

The Great Power ‘Great Game’ between India and China: ‘The Logic of Geography’

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The simultaneous rise of China and now India is a fundamental factor for understanding the twenty-first century. In rising as Great Powers, a relative term, they are coming up against each other across Asia and its surrounding waters. Traditional geopolitical models, Mackinder, Spykman and Mahan point to their spatial politics around Central Asia, South Asia, Pacific Asia and the Indian Ocean. Actual spatial settings are combined with perceived spatial outlooks. These powerful neighbouring states seek to continue rising, and constrain the other where necessary through mutual encirclement and alliances/proxies. This type of ‘Great Game’ is evident in the military-security, diplomatic and economic areas. Globalisation has not replaced regionalism, nor has geoeconomics replaced geopolitics. The stakes are high as is their need for securing access to energy resources for their economics-led rise to Great Power status. Some cooperation is evident, in line with IR liberalism-functionalism. However, geopolitical IR realism and security dilemma perceptions still shape much of their actions.

In recent years, the ‘rise of China’ has become a frequently evoked term of reference, as has the ‘rise of India’.¹ There may still be debate over exactly how far they have risen, and about their precise Great Power status, but at the very least one can say that theirs is a significant relationship since they are both now significant powers. Both have “widening geopolitical horizons”, yet as adjacent major states “they both strive to stamp their authority on the same region”²

Geopolitics starts off here in its straightforward ‘classical’ sense, the way in which geography affects politics, or rather international politics.

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Osterud's summary remains useful, that "in the abstract, geopolitics traditionally indicates the links and causal relationships between political power and geographic space . . . in concrete terms . . . the geopolitical tradition had some consistent concerns, like the geopolitical correlates of power in world politics, the identification of international core areas, and the relationships between naval and terrestrial capabilities".³ Geopolitics is important for understanding Sino-Indian dynamics; overlapping "territory and location" are at stake; "space matters" for them, not just "contingently" but also "necessarily"; there is "spatial ontology at play".⁴ Agnew's general geopolitical sense of Great Powers' "pursuit of primacy" is in play between India and China, official rhetoric notwithstanding.⁵ As India's Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha admitted, China and India needed to "try to ensure that each has sufficient strategic space".⁶ However their 'strategic space' is in various ways the same spatial arena, i.e., Pacific Asia, South Asia, the Indian Ocean and Central Asia. Both states are engaged in "mastering space", directly and indirectly, and at times in competition with each other.⁷ In India, successive Foreign Affairs Ministers have used geopolitics frameworks in describing Sino-Indian relations. Jaswant Singh asked in 1999, "How do you alter geography? We are neighbours. . . . There are difficulties"; and Shyam Saran considered in 2006 that it is in "Asia, where the interests of both India and China intersect . . . the logic of geography is unrelenting".⁸

Amidst these intersecting interests, something of a 'Great Game' seems at play between these two rising powers. The 'Great Game' was originally coined in the nineteenth century to describe the geopolitical rivalry between the Russian and British Empires, a 'New Great Game' has been often associated with current Central Asia. As Edwards points out this term can be overused, and become a "misleading analogy" if equated to just the nineteenth-century Great Game of classic imperialism, territorial annexations and secret agents.⁹ However the term is still usable in connection with the current Sino-Indian relationship. The original Great Game saw Britain and Russia manoeuvring and intriguing against each other across most of Asia at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from the Gulf to the Pacific – as do India and China at the start of the twenty-first.¹⁰ Meanwhile, as Edwards notes, "The concept of a New Great Game has been used as shorthand for competition in influence, power, hegemony and profits".¹¹ However, 'competition in influence, power, hegemony', though perhaps not 'profits' was also at stake in the original Great Game. Crucially for our purposes, such 'competition in influence, power, hegemony and profits' is at stake in the current Sino-Indian relations – and it is in this sense, that the Sino-Indian relationship has become described as another Great Game, particularly by Indian media commentators and political analysts.¹²

