



"SINO-INDIA CONFLICT IN THE ASIAN CENTURY: THE NEW GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN"



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ABSTRACT

The 2020 Ladakh military face-off between China and India has pushed the unresolved Sino-Indian border conflict into the crosshairs of intense international focus. Key socio-economic and geo-political factors have extended this dangerous conflict beyond a bilateral prism into a regional arc of conflict. Because of the spectacular socio-economic and military rise of China and India, the post-Cold War unipolar liberal international order led by the United States and its geo-political alignments are now confronted with the reality of managing the rise of these two Asian powers. Pakistan finds itself caught at the epicenter of an unstable new power triangle of the US, China and India, while surging Great Power Competition in Asia is beginning to impact both foreign policy and national security outcomes in the region, most significantly so for Islamabad. In this evolving landscape, Pakistan needs to assess the big-picture security metrics of the simmering Sino-India conflict to calibrate an effective policy agenda and response. This essay outlines key strategic contours, emerging risks and policy options for Pakistan in the unfolding Sino-India conflict.

Keywords: India-China standoff, Galwan Valley, Ladakh, Kashmir, Pak-China, Indo-Pak



Introduction

The summer of 2020 will be marked in South Asian history for the unexpectedly violent and game-changing China-India military standoff that erupted on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Galwan Valley of the disputed Ladakh region. On June 15th, tensions spilled into a physical battle fought with stones and batons. It claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers¹ and a colonel, as well as injured several Chinese soldiers,² without the firing of a single shot. Tensions have continued with another face-off recurring in end-August.³ The new area where India and China are now engaged in a stand-off is at the southern bank of Pangong Tso lake, unlike the earlier face-off which was limited to Galwan Valley.⁴

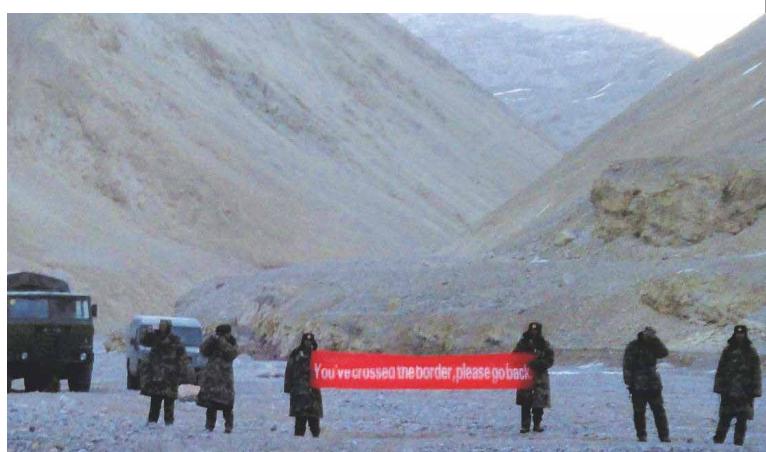
Despite the papering over of the second border conflict in one year, there is little doubt that this year's events have pushed the unresolved Sino-Indian border conflict into the crosshairs of a new phase of dangerous strategic tensions

Looking back, the Sino-Indian war of October 1962 remains the single most violent event in their bilateral history that resulted in nearly 3,000 Indian and 700 Chinese casualties. Over the past five decades, the border dispute has sustained intermittent tensions and face-offs, but has not hampered the parallel growth of an unprecedented economic partnership worth billions of dollars, which is also supported by bilateral and multilateral foreign policy cooperation. This strong interdependence was illustrated in the quick de-escalation that followed the Galwan fight earlier this year, where both sides agreed to an "early and complete disengagement" of troops on the LAC and "de-escalation of border areas to ensure the restoration of peace and smooth relations".⁵ While the more recent stand-off that started on August 29th, at the southern bank of Pangong Tso lake has gone on for longer than a week, and shots were fired for the first time in decades, pragmatism driven in part by economic impetus drove the behavior of the two states as they met to manage the conflict. In a show of smart summetry, the Foreign Ministers of both countries agreed that the current situation in the border areas does not serve the interests of either side. In a joint statement released on September 11, 2020, the two sides publicly aligned themselves on the same page about the need for border troops of both sides to "continue dialogue, quickly disengage, maintain proper distance, and ease tensions".⁶

