

Major Bilateral Issues between China and India

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the bilateral issues which hinders the relations among the two states and looks for the mutual understanding in the important issues for the peaceful rise of the two Asian giants. For instance, there is a divergence of interests between the two like the border disputes, water disputes etc. Here an attempt has been made to illuminate whether China's and India's paths lead them to interact as rivals or partners.

Keywords: China; Dalai Lama; India; Tibet

Introduction

The present relation between China and India has great uncertainty and ambiguity as both the countries have adopted different attitude of methodology and way of sorting the differences to emerge as regional powers mainly due to the mutual suspicion and distrust rather due to the inheritance of issues.

China and India, the two largest developing countries in the world, share a number of interests especially in the field of domestic development, and economic reform. They are experiencing a period of rapid economic growth. However, both the states are also struggling to define their role in the world given their new profound influence on the global economy. Both promote the notion of a multi-polar world in which they may serve as bigger players alongside the United States. China's strategic interests in India follows from its desire to maintain a peaceful international environment create friendly relations with all the states and especially with neighbors, prevent any attempt towards the formation of anti-China blocs and finally develop new markets, investment opportunities and resources to stimulate its economic growth. It also wants to resolve its domestic problems in a coherent manner. To achieve all these objectives, it is necessary for China to have friendly relations with India, despite the inherited bilateral issues. On the other hand, India's own focus on the internal development encourages it to cultivate positive relations with China. However, the attitude within India towards forging cordial relations with China remains mixed to some extent due to the historical legacy of China-India relations. While the left parties such as the Communist party of India (Marxist) has always sought the friendly relations with China, but the right wing parties and some people within the security establishment view China as a major security threat¹ [1]. From this perspective, it would be pertinent here to state these areas in which both the sides compete with each other and which is a major source of distrust, suspicion and misunderstanding between them.

Bilateral Issues between China and India

There are factors within and outside between China and India which still impacts their relations, for instance, border and Tibet issues are more prominent and recently, the water issue has also surfaced in the bilateral relations between China and India. These bilateral issues will not only effect on their present relations but have a negative impact on their future relations as well; it will also affect the process of their rise and the peace and stability in and outside the region.

¹The Indian Express, 4 May 1998, George Fernandes has declared China as India's "potential threat number one".

Border issue

The main problem between the two countries is the Border question, which is a historical one. The Border issue is rooted in the disputed status of the McMahon Line, which defines the border between India and Tibet. India recognizes this agreement as the basis for its territorial claim while China objected the validity of McMahon Line which was drawn in 1914 Simla convention because China believes that it was not a party to Simla Convention so it is not bound to accept the boundary demarcated by Simla convention² [2]. India claims 43,180 squares Kilometers of Jammu and Kashmir occupied by China including 5180 square kilometers cede to China by Pakistan under a 1963 China-Pakistan boundary Agreement. On the other hand China claims 90,000 square kilometers of territory held by India in Arunachal Pradesh³ [3]. There has not been a remarkable progress in resolving the border dispute between the two sides due to the importance of Aksai Chin to China because it is the main link between Tibet and Xinjiang province of China and Arunachal Pradesh to India is crucial to stability in India's north-eastern insurgent affected areas⁴.

After the 1962 war, relationship between China and India remained hostile for several decades. India's grant of statehood to Arunachal Pradesh in the late eighties (February 1987) which China claims as a part of South Tibet caused the hostility on the bilateral relations to such an extent that another border war seemed about to happen. China claimed the major territorial concessions in populated areas of Arunachal Pradesh particularly Twang because Chinese claim it to be central to Tibetan Buddhism given that the sixth Dalai Lama was born there⁵ [4]. In the same way, as China seeks return of Arunachal Pradesh on religious grounds, India demands the return of the sacred Mount Kailash Manasrovar in Tibet, since it is a sacred

²Bhawan Pokharna, India-China Relations (Dimensions and Perspectives), New Century Publications, New Delhi, p. 122.