One geopolitical difference is that the original Great Game between the Russian and British Empires was land-focused, with particular emphasis on the overland threat to British India from Central Asia. It is not for nothing

that Edwards calls the “new great gamers” in Central Asia “disciples of . . . Mackinder”, pointing as that area does to Mackinder’s Eurasian “Heartland” as the “pivot of History”.¹³ Admittedly from India’s viewpoint, her spatial awareness, some similarities might be felt on the one hand between the previous threat posed to British India by Russia’s control of Central Asia and on the other hand the current challenge posed by China’s grip on Xinjiang and Tibet, her growing influence in ex-Soviet Central Asia and close land links with Pakistan. Mackinder’s famous dictum still has some resonance, “Who rules the [Eurasian] Heartland commands the World Island; Who rules the World Island commands the World”. Spykman’s later refinements, concerning the role of the Eurasian Rimland (China and India) also come to mind, and his own maxim “Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia rules the world”.¹⁴ Although both Mackinder and Spykman had concerns about a Russian/Soviet hold on the Eurasian heartland, China could fulfil a similar role. Indeed according to Mackinder, “Were the Chinese . . . to overthrow the Russian Empire and conquer its territory, they might constitute the Yellow Peril to the world’s freedom just because they could add an oceanic frontage to the resources of the great continent”.¹⁵ “Oceanic” elements are also a geopolitical factor in the Sino-Indian relationship, evoking Mahan and his emphasis on “sea-power”; his sea-power as enabling power projection and control of SLOCs, the Sea Lines of Communication.¹⁶ If one looks at the Sino-Indian relationship, commentators and military figures on both sides have evoked Mahan at various points; indeed “Mahan seems to be alive and well and living in Asia”.¹⁷ Elements of Mackinder’s (Heartland), Spykman’s (Rimland) and Mahan’s (Oceanic) paradigms operate for Sino-Indian relations, despite Thompson’s dismissal of these figures as redundantly “old fashioned”.¹⁸

As states on the rise, China and India face each other in the international system, spatially and power-wise. Kelly’s definition is particularly appropriate, that “Geopolitics is a foreign policy approach and an international relations theory that stresses an awareness of relative position among countries and a corresponding response of statesmen to advantages and vulnerabilities that territorial and maritime space may bring to foreign affairs and national security”.¹⁹ Geopolitics is involved in their spatial relationship, with ‘critical geopolitics’ adding further refinements in terms of ‘spatial discourses’ through considering what spatial perceptions of themselves and of the other are in play.²⁰ This overlaps with International Relations’ *constructivism* theory and its focus on the role of images. International Relations theory presents ambiguous pointers though for the Sino-Indian relationship. IR *liberalism-functionalism* argues that states are naturally cooperative, tending to reach common interests in bilateral and multilateral settings. Conversely, IR *realism* argues that states are naturally competitive, with someone like Mearsheimer combining geopolitics and realism paradigms.²¹ Attitudes of optimistic cooperative engagement (IR *liberalism-functionalism*) and of

pessimistic antagonistic containment (IR *realism*) are discernible in both countries, with mixtures in between of pragmatic ‘constrainment’ or ‘con-
 gement’.²² Government rhetoric currently stresses cooperative dynamics,
 yet “the dominant *Gestalt* dominant among both Chinese and Chinese ana-
 lysts is an image of competition and rivalry” between the two powers.²³
 One Chinese voice, Chung Ch’ien-peng, argues that “even if the territorial
 dispute were resolved, India and China would still retain a competitive rela-
 tionship in the Asia-Pacific region, being as they are, two Asiatic giants
 aspiring to Great Power status”.²⁴ The key remains to a large extent spatially
 focused, ontologically and perceptually, ‘where’ they are both rising and
 impacting in and around Asia, at which point one can well ask, ‘How do
 you alter geography?’ Three fields are involved: military-security, economic
 and diplomatic.

MILITARY-SECURITY FIELDS

Both these rising powers have been increasing their military strength in
 power terms, deploying it more widely according to strategic effectiveness,
 and in doing so have attempted a degree of geopolitical encirclement
 against each other.

