

India and China decide to shed hostility, sign historic accord

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In a well-calculated move, both the Indian and Chinese leadership, increasingly feeling pressured by various control regimes imposed by the post-Cold War unipolar world order, have decided to institutionalize peace and tranquility on the Line of Actual Control, the scene of fierce skirmishes in the 1960s between the two countries. Since the buildup of the border dispute between India and China surfaced in the 1950s and erupted into a full-fledged Chinese invasion across the Himalayas in 1962, catching India unaware and humiliating the Indian Army, hostility between the two nations over territorial claims has kept them apart and the region has remained a potential hot spot, with both nations' large army contingents staring at each other all along the Himalayas.

During a historic four-day (Sept. 6-9) visit to China, Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, and his Chinese counterpart, Li Peng, directed the Joint Working Group, which was set up following the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing in December 1988, to step up its work to find an early, fair, and reasonable solution to the boundary question. The landmark agreement, signed by the two prime ministers on Sept. 7, 1993, lays down the framework for the two sides to resolve the boundary question. They have also undertaken that neither side shall use or threaten force against the other. Pending a boundary settlement, India and China have agreed to respect and observe the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Where there are differences on the alignment of the LAC, experts from the two countries will jointly check and determine where the LAC lies.

The agreement

Under the agreement, the two sides have also agreed to undertake a series of confidence-building measures, including the reduction of military forces deployed along the India-China border. India and China have agreed to keep their military forces in areas along the LAC in conformity with the principle of "mutual and equal security." The extent, depth, timing, and nature of reductions will be worked out through mutual consultations. The agreement also calls for prior intimation of military exercises above thresholds mutually decided within mutually identified zones.

The accord specifically states that references to the LAC do not prejudice the respective position of the two countries on the boundary question. Details regarding the implementa-

tion of the agreement will be worked out by diplomatic and military experts under the Joint Working Group. The experts will also help the group in devising effective verification measures.

In addition to the landmark agreement, the two countries also signed a protocol on extending border trade by opening a point at the Shipki Pass, and two agreements on environmental protection and on radio and TV cooperation.

About Tibet, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Wu Jian Min, said the Chinese side had reiterated its known position and India responded that it regarded Tibet as an autonomous part of China, as stated in the early 1950s. However, while India will not allow any anti-China activities by Tibetans on Indian soil, at the same time, it regards the Dalai Lama as the spiritual and religious leader of the Tibetans and would be treated as such. India also urged China to recognize Sikkim, an independent mountain kingdom till 1975, which joined the Indian union as part of India. Beijing's response in this regard has been reported as "constructive and objective."