Despite the papering over of the second border conflict in one year, there is little doubt that this year's events have pushed the unresolved Sino-Indian border conflict into the crosshairs of a new phase of dangerous strategic tensions not just between two nuclear countries but also clear regional rivals. The conflict has also generated intense international attention, principally because the threat of potential rupture in a broadly cooperative relationship that has been carefully curated between the two countries in the last few years has gone up exponentially. At the same time, a number of socio-economic and geo-political factors have extended this conflict beyond a bilateral prism into a regional arc of conflict. At this point, not only does the danger of escalation signal a clear and present threat of territorial conflict, but also spirals up the risk of unpredictability which can trigger a range of unforeseen consequences. In this context of heightened mutual suspicions, the potential volatility of eruptions on unstable borders which are not demarcated or agreed upon, present themselves as ongoing triggers for conflict, creating a hotspot at the confluence of great strategic shifts marking the new geo-political competition in the continent.

This year's violence in Ladakh, therefore, symbolizes the play-out of a new Great Power competition in the heart of Asia. Owing to the phenomenal socio-economic and military rise of China and India in parallel, the post-Cold War unipolar liberal international order led by the United States and its geo-political alignments are now confronted with an emerging reality of managing the rise of the two Asian powers that together hold a quarter of the world's total population. Both have become strategically ambitious and globally assertive in how they project power across a regional and international span of economic, political, structural, and ideological terrain.

Not only does China's dramatic rise pose challenges for American supremacy and power alignments in the region, it has also raised new geo-





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political and geo-economic questions for its Asian neighbors that have hitherto orbited around the US as the preeminent global power. To this effect, the US has made its 'contain China' strategy public. The recently released Pentagon's Annual 2020 report entitled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" demonstrates how sharply Washington D.C. is recalibrating its strategic calculus and capabilities to counter China.⁷

"Given the continuity in the PRC's strategic objectives, the past 20 years offer a harbinger for the future course of the PRC's national strategy and military aspirations. Certainly, many factors will determine how this course unfolds. What is certain is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a strategic end state that it is working towards, which if achieved and its accompanying military modernization left unaddressed, will have serious implications for US national interests and the security of the international rules-based order".⁸

Due to growing anxiety from the US and India about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan is currently confronted with a slew of foreign policy and national security challenges from the fallout of Great Power competition

In this context of rapid change, Pakistan finds itself caught at the epicenter of a new power triangle of the US, China and India. Due to growing anxiety from the US and India about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan is currently confronted with a slew of foreign policy and national security challenges from the fallout of Great Power competition. Despite the changes it has brought in the global balance of power, the new Asian century is clearly not an easy transition for any state. Considering the geographic proximity and the complex relational history shared with each of these powers, Pakistan needs to factor in the essential elements of this competition to ensure protection of its national interests in a rapid re-ordering of the regional and global balance of power.

Three major security dimensions of the evolving Sino-India conflict need to be factored in by Pakistan in order to calibrate an effective policy agenda and response:

- 1) Territorial; 2) Economic; and 3) Geo-Political.

Territorial Security

The Sino-Indian border dispute involves about 13,500 square miles in Ladakh and Aksai Chin and about 35,000 square miles in the north eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China calls South Tibet. The LAC is patrolled by both armies, and there has been no final agreement on its exact location. It is a loose line of demarcation of the disputed area that is divided into three sectors. Its western sector separates the Indian-controlled territory of eastern Ladakh from the Chinese-administered territory of Aksai Chin, which is also claimed by India. Despite signing six bilateral agreements⁹ to reduce the risk of combat, face-offs have remained persistent, with this summer's clash being the deadliest in years (A Historical Timeline of Sino-Indian Border Conflict).⁴¹ China has built a network of roads and tracks on its side of LAC. India is also investing in borderland infrastructure development, though at a slower pace, and it has been consistently opposed by China (see Box 1 with Map: Key Infrastructure Developments on China-India Border).¹⁰

Key infrastructure along India-China border

Projects completed or under construction



Box 1: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53171124>



Chinese analysts view the present conflict not as a usual one-off border skirmish but an "inevitable result" of "India's long-standing speculative strategy" on the border