China’s Encirclement of India

Containment of India has been “China’s Great Game”.²⁵ As Zhang
 Guihong admitted, “An emerging India does mean a strong competitor for
 China from South, West, Southeast and Central Asia to Indian and Pacific
 Oceans where their interests and influences will clash”.²⁶ India’s military
 and security perception of China has long been one of deep distrust, cur-
 rent official rhetoric notwithstanding. ‘China Threat’ perceptions in the
 USA and Japan were mirrored in India during the 1990s.²⁷ This was evi-
 dent in India’s nuclear explosions in 1998, where Defence Minister
 Fernandes famously asserted, “China is potential threat number one . . .
 China is and is likely to remain the primary security challenge to India in
 the medium and long-term . . . the potential threat from China is greater
 than that from Pakistan and any person who is concerned about India’s
 security must agree with that”.²⁸ Similarly, the Indian Prime Minister
 Vajpayee explained to US President Clinton that the tests had been neces-
 sary due to China being “an overt nuclear state on our borders, a state that
 committed armed aggression against India in 1962”, with whom “an atmo-
 sphere of distrust persists”.²⁹ However China’s own growth in power has
 been worryingly exacerbated for India by China’s wider presence around
 India on sea and land; for Khanwal (1999) Chinese activities “clearly
 indicate that concerted efforts are underway aimed at the strategic

encirclement of India . . . quite obviously designed to marginalise India in the long-term and reduce India to the status of a sub-regional power . . . it [China] is unlikely to countenance India's aspirations to become a major regional power in the Asia-Pacific region".³⁰ This sense of strategic encirclement remains high for Indian analysts.³¹ China's perceived spatial threat to India is through four avenues: its own land frontier, its land links with India's neighbours, its own maritime presence in the Indian Ocean, and its maritime links with India's neighbours – power projection from China itself and through its "strategic proxies".³²

To the north, China's encirclement of India starts in the distance where China's direct control of Xinjiang is complemented by her growing position in ex-Soviet Central Asia, a development which has caused discomfort in Indian circles.³³ More immediately comes China's direct hold on Tibet since 1950. Vatikiotis argues, "Luckily, geography makes it hard for China and India to confront one another. The Himalayas pose a formidable barrier to military adventurism in either direction, which explains why the month-long border war the two countries fought in 1962 ended in stalemate".³⁴ His argument contains two flaws. First, it did not end in stalemate; Chinese forces decisively ejected and defeated Indian forces wherever encountered and it was Chinese forces that decided where to draw their Lines of Control when the fighting ceased. Second, the Himalayas do not pose any fundamental barrier to military operations from Chinese-held Tibet against India, especially in an age of missiles and with China holding the heights. Tibet was part of the original Great Game, and recognised as a potent base for airpower by British strategists in 1946.³⁵

This is no hypothetical point, for China's strategic advantage has become even more pronounced with their current military build-up in Tibet. Permanent long-distance highways and railway lines have been built. The questions surrounding their construction have been recognised by Indian strategists as significant, a "strategic challenge".³⁶ Tibetan "road and access issues are classic geopolitics" in which "roads and connectivity are crucial issues around which nations [China] develop strategic plans" but which cause "anxiety though at the same time" to India.³⁷ The opening of the Lhasa to Golmund railway in summer 2006 has been seen by Indian analysts as "China's strategic masterstroke"; as "the most important strategic development since the 1950s. It alters the military balance" in China's favour and enables significantly greater and quicker "feeder" facilities for China's military supplies and garrisons and airfields.³⁸ Missile systems have been installed, irrelevant to quelling domestic discontent inside Tibet, but pointing towards the north Indian heartland, the capital Delhi and other major Indian cities like Calcutta. Such "power projection" makes "India vulnerable to Chinese pressure".³⁹ Installation of medium range missiles lets the PRC immediately and easily threaten India, whereas the main centres of China, like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, remain far away from India.

