

Beijing tries to strike a balance in South Asia

by Ramtanu Maitra and Linda de Hoyos

In 1955, Zhou En-lai, premier of the People's Republic of China, and Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister of India, representing the world's two most populous nations, met in Bandung, Indonesia for the famous conference organized by Indonesian President Sukarno that is credited with launching the Non-Aligned Movement. Among the Five Bandung Principles signed by the ranking leaders of the developing nations attending was a resolution for peaceful coexistence.

The concept was shattered in August 1962, when China launched its surprise military attack against India, grabbing sections of Indian territory along India's northeastern perimeter. The Chinese attack so shocked Nehru, that veteran observers in Delhi believe the Chinese invasion led to his death in the spring of 1964.

The invasion brought Indo-Chinese relations to a frigid standstill, made even worse by the 1971 decisive tilt toward Pakistan by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the Bangladesh War, as part of Kissinger's opening bid on the "China card."

No thaw came to relations between the two Asian giants until 1987, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi traveled to Beijing. Even so, relations did not "pick up" until September 1993, when Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao visited Beijing and signed a "peace and tranquility agreement."

By the end of 1993, a Chinese military team was in New Delhi, a visit that featured for the first time ever a call to an Indian port by a Chinese naval vessel commanded by an admiral. The Chinese delegation came to negotiate a mechanism by which the local commanders along the line of control in the disputed territory can meet regularly, and an agreement by which either country would pre-inform the other of military exercises. (Both sides have already begun to reduce troops at their mutual border, as both want "to divert resources from military to economic areas," according to Chinese Ambassador to India Cheng Ruishang.) Meeting with the heads of the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force, the Chinese delegation also discussed scheduling regular visits to military training institutes of both sides.

The reason for the change in Sino-Indo relations is not bilateral. With the 1989 demise of the Soviet Union, the India-Russia versus Pakistan-China fault lines no longer hold in Asia. Both countries are eager to ensure that Central Asia,

with the emergence of five newly independent republics, becomes a zone of stability rather than conflagration widening from Afghanistan. And both countries are vulnerable to separatist pressure. China is threatened in its northwest by a separatist movement of Muslim Uyghurs backed by the Turkish government, and implicitly by the United States. India is also targeted by separatist Muslims in Kashmir and by both Islamic and ethnic separatist insurgencies in the Northeast.

Pakistan the loser?

One correlative of Beijing's developing of relations with New Delhi, is a downplay of its military alliance with Pakistan, forged in the early 1960s. On Dec. 26, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto traveled to China—the first visit to a foreign country during her new prime ministership. Bhutto's eagerness to win favor in Beijing was evident. "Pakistan regards its relations with China as a cornerstone of its foreign policy," she said upon arrival. "Pakistani-China friendship is a model of inter-state relations . . . and has stood the test of time and changing global trends."

By the end of the visit, Bhutto and Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng signed five documents, including a trade agreement for trade routes through the Pakistan-held part of Kashmir and southern Xinjiang, also involving Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. However, the accord on military cooperation, which Pakistan had promoted as the highlight of the trip, failed to materialize. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reported that Pakistani Defense Minister Aftab Shaban Mirani was present at the signing, but no Chinese military counterpart attended.

China's unwillingness to forge a new military agreement may be conditioned by Washington's placing of limited economic sanctions on China in August 1993, when China sold M-11 missiles to Pakistan, claiming that the missiles violated the Missile Technology Control Regime.

However, Bhutto did not fare well on other prime security areas. On Pakistan's dispute with India over the contested state of Kashmir, Li Peng said India and Pakistan must resolve the conflict through patient dialogue—that is, backing India on its insistence on resolving the conflict through the bilateral Shimla Accords of 1976. Although Bhutto asked Beijing to play an "important balancing role" in the Kashmir dispute, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterated that the Kashmir problem is a historical issue between India and Pakistan and could only be solved by them.

In early January, the British *Daily Telegraph* reported that China had notified both the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries, two days before their Jan. 3-4 talks, that China will not accept any form of independence for Kashmir. In explaining the note, a Pakistani diplomat who accompanied Bhutto to Beijing reportedly said that "the Chinese said the Americans are already undermining them through Tibet and Xinjiang, and Kashmir would become another hotbed of anti-Chinese activity."