China's decisive action in Galwan this year was based on an astute reading of India's growing expansionist maneuvers in the regional terrain. The most recent has been the Bharatiya Janata Party government's illegal action on 5 August 2019 of annexing Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & and Kashmir and Ladakh, [IIOJK] as two Union Territories, with the new Indian maps showing Ladakh and Aksai Chin as Indian territories. Chinese analysts view the present conflict not as a usual one-off border skirmish but an "inevitable result" of "India's long-standing speculative strategy" on the border. From Doklam to Kashmir to India's "unending infrastructure arms race" at the LAC, they say, Beijing was "fed up" and "had to teach India a lesson".¹¹ One must remember that as per UN Security Council resolutions, India is in illegal occupation of IIOJK, of which Ladakh is a part.¹²

Facing off a belligerent India, today's hardline Chinese strategists advise practicing the "Three Nos"— "No weakness, No concession and No defensive defence"

While India managed to shape a strong message in the narrative war (domestically and internationally) during the Ladakh fight, it has maintained a posture of cautious ambivalence on the actual status of New Delhi's subsequent border talks with China and status of the current land control on its side of the LAC.¹³ The fact is that China has now reached its claim line of 1959 in the Ladakh sector, causing loss of territory for India, which has withdrawn two kilometers east from ground that it claimed as its own.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, Ladakh has demonstrated China's conventional power over India without deploying artillery or extensive power in air, cyber, space and the electromagnetic spectrums through which it can seriously disrupt, disable and destroy India's communications and Command & Control capabilities at all levels.¹⁵ The Chinese have also articulated their position clearly to a slightly bemused India, which expected perhaps a less aggressive response from the PLA in this round. In fact, facing off a belligerent India, today's hardline Chinese strategists advise practicing the "Three Nos" – "no weakness, no

concession and no defensive defence", as a stabilizer for bilateral relations.¹⁶ Clearly, for Beijing, the US threat is the serious one within which it needs to 'manage' India's aggression:

"Eastern Ladakh, in the larger strategic scheme, is not a tier-one issue for China. Beijing's bigger problem is an aggressive United States. Its moves in Ladakh are more about keeping India under pressure since India's August 5 decision to change the status of occupied Kashmir, including Ladakh. Put another way, Beijing's strategy is to space out its pricks and probes but ensure that the situation does not get out of hand. It's a strategy of slow attrition. It is not without reason that China continues to talk at the military and diplomatic levels. That India does too is a clear signal to Beijing that New Delhi is not looking for a fight but a face-saver".¹⁷

The current, evolving scenario is ripe for putting into practice India's 'two-front war' doctrine that stems from its perceived threat emanating from a China-Pakistan strategic combine

But here's the caveat. At no point should India's muted responses to its Ladakh face-offs with China be mistaken for its acceptance of the current territorial status quo. With the US encouraging India to act as strategic proxy in the region, New Delhi seems determined to militarily engage with China, even as it faces serious budgetary constraints, especially after the economic downturn it faces due to Covid-19.¹⁸ In its Modi-Doval doctrinal approach, New Delhi is preparing to position an additional 35,000 troops along the LAC, which will be in addition to its heavy military commitment at the 742 kilometers of the LoC with Pakistan and its counter-insurgency operations within IIOJK. To prop up its posture of challenging China as emerging regional hegemon, India's additional manpower and hardware commitments in Ladakh will cause increased pressure on its military's operational serviceability, research & development and capital expenditures, which will be difficult to sustain unless New Delhi increases its defense budget.¹⁹

As it stands, the current, evolving scenario is ripe for putting into practice India's 'two-front war' doctrine that stems from its perceived threat emanating from a China-Pakistan strategic combine. To all observers, India is clearly preparing for