China's land threat from the north has been extended downwards through its 'all-weather friendship' with Pakistan, a link symbolised by the Karakorum Highway, currently being upgraded, which "concretizes an enduring Sino-Pakistani alliance. It also installs China as a major player in South Asia".⁴⁰ Pakistan originally gravitated towards China as a counterweight to India's greater adjacent strength. This enabled China to threaten India's northern flank from Tibet, her western flank through West Pakistan, and her eastern flank through East Pakistan. Whilst China could not prevent the breakaway of East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971, she was able to provide significant help to Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Pakistan's 1998 bomb was in many respects China's bomb.⁴¹ Pakistan's recent emphasis on its role as a 'land corridor' for China, upgrades China's land access from its central Asian hinterland and continues to outflank India on the western land approaches. 2004 saw China's first joint military exercises on land with Pakistan, in Xinjiang.⁴²

At sea, China's "oceanic offensive", her drive for a blue water fleet and her application of Mahan have brought her into the Indian Ocean.⁴³ This was already apparent in 1993 with Zhao Nanqi, PRC General Staff, arguing "we can no longer accept the Indian Ocean as only an ocean of the Indians".⁴⁴ Consequently, Hari Sud notes, "The Indian Chinese are also slowly moving into the Indian Ocean . . . the Indian Ocean is not a Chinese Lake", an assertion but also a fear.⁴⁵ Since 1999 Chinese naval vessels have been making calls around the littoral, at Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan and South Africa, all part of what Sakhuja has called "Chinese creeping assertiveness in the Indian Ocean" to test its strategic reach.⁴⁶ As India's Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Arun Prakash, delicately put it, "We wonder what their [Chinese] long-term intentions are – this is a legitimate area for speculation".⁴⁷ China's 'string of pearls' strategy focuses around the establishment of a series of access points in and across the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, challenging India's own Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and her general control, a "new game" for Mohan.⁴⁸

To the east of India, China's maritime challenge to India starts with the Malacca Straits. As India has moved forward to project its presence and 'guardianship' of the area, the PRC has been trying to circumvent this through discussions with Thailand on building a canal across the isthmus of Kra. This would directly link the South China Sea to the Bay of Bengal, and bypass the Malacca Strait. China's burgeoning links with Myanmar are well established on land but also at sea, the source of long-established Indian concerns.⁴⁹ Base facilities have been established at Sittwe, along with various intelligence posts in the Coco Islands, and elsewhere. From India's point of view this is highly disturbing. In Prakash's eyes, "It is not for us to say whom Myanmar should choose as her friends or allies. However, it would cause us considerable concern if any outside power [i.e., China] were to find its way into the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea through Myanmar, since this is an area of vital

interest to us".⁵⁰ China has also developed military links with energy-resource rich Bangladesh, including a comprehensive *Defense Cooperation Agreement* in December 2002.⁵¹ China's involvement in building a deep-water port entry at Chittagong has also raised Indian eyebrows, the defence pact with Bangladesh able to be invoked to allow use of the harbours at Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar as well as refuelling facilities for PRC aircraft.

To the south of India, China's oil exploration in Sri Lanka, her development of port and bunker facilities at Hambantota, growing bilateral trade and increased military cooperation with Sri Lanka "are causes of worry to Indian policy makers".⁵² Hambantota forms part of "China's strategic triangle" around India, an involvement in India's "backyard".⁵³ China has also made its influence felt in the Maldivian islands, a crucial link between China's presence in the Arabian Sea (Pakistan) and in the Bay of Bengal (Myanmar and Bangladesh). Direct "intrigue" and rivalry is evident between India and China with regard to the Maldives.⁵⁴ Local commentators have speculated, amidst diplomatic visits between the Maldives, the PRC, and India, that "a great game is on between India and China to take Maldives in its sphere of influence for the control of the Indian Ocean region . . . India and China both are keen to woo Maldives for their strategic interests".⁵⁵ China seemingly negotiated a deal with the Maldives from 1999 to build a naval base in Marao. This quasi-secret base deal was finalised after two years of negotiations when the Chinese prime minister, Zhu Rongji, visited the Maldives in May 2001. An airbase at Gan would complete the picture for China. Hu Jintao's visit to the Seychelles in February 2007 raised further Indian eyebrows. A "balance of power game" between India and China is entwined with geo-political location in these areas surrounding India.⁵⁶

