, non-Hindi people of the massif regions are less numerous, less wealthy, and less powerful than neighboring Hindi and Han centers of power—this was not always the case historically but seems to have become a constant by the nineteenth century. The differences in size, wealth, and power have meant that, more often than not, these smaller groups have been subjected to the force of Indian or Chinese states. Viewed from a long historical perspective we can conclude that what is probably happening is that these smaller, weaker nations are gradually being assimilated into the larger, more powerful amalgamated nations of India and China. This is not always a conflict-free process; it often creates grievances among the people being assimilated, which in turn can create internal instability that may be exploited by the other powers. The PRC has exploited such ethnic divisions within India's northeast, while the ROI has exploited China's ethnic vulnerabilities in Tibet. Parallel with this process of mutual exploitation of ethnic vulnerabilities is a longer-term but more effective process of assimilation, driven, it seems to me, by modern technology, which makes possible the swift and easy movement of people, goods, ideas, and information, and by state security, which encourages the use of modern technology to integrate these vulnerable areas.

Which brings us to the final element of the Himalayan-Tibetan system: the level of development of the transportation network within this zone and between these highlands and Chinese and Indian centers of power and wealth. The speed and ease with which Indian and Chinese military resources could be moved into and across these lands, supported, and effectively coordinated, is directly linked to the structure of the political regimes of these territories. Developed transportation technologies also link the economies of these regions more closely to the economies of India and China or, if such technologies are not well developed, keep economies from being tied together.

The key elements of the Himalayan-Tibetan system are thus: the lay of particularly rugged terrain, political administrations, ethnicity, and the level of development of transportation networks. These elements must be understood in relationship to one another. A now-classic Indian realistic view of the Himalayan-Tibetan system was presented by Sardar Vallabhai Patel in a letter of November 7, 1950, to Jawaharlal Nehru. Patel had been the organizational mainstay of the Congress Party during the 1930s and 1940s. While inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's saintliness, Patel tended toward a hardheaded view of politics. As home minister and deputy prime minister in the period after independence, Patel presided over the integration of the 562 Princely States into the Indian union (except for Kashmir, which Nehru insisted,

against Patel's objection, on submitting to the United Nations) and the suppression of a communist revolt in southern India.¹⁹ Patel's letter to Nehru came shortly after the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) defeated Tibetan forces at Qamdo on the eastern gateway to Tibet, thereby positioning itself to carry out the previously proclaimed mission of military "liberation" of Tibet. The imminent Chinese occupation of Tibet, together with a number of other factors, posed new and fundamental challenges to Indian security, according to Patel.

Throughout its history, Patel told Nehru, India had not faced Chinese armies stationed in Tibet on India's northern borders: "Throughout history we have seldom been worried about our northeast frontier. The Himalayans have been regarded as an impenetrable barrier against any threat from the north. We had friendly Tibet which gave us no trouble." This was about to change with the PLA occupation of Tibet. The "disappearance of Tibet, as we know it, and the expansion of China almost up to our gates" presented India with a new and dangerous situation. The broader power equation had also changed. Previously, "the Chinese were divided. They had their own domestic problems and never bothered us about frontiers." Now China was unified under an effective and centralized regime. This regime also rejected the old notion of suzerainty under which Tibet had been an entity able to enter into treaty relations with other countries. This crucial shift threw "into the melting pot" the various frontier settlements India had previously reached with the Tibetan government and rendered the entire Indian-Tibetan/Chinese-Indian border undefined. "Our northern and northeastern approaches consist of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, the Darjeeling (areas) and tribal areas in Assam" and "The undefined state of the frontier and the existence on our side of a population with its affinities to the Tibetans or Chinese have all the elements of a potential trouble between China and ourselves." Communication with and Indian administrative authority within these areas were weak. The border was extremely porous, and "there [was] almost an unlimited scope for infiltration" of "spies, fifth columnists and communists." Ethnic factors also created opportunities for Chinese exploitation. "All along the Himalayans in the north and northeast we have on our side of the frontier a population ethnographically and culturally not different from Tibetans and Mongoloids . . . The people inhabiting these portions have no established loyalty or devotion to India . . . [and] are not free from pro-Mongoloid prejudices." All of these factors created many Indian "weak spots" that China could exploit. Patel also raised the possibility of a link-up between China and Pakistan which could put India in a "perpetually weak" position in which it "would not be able to stand up to the double threat of difficulties both from the west and north

and northeast.”²⁰ Patel concluded his letter with a list of measures designed to meet these new challenges.

Patel’s views did not become policy—at least not for another decade. In 1950–51, while Nehru pushed through prophylactic treaties with Sikkim, Bhutan, and Nepal, more broadly he rejected Patel’s *realpolitik* approach in favor of a policy that can perhaps fairly be termed “appeasement.” (Patel himself died shortly after he wrote his letter to Nehru.) Nehru sought to persuade China of India’s friendship by vigorously promoting China’s cause on international issues such as United Nations representation and a Korean War truce while eschewing actions potentially objectionable to China in the frontier regions. On the crucial issue of Tibet, after a brief period of using diplomatic means to uphold Tibet’s autonomy, Nehru conceded China’s core demands. In sum, Nehru attempted to deal with China’s challenges by actively befriending China and sidestepping efforts it might otherwise have taken to construct a position of strength favorable to India.