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confrontation with both countries on land, in air, and in water, thereby extending the conflict to a 'two-ocean war'. Indian media reports have cited Indian Military, Navy and Air Force build-ups on the Western front with Pakistan, and Northern and Eastern fronts with China.^{20,21} In early September, Indian Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat warned Pakistan against trying to take advantage of the Sino-Indian confrontation in Ladakh: "If any threat develops around our northern borders, Pakistan could take advantage of that and create some trouble for us. Therefore, we have taken adequate precautions to ensure that any such misadventure by Pakistan is thwarted. In fact, Pakistan may suffer heavy losses should it attempt any misadventure".²² India has also renewed its interest in the Quad – the US led Quadrilateral Alliance including Australia, Japan and India, which Washington wants to grow into an anti-Beijing bulwark in the Indo-Pacific. In fact, on September 11, 2020, the Times of India reported that Japan has now become the sixth country, after the US, France, Australia, South Korea, and Singapore, with which India has signed an agreement to "enable military forces to share logistics to support each other's warships and aircraft as well as bolster overall interoperability and defence cooperation".²³ At the same time, it is also clear that none of America's permanent strategic-interest policies will be significantly impacted by a November change in government in Washington, although a second Trump-led Republican term is likely to solidify the bond between India and the US to new heights and perhaps enhance New Delhi's strategic belligerence as well as attempts at economic decoupling of supply chains and economies with China.

In effect then, the post-Balakot regional strategic matrix has now become a trilateral conflict theater in which limited wars between India and Pakistan or India and China could escalate into a bigger regional conflagration between the three nuclear-armed countries. In lieu of New Delhi's inability to strike China, Pakistan should expect to be targeted by India across the LoC as well as its increased support for asymmetrical proxies targeting CPEC security interests across Pakistan's terrain, including Gilgit-Baltistan,

Balochistan and Sindh. The terror attack in June on the Karachi Stock Exchange, where China has a large stake, was ascribed to the Baloch Liberation Army, which has well-documented linkages to Indian intelligence agencies.²⁴ Although this meddling is largely ignored in Western capitals, several cases of Indian espionage including that of Kulbhushan Jadhav have surfaced over the last few years, with BLA insurgents either receiving funding, medical treatment and other facilitation in India.

Economic Security

Three decades ago, China and India had similarly sized economies and spent nearly the same amount on defence. Today, China has shown significant growth in its defence establishment;²⁵ it is the world's manufacturing factory and its GDP is more than five times that of India. China is India's second-largest trading partner after the US, with India importing almost seven times more from China than it exports to it. In 2018-19, India's exports to China were a mere \$16.7 billion, while imports were \$70.3 billion, leaving a trade deficit of \$53.6 billion. India's trade deficit with China stands at 50% of the country's total trade deficit.²⁶

The pandemic effect has of course cut a wide swathe through this economic power-house and its markets, like everywhere else. COVID-19 has weakened the world economies, and countries are struggling to build resilience while finding alternatives to their high dependence on Chinese supply lines. As an early response, India had begun taking protectionist measures on its trade with China even before the Ladakh clash. Yet the actual chronology of growing apart had begun with China's new Belt and Road Initiative, when India had rejected participating in China's big new push to re-shape the Asian economic landscape through investment platforms that exported its growing surplus. In November 2019, China joined 14 countries in agreeing on terms for the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), but India pulled out at the last minute saying the deal would hurt its farmers, businesses, workers and consumers. In April 2020, India amended its foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to tighten scrutiny over foreign

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investments from bordering countries, primarily China (Pakistan and Bangladesh already face restrictions).²⁷

In May 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the beginning of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' -- a new era of economic self-reliance and a push to bring supply chains back home to ensure resilience. Though the new FDI policy does not prohibit Chinese investment, it does point to India's preference to direct the investment to favored sectors and control it. According to the Indian Ministry of Commerce, tighter restrictions on Chinese investment became necessary in order to prevent "opportunistic takeovers" of Indian companies. The scale of Chinese investment power was such that as recently as March 2020, the Chinese central bank had bought a one percent stake in India's largest non-banking mortgage provider, HDFC Bank, bringing its total holdings in the lender to 1.75 percent.²⁸