To the west, Pakistan has long been the lynchpin of China's presence in South Asia, on land but also at sea. In 2005, China also conducted its first joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean with Pakistan, the first outside PRC territorial waters. Chinese maritime "Grand Strategy" is most evident at Gwadar, "China's pearl in Pakistan's waters" situated on Pakistan's far western shores, looking towards the entrance of the oil-rich Gulf, and capable of offering ongoing berthing facilities for the Chinese navy.⁵⁷ This deep-water port was opened in March 2007, with 80% of Phase-1 costs met by the PRC. In this context, one can note the question raised by India's Chief of Naval Staff, Arun Prakash, "China has provided massive assistance for construction of the Gwadar deep-sea port on Pakistan's Makaran coast. One can only wonder if there will be a quid pro quo for this support".⁵⁸ The understanding seems to be that it will operate as "China's naval outpost on the Indian Ocean".⁵⁹

India's Encirclement of China

Such encirclement moves by China have been recognised as such in India, with the perception that "China presents the biggest geopolitical test".⁶⁰

India has responded to this strategic nightmare posed by China's military encirclement in two ways. First, India has been building up its own nuclear and conventional military strength, "modernising its own military and enhancing its power projection. This is [to match] what China has [already] done".⁶¹ Second, India has achieved some degree of land and sea encirclement of China. This is probably not as much as China's encirclement of India, but nevertheless evident enough. Any encirclement strategy has been 'officially' denied by the Indian government. Nevertheless, the Indian media and Indian commentators have been quick to discern the encirclement outcomes, and presumably intention, of a whole series of Indian deployments and augmentations of strength around China. Although China has generally not officially commented on such moves, PRC domestic literature does by contrast show much more "critical comments" and perceptions of India's aims cutting across those of China.⁶²

On land, India has been attempting to improve its infrastructure along her disputed northern border with China, thereby enabling more effective future deployment of military power.⁶³ India continues to assert its preeminence in Nepal, though worried about Maoist groups. India also continues to give refuge to the Tibetan government in exile at Dharmashala. Further around China's land frontiers, post-Taliban Afghanistan has seen an Indian "geo-strategic" political and economic presence established, and noticed by Beijing.⁶⁴ Indeed, calls are currently being made for Indian troops to be committed alongside the more overt US-NATO military forces.⁶⁵ For India, all this obviously brings Afghanistan in against Pakistan and reduces terrorism activities, but it also gives India another friendly voice on China's frontier, its "broader agenda" there.⁶⁶ Some Indian military penetration can be seen in Tajikistan to the north of Afghanistan. India's "military shadow" was first seen in 2002 with Indian "defence advisers" quietly setting up an airbase at Farkhor, near the border with Afghanistan.⁶⁷ An overt military presence was established at Aini airbase, to be operated from Spring 2007 by Tajikistan, Russia and India.⁶⁸ Tajikistan gives India a further friendly voice on China's border. Finally, India has established military openings with Mongolia. Bilateral military exercises took place in Mongolia in 2004, were reinforced with more bilateral exercises in 2006 in India and 2007 in Mongolia, and were seen by some analysts as a balancing move "to counter China".⁶⁹ Russian and Chinese influences remain more evident there, but nevertheless Chinese sources were quick to pick up the "most notably . . . prolonged meetings" taking place, and how Indian-Mongolian discussions over base facilities "will add to India's overseas muscle".⁷⁰ Generally one should not overestimate such military appearances by India; they are modest and overshadowed by the much more evident Russian, Chinese and American presences across the region. Nevertheless they are a new development for India, part of the jigsaw puzzle in which, "as a small but not insignificant player in the 'New Great Game' in Central Asia", India is asserting

its geopolitical "interests beyond its immediate neighborhood", which in part bring it up against China's interests.⁷¹