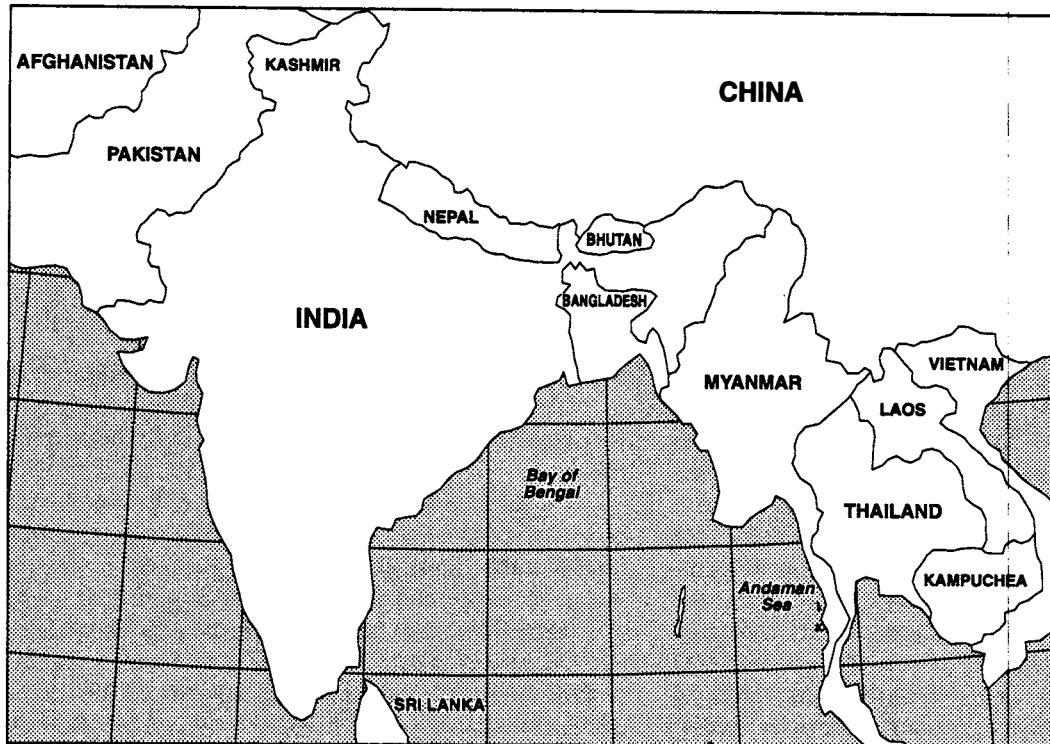
Shift in China's attitude

Although the various confidence-building measures have been hailed by the analysts here in Delhi as highly significant, the linchpin in the whole set of agreements was the agreement to maintain lasting peace and tranquility along the LAC in the border areas.

Indian Prime Minister Rao has effectively built upon the earlier visit of Rajiv Gandhi when China, for the first time, showed an inclination to move ahead on the border issue for a peaceful solution. The Chinese supremo Deng Xiaoping, then 84 years old, had told the youthful Rajiv Gandhi, "Welcome, so welcome my young friend. Starting from your visit, we will restore our relations as friends. We will be friends between the leaders of the two countries. The countries will become friends. The people will become friends. Do you agree with me?"

The motor behind the present agreement was Deng's keenness to discuss the "bigger issues" with the Indian prime minister. In a 90-minute meeting, which Rajiv Gandhi had recounted partially in a press conference, the two leaders also discussed world problems of deterrence philosophy, the creation of blocs as security measures, the economic disparities that still remain, and the economic exploitation which is

India, China and their neighbor states



effectively still taking place, and how India and China could counter these.

New initiatives

Unfortunately, the political chaos that descended in India following the electoral defeat of the Congress (I) and the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 had put the Sino-Indian rapprochement on the back shelves. However, the Beijing leaders, who had participated in the Cold War geopolitics by siding with the United States to exert strategic pressures on the Soviet Union, have been signaling interest in normalizing relations with India. China's envoy to India, Cheng Rui-sheng, speaking at a public forum about ten days before the Indian prime minister set off for Beijing, said that the emergence of three important factors augured well for Sino-Indian relations: "The end of the Cold War, leading to unipolar polity in international affairs; liberalization in the economic scene within both the neighboring countries; and the realization amongst the leaders to depend upon each other in building bridges of peace and amity, leading to development for the good of the people of the region," envoy Cheng said.

He also pointed out on that occasion that China was prepared to provide launch facilities for Indian satellites from its soil, given the sophistication of its space technology. "We are already committed to providing technology to Indian friends in the area of steel manufacturing and hybrid rice cultivation," the Chinese ambassador noted.

Less than a week before Prime Minister Rao's visit began, the United States had re-imposed sanctions on China

and Pakistan for missile technology transfers from the former to the latter. China, which adheres to the 23-nation Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), run by the Group of Seven countries, was accused of violation of the MTCR regime. Beijing had reacted angrily to it. At the same time, the United States was demanding that the Chinese ship *Yinhe*, which was destined for Iran, be allowed to be inspected, since Washington was "aware" that the Chinese ship was carrying chemicals which are banned under the chemical warfare agents ban. The ship was later inspected in Saudi Arabia, in the presence of the Saudi authorities, after the Americans had trailed it for a month; it was found not to contain said chemicals.

During Prime Minister Rao's visit, India made it clear that it would not be raising the Pakistan missile transfer issue and prefers to accept the Chinese explanation that the arms supply does not upset the regional power balance; that it is meant to bolster defense capability; and that it is not used to interfere in the domestic affairs of any other nation. During their talks, the two prime ministers noted with dismay the "serious cases of hegemonism, power politics, and naked interference in others' internal affairs."

However, efforts were afoot to torpedo the Indian prime minister's visit. On Sept. 8, it was reported that the U.S. Congress's Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific had said in a report that China's sales of M-11 missiles to Pakistan appear to be a part of a strategic initiative to keep India off balance. The Chinese strategy, as the subcommittee surmised, is to force New Delhi to focus its attention and

resources on its neighbors to the west, as well as to the north.