The Ladakh episode in June 2020 caused an immediate backlash in the economic domain, with New Delhi facing domestic calls to boycott Chinese goods, especially mobile apps²⁹ and electronic goods. But this broad level of chauvinism against China is as much a symptom of India's competitive weakness in the face of the Asian Dragon's economic power as it is about Narendra Modi's political reliance on Indian hyper-nationalism. The important change marking this inflection point is that until today, Chinese investments were poised to acquire controlling stakes in India's e-commerce and tech start-ups. Post-Ladakh, Indian worry has amplified to effective policy concern about the Chinese government's influence over private technology companies' foreign activities, technology transfer, access to sensitive data, Chinese censorship policies, protection of intellectual property rights, data privacy, and national security. Similar to the US trade backlash against China, Indian fears that dependence on Chinese technology for 5G critical infrastructure will make it vulnerable to espionage, sabotage, and blackmail, will have an effect on policy. At the same time, the Indian tech sector's heavy dependence on Chinese investments will not make the break easy or immediate. The exposure list is high: out of India's 30 start-ups that are valued at \$1 billion or more, 18 are recipients of Chinese funding from giants, such as Alibaba and Tencent³⁰ while India's pharma sector is

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also critically dependent on Chinese imports used in drugs manufacturing.

For its part, China has been fairly unresponsive to India's requests to address the huge trade deficit. To the contrary, it has accused India's new FDI policy of being discriminatory and in violation of the World Trade Organization's free trade rules. Unlike, New Delhi, which retains an aggressive and often unpredictable posture in South Asia, Beijing's bid for Eurasian economic leadership has prompted rational messaging and smart diplomacy. Promptly responding to the post-Ladakh, China-boycott campaign, for instance, it counseled India to be 'logical' and to keep trade and investment issues separate from border issues. This is in complete alignment with Beijing's sharply defined agenda of economic growth as a top national and international priority.³¹ The clarity and heft of Beijing's public messaging was reflected across its institutional framework, as despite the Ladakh clash, China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank vowed to remain an "apolitical institution" while continuing extending its support to projects in India.³² In parallel, Beijing stayed on track in the South Asian region by intensifying economic ties with Bangladesh by offering to waive 97% of tariff on 5,161 items that Bangladesh trades with China.³³ It is no coincidence that Bangladeshi media reported a slowing of Indian projects since the re-election of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed in 2019 while Chinese infrastructure projects began receiving more favor from Dhaka.³⁴

On the whole, while the BJP's protectionist economic position on China is in lockstep with its



India bans Chinese apps



Under the rubric of its growing national 'confidence' and 'rising power', India has quickly latched onto the US grand geopolitical and geo-economic strategy of 'containing China' by becoming America's new pivot in Asia

hyper-nationalist narrative, barring new 'black swan' developments, Indian policy actions will not result in a speedy 'de-coupling' of the two economies any time soon. The new FDI policy may give New Delhi some bargaining power in future negotiations with Beijing, principally because Indian markets continue to attract Chinese investments for multiple reasons. But as an emerging trendline, bilateral economic trajectories seem set to follow a path of competition with cooperation. This projection will also influence both countries' security and strategic calculi. The rapid post-Ladakh de-escalation must be seen against these economic realities.

Geo-Political Security

Finally, given that China-India clashes have erupted again after the Ladakh cycle, all territorial and economic security trends must be viewed in the larger geo-political security scenario that is unfolding in the region. New lines are being drawn in shifting sands. Unsurprisingly, New Delhi has adopted a consistent policy articulation against CPEC's 'legality', while upping the drumbeat on its old territorial claims on Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. These deliberate provocations are clearly aimed at the long-standing geo-strategic, political, economic and security partnership between China and Pakistan that has gathered new impetus through increased cooperation in emerging opportunity areas of: i) CPEC, ii) Pakistan's efforts for global counter-terrorism compliance, primarily at FATF, iii) Pakistan's stance on Kashmir, iv) US endgame in Afghanistan, v) and a clear shift in Pakistan's foreign and security policy towards greater regional integration with neighbors.³⁵ Under the rubric of its growing national 'confidence' and 'rising power', India has quickly latched onto the US grand geopolitical and geo-economic strategy of 'containing China' by becoming America's new pivot in Asia.