China may have land superiority over India, but India probably has the maritime edge, e.g., aircraft carriers. Her infrastructure has been strengthened; her more northerly command centres shared with commercial shipping at Mumbai and Visakhapatnam have been supplemented with two new purely naval deep-sea port facilities on the southwest coast at Kavar and on the southeast coast some 50 kilometres south of Visakhapatnam. Both bases will enable Indian power to be felt further around the Indian Ocean, and thereby enable India to more easily cut China's Sea Lanes of Communication between the Persian Gulf and Straits of Malacca. The extension and build-up of Campbell Airport on Great Nicobar island gives India the chance to strike against the southern and central Chinese zones, avoiding the geographical problems for India of trans-Himalayan operations. 2005 saw the setting up of India's Far Eastern Naval Command (FENC), at Port Blair in the Andaman Island. The islands look westwards back to India and the Eastern Naval Command at Visakhapatnam, thereby securing the whole Bay of Bengal as a consequence. They also look eastwards, to Southeast Asia and the South China Sea; indeed they geographically pull India into Southeast Asia, being in between Indonesia and Myanmar. India's MILAN naval operations with Southeast Asian neighbours have been a regular feature of its Bay of Bengal operations since 1995, buttressed still further by the quadrilateral naval exercises conducted by the Indian navy with American, Japanese, Australian and Singaporean units in September 2007, near the Andaman Islands, close to China's monitoring stations at Coco Islands and near the strategic Strait of Malacca.

Here, India has been edging further and further eastwards. India's proposals to take a lead in security operations along the Malacca Straits has been raised, though the sensitivities of smaller states to such potential control of SLOCs remains discernible. One key player is tiny Singapore, at the tip of the Malacca Straits, facing northwestwards towards India and northeastwards towards China. Despite Singapore's Chinese ethnic background, she has pursued close military-security cooperation with India since 1994, strengthened with their *Defence Cooperation Agreement* of 2003. A significant message was sent in 2005 when the India-Singapore SIMBEX naval exercises took place, not in their usual Bay of Bengal/Malacca Straits setting, but eastwards in the South China Sea, an area claimed by China. Other Indian naval deployments into the South China Sea were carried out in 2000, 2003 and 2004. Indian commentators were happy enough to see them as challenge and containment of China.⁷² PRC sources expressed unease; India in Mahan-style was "stepping up navy building or enhancing its ability to control the ocean . . . in an effort to hinder China, the Indian navy will enter the South China Sea".⁷³ By 2004 PRC sources were warning "world powers such as . . . India have increased their military infiltration in the

South China Sea regions. . . . The situation allows no room for optimism” over China’s undisturbed hegemony in these waters.⁷⁴

Indian links with Vietnam, nestled in what Karnad sees as “China’s ‘soft underbelly’”, have further extended India’s presence and Chinese concerns, Kapila’s “China factor” as an underpinning “strategic calculus of India and Vietnam”.⁷⁵ Both Vietnam and India have unresolved territorial disputes with China, both have China as a looming northern land neighbour, and both have faced war with China (India in 1962, Vietnam in 1979). Moves towards military cooperation were already evident by the mid-1980s.⁷⁶ An initial India-Vietnam defence agreement in 1994 was further strengthened by a joint protocol on defence cooperation in March 2000 which included sharing of strategic threat perceptions and intelligence. Naval exercises between India and Vietnam in 2000, not surprisingly, drew protests from China. India would be hard pressed to send any effective land aid to Vietnam in the event of another Sino-Vietnamese war; but then China found it difficult to inflict any decisive blow against Vietnam during its failed punitive war against Vietnam in 1979. However naval cooperation does seem a rising factor, with India’s aircraft carrier power able to enter the strategic equation. Karnad’s analysis from the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi remains fresh. On the one hand discussions are underway for the transfer of India’s new Brahmo medium-range missiles to Vietnam, in Karnad’s view “to keep the Chinese navy on the defensive in the South China Sea”.⁷⁷ Meanwhile other discussions have taken place on naval berthing rights for Indian ships, possibly at Cam Ranh deep-water bay. In the 1980s this had been a Soviet base and the scene for Chinese fears of encirclement.