At the same time, Washington had informed India that the United States does not approve India's deployment of short-range battlefield missiles, the Prithvi, which were developed indigenously, and further testing of India's medium-range missiles, the Agni, also developed indigenously. By re-imposing sanctions on the Chinese transfer of missiles to Pakistan, Washington implied that the Indian argument that the missile development is for ensuring its own security, is valid no longer.

Border quagmire

The steps to resolve the Sino-Indian border issue are crucial to resolving Sino-Indian relations. While the Chinese rest their case on the pretensions of their imperial predecessors, India rests its case too rigidly on the interpretation of the British legacy. The 1914 Shimla Agreement to demarcate the border between China and India, under the British tutelage, was never ratified by the Chinese. Moreover, there are ample documents available to prove that the British demarcation of the border, particularly in the northwest, was not based upon any rigorous survey. In the east, the much-maligned McMahon Line represents a broad enough band within which interests of both sides can be adjusted. The cumbersome disputes over watershed must also be resolved. The late Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's embracing of the position that the survey maps are non-negotiable, had only helped force a confrontation.

Kashmir will also figure in demarcating the Sino-Indian boundary. On March 2, 1963, a few months after the Sino-Indian border clash, Beijing had signed an agreement with Pakistan on the boundary between Xinjiang province of China and Pakistan, in which occupied Kashmir was described euphemistically as "the contiguous areas the defense of which is under the actual control of Pakistan." Then-Chinese Foreign Minister Marshal Chen Yi had urged the Indian government "to look forward, bear in mind the whole situation, change its lines, and respond positively to the peaceable proposals of the Chinese government." This position of Beijing has not changed, and according to an Indian estimate, the Sino-Pakistani agreement had helped China to gain 2,500 square miles of Kashmir in addition to 1,600 square miles which Pakistan was not effectively controlling. Although this agreement is provisional, pending the final outcome of the Kashmir dispute, it does pitch China into the Kashmir imbroglio. On the Kashmir dispute itself, China had supported the Pakistani stance all along, and it is only recently, perhaps out of fear of its own Uighur Muslim population demanding a similar solution as the Kashmiris are seeking, that China has begun to tread softly on the issue, urging India and Pakistan to resolve the dispute through negotiations, as determined by the India-Pakistan Shimla Agreement of 1972.

Beside Kashmir, India has reasons to be cautious about China's intentions. In Burma (now Myanmar), China has

aggressively supported the present military junta and is responsible for an unprecedented increase in Burma's military strength. There are also signs that with the help of its control over Myanmar, China is establishing a beachhead on the Andaman Sea, thus making a direct entry into the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean and getting a direct access to Bangladesh, India's eastern coastlines, Thailand and Malaysia's west coastlines, and straight to Indonesia's largest island, Sumatra.

All these, and China's past policy to back the ethno-tribal movements in India's sparsely populated northeast, bordering Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Tibet, have made New Delhi wary of China's hegemonic policies toward the sub-continent. China's efforts to update and modernize its military in all three areas—land, air, and water—have also been noted in Delhi.

Asian dominance

Indian press reports make clear that Beijing is becoming increasingly aware of the new threats posed by the *diktats* of the new world order, and India cannot be considered a partner of the new alliance. China also wants to have much broader socio-political, as well as economic, contact with the rest of the Asian countries.

In Pakistan, for example, the Sino-Indian agreement has caused concern within a narrow band of geopoliticians, who in Pakistan had always played the "China card" ostensibly to contain India. Washington, a major factor in Pakistan's politics, had okayed that policy without reservation. A recent article in the Karachi-based English daily, the *Dawn*, considered the most conservative of Pakistan's news dailies, said that "with the Chinese strengthening their southern flank by smoothing their ties with India, international politics should become somewhat less unipolar," which would mean the emergence of Asia as a region of pre-eminence in world affairs. Another news daily, *Frontier Post*, published simultaneously from Lahore and Peshawar, said that by signing the accord, "India had taken a decisive step forward in tackling perhaps the most formidable external security threat that has dogged it for more than three decades since its disastrous 1962 war with China."

Similar articles have appeared in the Indian media forecasting the emergence of Asian dominance as a consequence of the Sino-Indian détente. However, such speculations will remain unfulfilled promises, unless India and China tackle the more important issues. These issues will center around strategic and economic cooperation, by helping each other in the breakthrough areas of science and technology. Both India and China have a wealth of manpower and a sound foundation in nuclear and space research. In the coming days, many other areas have to be identified and full-fledged research and development cooperation will be necessary to translate the agreement into potential economic tools for "the good of the people of the region."