In this clear post-Nehruvian calculus of alignments, India's strong ties with Russia act as a useful buffer to full-fledged conflict due primarily to Moscow's major stakes for peace in the Eurasian region. Despite all the noise about the pole position America is acquiring with India, in a bid to make the

best of the gains that the new global multipolarity has to offer, Russia has not been dislodged as India's closest partner for its defence and energy (including nuclear energy) needs.³⁶ At the same time, both Russia and China have invested heavily in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (that includes the Central Asian Republics, India and Pakistan), and the Afghanistan peace process. Moscow and Beijing have converged strategically to meet Washington's challenge to their Asia-Pacific security paradigms. They view India as playing a key role in neutralizing the US threat, although limits to this role may emerge in some situations. Arguably, the view that India is not in one fixed camp of allies may be strengthened, especially after the post-Ladakh

The more pragmatic elements in New Delhi's strategic community are beginning to acknowledge the limits of India's capabilities versus its over-blown ambitions

reputational questions that have been raised about India's actual versus projected, capabilities to counter China.³⁷ This includes India's reported intelligence failures to detect Chinese movements ahead of the Ladakh crisis, as well as historical "other intractable issues in India's national security system".³⁸ Additionally, the reported China-Iran \$400 billion framework agreement spanning 25 years for energy plus is another significant geo-political development in the region. Although it is too early to expect failure of Indian strategy to counter CPEC by investing in Iran's Chabahar Port project,³⁹ the latest developments open new opportunities for both China and Pakistan to check threats from a US-India pivot alliance. This can be buttressed by growing stabilization in US-Pakistan ties because of Pakistan's winning facilitation in the Afghanistan peace process, where India has been caught on the strategic back-foot for the moment and is considering its limited options. Hence, New Delhi cannot expect any time soon a clear validation from Washington on its position toward Pakistan, which adds to its insecurity. The more pragmatic elements in New Delhi's strategic community are beginning to acknowledge the limits of India's capabilities versus its over-blown ambitions. As one senior analyst starkly observes:

"India's inability to clearly articulate, identify and address the Chinese threat is also a function of another sobering realization within the establishment regarding the limited utility when it comes to Euro-American assistance in checking China in South Asia. In an international system that is preoccupied with the



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domestic political, economic and public health worries of COVID-19, there is little enthusiasm to resolutely stand by India in pushing back China. The unpredictability of US President Donald Trump adds to Indian woes, and until a new President is sworn in, in January 2021, Washington DC's ability to make up its mind and act on it vis-à-vis China-India affairs would be limited. New Delhi does recognize this lukewarm global mood, and so does Beijing. Picking a fight with China, therefore, is not the wisest strategy; obfuscating the exact nature of the China threat is indeed a much better strategy".⁴⁰

Securing Pakistan's Interests: Need for a Pragmatic Policy Outlook

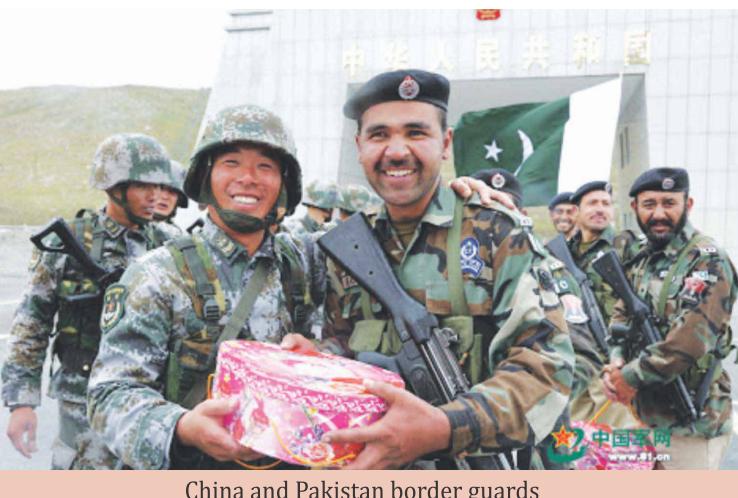
For Pakistan to safeguard its national security interests from territorial, economic and geo-political risks, Islamabad must astutely read the emerging trendlines on strategic thinking in China, India, US, Russia, Iran and other key players. China's strategy towards India appears to be driven by a dual objective to maintain border status quo by making India retreat without a military conflict, and to not push it towards the US by maintaining a strong economic partnership⁴¹. Both inside India and more so, outside, a significant degree of political capital has been lost due to the Modi

While an Indian compulsion for restraint with Beijing in the near term is very obvious, it does not preclude almost zero Indian appetite for normalization of ties with Pakistan

regime's muted response to the Ladakh crisis. However, the spike in the BJP's officially stoked ultra-nationalism suggests that Islamabad should not be sanguine about India's new revisionism. While an Indian compulsion for restraint with Beijing in the near term is very obvious, it does not preclude almost zero Indian appetite for normalization of ties with Pakistan.