Karnad welcomed reports of such discussion, “to allow the Indian navy a basing option in Cam Ranh bay, unarguably the finest natural deep water harbour in Asia, to match the planned Chinese naval presence in Gwadar on the Baluchistan coast”.⁷⁸ Generally, geopolitical reciprocity could be applied: “By cultivating a resolute Vietnam as a close regional ally and security partner in the manner China has done Pakistan, India can pay back Beijing in the same coin”, for there was a “Vietnam card” able to be played against China.⁷⁹ Kapila used the visit of Vietnam’s Prime Minister to India in April 2007, to similarly argue for India deploying Vietnam, in the way that China has deployed Pakistan, as a geographic pressure point on the flank of the other.⁸⁰

Such has been India’s projection into this region that Daly noted that in future Taiwan scenarios, “China must also take into account the growing naval power of its nearest significant military rival, India”.⁸¹ Japan’s maritime exercises with the Indian navy in the Indian Ocean have been mirrored by India’s maritime exercises with the Japanese navy in East Asia. The outlines of a geopolitically orientated naval web can be seen running from Japan-Taiwan-Vietnam-Singapore-India’s Eastern Command. Behind this immediate mesh stands India’s developing naval links with Australia, and even more so her developing close links and sustained operations (including

aircraft carriers) with the powerful US naval force structure in the Indian Ocean, and indeed in the Pacific as well. A 'quadrilateral alliance', and military-security convergence, between the USA, Japan, Australia and India is emerging to some extent. It is of some significance that whereas India starting sending observers to America's RIMPAC naval exercises off Hawaii in 2004 and 2006, China did not. India's future full-blown participation in these exercises is likely; the PRC's is not. India's deployment of a powerful long-range five-ship flotilla into Southeast Asia and East Asia, from March to April 2007, was a significant signal to China, including as it did war-game exercises with the US forces between Okinawa and Guam, further trilateral TRILATEX 07 exercises with Japanese and American naval units off the western coast of Japan, bilateral exercises with the Vietnamese navy, and passage through the South China Sea.

THE DIPLOMATIC FIELD

Meanwhile, both India and China have been engaged in vigorous diplomatic efforts to spread their presence into the other's backyard. Regional organisations across Asia have become the board for their rivalry, "locked in a bitter struggle for Pan-Asian leadership" in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which "symbolize their jostling for power".⁸² Competition in and through regional organisations were not a feature of the nineteenth-century Great Game between the British and Russian Empires, since they did not exist, but this is a feature of Sino-Indian relations. Globalisation has not erased regionalism, where Sino-Indian geopolitical dynamics remain evident.

On the one hand India has long been pre-eminent in SAARC, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, set up in 1985. Ironically India's very size, 75%-odd of SAARC's area and population, has made other countries wary of ceding too much power to the organisation. 2005 saw India lobbying for Afghanistan's inclusion in SAARC, but Pakistan turned the tables by making Afghanistan's entry conditional on China being granted observer status in SAARC. Initially India resisted this linkage, correctly seeing this as something that would weaken her general sway in SAARC and which would conversely increase China's role in the region, but she had to concede. In achieving this observer status in SAARC, China in effect pushed aside India's regional position of institutional dominance. Great Power politics in a multilateral setting was evident as India counterbalanced China's observer status, by insisting in turn that Japan be given observer status as well, an extra voice with whom India shared common concerns about Chinese expansionism. China's observer impact was further diluted by India facilitating SAARC observer status for the United States in 2006.

India has also taken the diplomatic game into China's own arena. Bilateral relations have been vigorously pursued with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and watched carefully by the official Chinese media, who readily cited Indian comments that "for us central Asia is our 'immediate and strategic neighborhood'", and concluded "for sure, more and closer contacts between India and Central Asia can be expected in the future".⁸³ Multilateral avenues have also been pursued by India, where China and Russia were instrumental in setting up the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001. This has operated as a fairly low-level organisation for settling territorial boundaries and dampening down 'terrorism', i.e., Islamic radicalism. More recently it has started to edge into security cooperation and economic projects, and push back American post-9/11 presence in the region. It was significant that India joined the SCO as an observer in 2005, yet the SCO remains an ambiguous organisation for India, for Kapila "China-centric and aimed at serving more of China's current interests".⁸⁴ Its role as the world's largest democracy sits uncomfortably with the authoritarian nature of the organisation which has been labelled a 'club for dictators'! It was no coincidence that the 2006 and 2007 SCO summits saw other states sending their national leaders, whereas India sent a low-ranking minister.