³Derk J. Hitchell and Chietigi Bajpae, China and India, p. 157

⁴Derek J. Mitgell and Chietigi Bajpae, India and China,

⁵Mohan Malik, India-China Competition Revealed on Ongoing Border Disputes, Power and Interest New Report(PINR), 2007

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place associated with the Hindu religion⁶ [5]. However, ease on border and overall border relations began to improve following the border agreements in 1993 and 1996 between the two states. Since then, both sides have agreed to keep working on the border issue and resolved that any disagreement on border issue should not be allowed to affect the overall bilateral relations. The two sides have also pursued Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) along the border which includes mutual troop cut, regular meetings of local military commanders and other confidence measures. Further, an additional step was taken for the resolution of border disputes in 2003 when both the sides appointed Special Representatives to address the border issue⁷ [6]. Since, then the Special Representatives have held number of talks to resolve the border issue, but so far no breakthrough has been achieved. Here the main reason has been that the unsettled border provides China the strategic leverage to keep India uncertain about its intentions and nervous about its capabilities and ensuring India's good behavior on issue of vital concern to China. Further, an unsettled boundary also suits the contemporary Chinese interests, for China's claims in the western sector are complicated by the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir, and China wants to engage India under strategic pressure on two fronts that is from China and Pakistan⁸ [7]. Moreover, it should also be taken into consideration here that although India has recognized Tibet as a part of China, at the popular level, there remains significant sympathy for the Tibetan cause within India. Due to the security threats and national interests, neither side is willing to give away their claims or compromise over the disputed territory. However, it may be once again reiterated here that from the India's point of view, "Tibet is not a critical issue in China-India relations because Indian government is neither abettor nor instigator of political cause of the Tibetans"⁹ [8]. For India, resolving the border issue ranks higher than status of Tibet. That is why during the Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to China in 2003, India formally recognized Tibet as an integral part of China. However in recent years China shown more aggressive policy towards border issue with India. In May 2007, the Chinese government denied a visa to an Indian official to visit China on the grounds that he was from Arunachal Pradesh which considers its own territory. In addition, there have been continued media reports of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) encroachments across the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This recent increasing aggressive policy over the disputed borders has led to a rapid melt down in Sino-India border talks and a 'mini-cold war'¹⁰ on the border issue was prominently visible. Again in March, 2009 China attempted to block a \$ 2.9 billion loan to India from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the grounds that it was destined for development of Arunachal Pradesh¹¹ [9]. Continuing the claim on Arunachal Pradesh, in June, 2007 Chinese Foreign Minister again insisted that the presence of Indians would not stop China from claiming Arunachal Pradesh. On the other side, India regards Arunachal Pradesh as an integral part of Indian Union which merged with Indian Union in 1987 constitutionally and in accordance with the consent of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, India is firm on its stand on Arunachal Pradesh and it is unlikely that India will toe to the China's line on this issue. Thus, border issue between China and

⁶Mohan Malik, "India-China Relations: Giants Stir, Cooperate and compete", Special Assessment: Asia's Bilateral Relations, Asia-Pacific Center for Security studies, October 2004, p.41.

⁷Fonathan Holslag, China and India Prospects for Peace, Columbia University Press, New York, 2010, p.56.

⁸Dinesh Lal, Indo-Tibet-China Conflict, Kalpaz Publication, New Delhi, 2008, p.3.

KN. Ramachandran, India-China interactions in K. Santhanam and Srikanth⁹Kondapall (Ed.), Asian Security and China 2000-2010, Shirpa Publications, New Delhi, 2004, p.287

¹⁰Mohan Malik, No.5, op.cit.p.3.

¹¹Shashank Joshi, China and India: Awkward Ascents, p. 4

India is one of the delicate issues and needs immediate resolution so that some long lasting peace can be brought in this part of the world.

Water issues between China and India

In all the times, water was regarded as a precious commodity and is essential for human existence. That is why, its possession bestows power. The preciousness and possession in geopolitical mechanics makes water a strategic commodity and its role as a strategic asset or vulnerability cannot be over-estimated. Thus, seen in this context, water can become a source of both contention and cooperation in the context of contemporary world.

In case of China and India, water issues are becoming major area of concern between two states. In fact, many strategic thinkers are arguing that disputes relating to water will be major source of conflict between the two countries in the future. China's plan of constructing big dams and diverting the water of rivers to its own advantage has disintegrated in India. As there are four rivers that flow from China to India, the two countries must have a better understanding relating to water sharing and other attending benefits out of these rivers. However, China's strategic advantage over these rivers makes it possible for her to counter-balance India on many other issues. A deep analysis of the water issues between the two countries is quiet relevant her.

Rivers flowing from China to India

There are four rivers descending from four directions of Mount Kailash in the Nagari region of Tibet to the Indian subcontinent¹² [10].