Despite the Covid-19 setback, the connectivity options now open to China are increasingly viewed in zero-sum containment models by American-Indian policy influencers. Given their growing anxiety, Pakistan should expect, and game for more hostility at multilateral forums on CPEC as well as Kashmir. Pragmatically, Islamabad must neither claim premature strategic victories in Afghanistan, nor must it view China as a sole guarantor for its security. By doing so, Pakistan will risk underestimating the complex nature of the Sino-India relationship that largely propels Beijing to maintain a careful balancing act between its ally, Islamabad and its rival, New Delhi. China is also a traditionally restrained actor at multilateral forums, which is why Pakistan must not test its one strategic ally and friend with more diplomatic battles than it has the appetite for.

As the Afghan transition stutters to a messy endgame for America, which is quite likely given the nature of the US-Taliban bargain, a different level of harm to Islamabad's stakes in regional peace may emerge. Although Pakistan stands to gain nothing if intra-Afghan talks don't take root in a more inclusive governance model, when violence surges – which is inherent to the conditions – New Delhi will likely use all its soft power via American interlocutors to advance the view of a hostile and sponsored Taliban-Pakistan 'partnership'.



China and Pakistan border guards

A surge of big-power maritime competition in Asia, with the potential to flare up into littoral warfare from the Malacca to the Hormuz Straits may also impact many shorelines and policy choices



Given India's heightened unpredictability, sharpened in the context of multipolar bids for hegemony in the Indian Ocean and West Pacific regions, Pakistan should game all potential border responses.

With India acquiring a non-permanent seat at the UNSC, its lobbying against Pakistan will be amplified this round, both in defence of unilateralism in IIOJK, but also against Pakistan. Advocacy for harsh terminology on Pakistan's alleged state-terrorism as a tool is now being normalized at international forums, and the institutional effort for inserting it into multilateral instruments and reports against Pakistan is already ramping up. These are important because they impact country-status from areas as diverse as human rights, trade, terror-financing, nuclear security and other qualifier benchmarks.

A surge of big-power maritime competition in Asia, with the potential to flare up into littoral warfare from the Malacca to the Hormuz Straits may also impact many shorelines and policy choices. After the LAC standoff with China, India has increased its surveillance posture in the Indian Ocean Region as a key member of the Quad. With India's growing naval aggression and blue-water build-up, Pakistan must guard its flank. Given India's heightened unpredictability, sharpened in the context of multipolar bids for hegemony in the Indian Ocean and West Pacific regions, Pakistan should game all potential border responses.

Beyond its traditional security considerations, however, Pakistan must now fully embrace its economic development agenda that is premised on increased regional connectivity and cooperation with its neighbors. This is also a consistent message from a market-focused Beijing, which prioritizes the success of its BRI and CPEC initiatives and will not allow escalation of conflict to derail them. China seems inclined to contain itself in pursuit of its economic interests therefore, a greater role for China in the Kashmir question remains a hope, and hope is not a strategy.

Lastly, Pakistan must commission an internal overhaul of its policy-making agility, domestic political unity challenges and external narrative ambitions. A country's ability to project power in the 21st century is as much related to its economic strength and the state of its public and cultural institutions as it is to its military prowess. So far, Islamabad's track record in shaping smart policy responses is limited principally by its own diplomatic lethargy and economic fragility, not strategic planning.

Senator Sherry Rehman has served as the Leader of Opposition in Senate, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States and Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting. She is the Founding Chair and serving President of the Jinnah Institute, Chair of the Climate Change Caucus in Parliament, Chair of the CPEC Committee in Senate.

NOTES

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41.