Bitter experience can be an effective teacher. In 1950 Patel’s *realpolitik* view was a distinct minority perspective. In the aftermath of the 1962 war it became representative of mainstream Indian thinking *on China*, if not of India’s view of the world generally. While Gandhian-Nehruvian idealism still played an important role in Indian diplomacy in the 1960s and 1970s, in terms of dealing with China, after 1962 Indian policy rested squarely on realist premises. The 1962 war produced a sea change in Indian public opinion about China as fundamental as the rejection of isolationism among Americans following the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. While much diplomatic water has flowed under the bridge of Sino-Indian diplomatic relations since then, the *realpolitik* lessons of 1962 remain at the core of mainstream Indian thinking about China.

“INDIAN HEGEMONY” VERSUS “CHINESE STRATEGIC ENCIRCLEMENT”

Chinese and Indian security interests have clashed in terms of the relations of each with the countries and areas of the South Asian region. Beijing’s objective has been to prevent the emergence on the PRC’s vulnerable southwestern borders of a threatening or potentially threatening power or combination of powers. Beijing’s primary security concerns have been elsewhere: along the eastern coast from the United States, Japan, and Nationalist China; and along China’s northern and northwestern borders from the USSR. Yet, because of factors of ethnicity and terrain outlined earlier, Beijing has also felt vulnerable along its southern borders. One of Beijing’s overriding strategic objectives has been to prevent the greater threat emanating from the east

or the north from linking up with a threat to the PRC's southern borders. As a result, two at times inconsistent policy directions have emerged. On the one hand, China has sought to cultivate friendly, cooperative ties with the smaller countries of South Asia. By developing friendly ties with these countries, China might support their struggles against Indian "hegemonism." On the other hand, Beijing courted, or confronted, India.

China's long-term security interests and the long-term growth of Chinese prominence in Asia would be best served by having more, smaller states rather than one larger state on China's southern border. The only realistic possibility of such a single large state came from India. Thus, Chinese policy has sought to prevent the possibility of Indian domination or unification of the South Asian region. An Indian-led South Asian bloc would be far more dangerous (because it would be more powerful) if it pursued policies antithetical to Chinese interests. The greater power of such a state might also serve to encourage it to pursue policies antithetical to China's interests. An Indian bloc would also be better able to restrict the development of China's friendly ties with South Asian countries. Indeed, such restriction would be the virtual definition of Indian domination.

Indian leaders and analysts take a skeptical view of China's relations with India's South Asian neighbors, especially concerning security relations. One senior Indian analyst, Sujit Dutta, wrote in 1998 that Beijing "has over the years . . . developed some of its closest external relationships in the [South Asian] region built on defense and intelligence ties, military transfers, and political support. Unlike China's ties in East Asia, where they are essentially economic, in South Asia [China's] ties are primarily political-military in content."²¹ Dutta found several types of reactions to China's role in South Asia among the countries there. The most common response—represented by Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka—is to see China as "a benign state whose power and independent role enhance their security by balancing other major states such as India or the United States or Russia that are their pivotal concern." These countries do not feel threatened by China's growing military power and have "close, friendly ties with China and welcome the growth of China's overall power and role" in South Asia. A second type of response—represented by Nepal and Bhutan—comes from landlocked countries dependent on India and with economic and security policies that "revolve around" India. India's views are *sui generis* in South Asia, according to Dutta. Being the dominant power there, India views China's South Asian activities with suspicion. While Sino-Indian relations have improved since 1988, "there has been little movement on resolving outstanding disputes, settling the issue of [Tibet], or removing Indian insecurities regarding China's

strategic postures and defense ties in the region.” Another Indian analyst, Colonel Gurmeet Kanwal, writing in 1999, perceived a Chinese policy of “strategic encirclement”: “While China professes a policy of peace and friendliness toward India, its deeds clearly indicate that concentrated efforts are under way aimed at strategic encirclement of India. For the last several decades, China has been engaged in efforts to create a string of anti-Indian influence around India through military and economic assistance programs to neighborly countries, combined with complementary diplomacy. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have been assiduously and cleverly cultivated toward this end.”²² According to Kanwal, “China’s foreign and defense policies are quite obviously designed to marginalize India in the long term and reduce India to the status of a sub-regional power by increasing Chinese influence and leverage in the South Asian region.” While we should not necessarily accept the proposition that China is indeed motivated by the strategic calculations attributed to it here, we can accept this view as representing Indian perceptions.

What Indian leaders perceive as well-justified concern for India’s security, Chinese leaders perceive as Indian hegemony. Since the mid-1970s (when Chinese concern for Soviet hegemonism became acute) Chinese sources have usually not spoken openly about Indian “hegemony”—although there is a tendency toward frankness in internal documents or in public polemics when Beijing wishes to express displeasure, as, for example, following India’s annexation of Sikkim in 1975 and its nuclear tests in May 1998. Nor is Chinese policy necessarily predicated on opposing what China perceives as Indian hegemony. Other goals often rank higher for Beijing in its ordering of priorities (e.g., thwarting Soviet or U.S. domination), and these higher-ranking objectives frequently lead China to downplay its opposition to Indian hegemony and its support for India’s neighbors against Indian pressure. But, while political and diplomatic exigencies may moderate Beijing’s response to India’s efforts to restrict relations between China and India’s South Asian neighbors, the underlying perception remains essentially unaltered: to China India is a regional hegemonist that presumes to block the natural and rightful expansion of China’s relations with its neighbors.