1. The Tackok Khabab originates in the East of Mount Kailash and flows from upper region of Nagari down to the valley of Tsang, where it merges with Kyichu River of Central Tibet following through Yarlung Dagpo. It then winds to the right of the Namchang Barwe Mountains into Hustang and flows through the eastern region of India becoming the Brahmaputra. It then descends into Bangladesh and finally into Bay of Bengal.

2. The Ma Cha Khabab originates in the North of Mount Kailash and flows from the region of purang into Nepal and then through the state of Uttar Pradesh into India. It merges with Ganga and ends up in Bay of Bengal.

3. The languchen Khabab originates in the North of Mount Kailash and flows through Dhapa Thoding of Nagari region and becomes Sutlej River flowing through Rampur and Kannuar valley in Himachal Pradesh and then into Punjab from where it flows through Pakistan into Arabian Ocean.

4. The Senge Khabab originates in the west of Kailash and flows through Ngari Gar and then becomes the Indus flowing through Ladakh, Kashmir and then through Pakistan finally into the Arabian Ocean.

This is a brief hydrological chart of Tibet which was necessary to show for better understanding of China-India water issues. As stated above, the immense water resources in Tibet are a critical factor in China's Tibet policy. Further, China's territorial position on Tibet has a significant bearing on the current and future water issues with India, which is a lower riparian vis-a-vis China.

This strategic advantage of China on water resources coupled with the differing positions on Line of Actual Control (LAC) and China's

¹²ISDA Task Force Report, water security for India: the external dynamics, Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, 2010, p.47

claims on the territories that are parts of India further complicate the water issue between the two. However, the more and more complicating problem is that there exist no agreements between China/Tibet pertaining to water resources. There is no reliable information on the present or proposed water related developments and projects in the upper regions of the rivers that flow into India from Tibet have not been addressed.

India being the lower riparian, will be vulnerable to any major storage projects planned on the Yarlung Tsangpo. Due to the political situation between the two countries, it is hard to imagine China playing the role of a responsible upper riparian by releasing re-regulated flows from power houses immediately book into river. China's consumption requirements and long distance transfers of waters will undoubtedly hurt interests not only India but also of Bangladesh¹³. The problem gets more complicated in the absence of international law on shared waters and when one such was attempted, China voted against the convention on the law of the Non-Navigational uses of International water courses in the UN General Assembly in 1997¹⁴. In spite of India and China having entered into agreements in the recent past on sharing of hydrological data for flood control, the Chinese have not been consistent in sharing of the information. In order to build a number of water projects in Tibet including a dam on Brahmaputra, Chinese scientists have recently completed a comprehensive satellite study of cross border Tibetan rivers completed determining their exact sources besides measuring the length of their drainage basins¹⁵ [11]. Besides mapping-out the course of Brahmaputra, the researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) also collected details about the flow of Indus which flows through India and Pakistan and Salween and Irrawaddy rivers, which flow through Burma¹⁶.

Dalai lama

China views that India is treating Dalai Lama in India as government in exile in Dharmasala which is just 200 miles away from China's border. Further, the presence of more than 1, 00,000 Tibetans refugees in India and India's continued willingness to provide shelter to the Dalai Lama is a continued source of irritation in China-India relations. Also China alleged that the Dalai Lama and his associates are provoking the suicides by publicizing a "self-immolation guide" on the internet and "openly encouraging Tibetans within Chinese border to carry out self-immolations" against the China. China accused the Dalai Lama of being behind a self-immolation protest by a Tibetan exile in India during the visit of Chinese president in March 2012 and Chinese Primer in 21 May 2013¹⁷ [12]. So the presence of Dalai Lama and his anti-China Activities in India have negative implications for India-China relations.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that India's long standing border dispute with China particularly China's claims on Arunachal Pradesh through which the river Brahmaputra flows, comes in the way of meaningful

cooperation on the water issues. Here it can be said that border issue and water issues between both the two states is closely interlinked with each other. In future, China is likely to use water as a tool to pressurize India and to exact concessions on boundary question. Thus, water will be the prime issue, apart from the border issues, that will determine the future relations between the two largest states of the world India and China. Besides, there life sustaining rivers coming from Tibet region of China into India will be the major stimulant of cooperating or conflict between the two.

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¹³Ibid, pp. 48-49

¹⁴Ibid, p. 49

¹⁵The times of India, New Delhi, August 24, 2011

¹⁶Ibid

¹⁷The Telegraph, 27 March 2012, Dalai-Lama-behind-Tibet-protest-self-immolation-says-China.html