<p>1947-1962</p> <p>China builds 1,200-kilometre road connecting Xinjiang and western Tibet. 179 kilometres run south of the Johnson Line through the Aksai Chin region claimed by India. It eventually escalates into the Sino-Indian War in October 1962, leading to nearly 3,000 casualties from the Indian side, and 700 from the Chinese.</p> <p>1975</p> <p>Indian and Chinese armies clash at Tuling La, Tawang district of the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. Four Indian soldiers are killed.</p> <p>JUNE 2017</p> <p>A military standoff occurs in the disputed territory of Doklam, near the Doka La pass along the Sikkim and the Bhutan border. China brings heavy road-building equipment to the Doklam region and begins constructing a road. This results in the Indian intervention of China's road construction.</p> <p>MAY 5, 2020</p> <p>Indian and Chinese soldiers clash at Pangong Tso, the lake that extends from Ladakh to the Tibetan Autonomous Region, China, with the LAC passing through it. A video shows soldiers from both nations engaged in fistfights and stone-pelting along the LAC.</p> <p>1914</p> <p>Britain, the Republic of China and Tibet gather in Shimla to negotiate a treaty for the status of Tibet and settle the borders between China and British India. The Chinese refuse to sign the deal. But Britain and Tibet sign a treaty establishing the McMahon Line, which India maintains is the official legal border between China and India. But China has never accepted it.</p> <p>1967</p> <p>The Nathu La and Cho La clashes begin on September 11, 1967, when the Chinese army reportedly attacks an Indian post at Nathu La, a mountain pass in the Himalayas in the East Sikkim state.</p> <p>APRIL 2013</p> <p>India says Chinese troops establish a camp in the Daulat Beg Oldi sector, 10 km (6.2 mi) on their side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border between the two countries. This figure is to be later revised to a 19-km (11.8-mi) claim. Soldiers from both countries briefly set up camps facing each other, but the tension is defused when both sides pull back.</p> <p>AUGUST 2017</p> <p>An incident occurs at Pangong Tso or the Pangong Lake, at an altitude of about 14,271 feet. Several soldiers on both sides sustain injuries. Indian media reports that around 72 Indian soldiers are injured in the confrontation.</p> <p>MAY 10, 2020</p> <p>Faceoff at the Muguthang Valley in Sikkim. Several troops numbering 11 men are left slightly injured in the encounter, of which seven are Chinese soldiers and four Indian ones.</p>	<p>MAY 21, 2020</p> <p>Chinese troops enter into the Galwan River valley in Ladakh region, citing objections to Indian road construction. The road under construction is said to branch off from the Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi Road and lead into the Galwan valley.</p> <p>JUNE 15, 2020</p> <p>An Indian colonel and 19 soldiers are killed in a "violent face-off" with the Chinese troops at the Galwan Valley. Indian army sources say the soldiers have not been shot but killed in a physical fight that involved stones and batons. A meeting held at Major General level of both armies. The meeting is claimed to have brought the situation on the ground under control.</p> <p>JUNE 21, 2020</p> <p>The Indian Army changes its rules of engagement on the LAC by enabling its field commanders to order troops to use firearms under "extraordinary" conditions. India grants emergency financial powers of up to Rs5bn per procurement project to the three defence services to acquire weapons.</p> <p>JUNE 26, 2020</p> <p>The strategic 'Y Nalla' near the Shyok-Galwan axis has become the new frontier for Indian and Chinese troops after the construction of a new post and infrastructure in Galwan Valley is believed to have cut-off the traditional access to Patrol Point-14 on LAC.</p> <p>JULY 6, 2020</p> <p>Amid tensions, IAF conducts night time operations in east Ladakh. The disengagement of troops of China and India is reported to have begun following intensive diplomatic, military talks.</p> <p>AUGUST 29-31, 2020</p> <p>Disturbances at Pangong Tso Lake. India claims that it was an attempt by China to change the status quo. Chinese officials retort by stating that India attempted to cross the LAC at 2 points in Pangong Tso and Rechin Pass.</p> <p>SEPTEMBER 8, 2020</p> <p>According to Indian sources, soldiers of PLA open fire near the Pangong Lake in Ladakh. Indian troops fire back in retaliation as a warning, following which the skirmish doused down.</p>
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