India has also looked in other directions, eastwards towards Southeast Asia and East Asia. Here, "when it comes to facing a rising China, India's tendency to engage in regional balancing with Beijing has not come to an end . . . indeed preventing China from gaining excessive influence in India's immediate neighbourhood and competing with Beijing in Southeast Asia are still among the more enduring elements of India's foreign policy".⁸⁵ This regional balancing underpins much of India's Look East policy, initiated in 1992. The Look East policy is officially described in positive terms as helping India and its eastern partners in ASEAN, Pacific Asia and the western Pacific. As her Foreign Secretary puts it, "The 'Look East' policy was a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and her place in the evolving global economy. It was also a manifestation of our belief that developments in East Asia are of direct consequence to India's security and development".⁸⁶ Despite official disavowal, "in this great game, competition and rivalry with China has become a significant component. . . . A critical review of India's Look East strategy as part of her overall foreign policy in Asia reveals that one of the important objectives behind this strategy is to play a new balancing game against China in the Southeast Asian and the Asia-Pacific region".⁸⁷ From China's point of view this Look East policy is all too readily an unwelcome intrusion into China's own backyard and interests, part of India's "rising profile" in East Asian security matters.⁸⁸

At the bilateral level, India's potential balancing of China have already been well established through strategic and security partnerships with Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia.⁸⁹ Even more significantly, India's bilateral security and strategic links were further strengthened with America during

2005–2006, Australia in 2006, and Japan in 2006. The last one showed clear “realpolitik concerns over China’s growing influence”, as indeed did those security links.⁹⁰ Certainly, despite government reticence over competing with China, Indian analysts point out that “India should not be diffident about embracing bolder political and strategic relationships with China’s neighbours . . . India will find that a closer and active engagement with the rest of East Asia will begin to yield results on the China front as well. It also does not take a genius to figure out that the India-Japan-US relationship is a far more promising triangle than the India-China-Russia chimera, espoused some years ago”.⁹¹ This is a classic containment line-up, around China’s periphery. Meanwhile moves by India towards a quadrilateral ‘axis of democracies’ with America, Australia, and Japan, whilst not couched in overt anti-China terms, does have an element of China containment inherent in it.⁹²

India’s ‘strategic partnership’ with America, announced in 2005 and strengthened in 2006 represents, in part, classic balancing tactics towards China. It has rapidly become much more substantive in military terms than the India-China ‘strategic partnership’ announced in 2005. Ironies abound here. If one goes back half a century, Jawaharlal Nehru was writing, “Geopolitics has now become the anchor of the [IR] realist and its jargon of ‘heartland’ and ‘rimland’ . . . became the guiding light of the Nazis, fed their dreams and ambitions of world domination, and led them to disaster. . . . And now even the United States of America are told by Professor Spykman, in his last testament, that they are in danger of encirclement, that they should ally themselves with a ‘rimland’ nation” like India, something Nehru considered “is supremely foolish for it is based on the old policy of expansion and empire and the balance of power”.⁹³ The irony here is that it is now just as much India as the United States that has reached out to the other, that containment of the Soviet Union has become de facto containment of China, that India’s embrace of a balance of power (with some seeing a degree of expansionistic hegemonism) is apparent, and that Nehru’s awareness but dismissal of Mackinder and Spykman has not been followed by subsequent Indian politicians and strategists who have embraced such geopolitical avenues.

Regionalism involves regional organisations for Sino-Indian dynamics to unfold. BIMSTEC, set up in 1997, now includes Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal, but not China. The MGC (Mekong-Ganga Cooperation) was set up in 2000 bringing together India and five Southeast Asian Nations, namely Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, but not China despite her Mekong tributaries. Conversely, the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Programme, set up in 1992, brought together China, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, but not India. India and China have circled around the regional organisation ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, set up in

1967, keeping each other as well as ASEAN in mind. India became a sectoral dialogue partner with ASEAN in 1992, a full dialogue partner in 1995, a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996, and a summit-level partner in 2002. Meanwhile China became a sectoral dialogue partner in 1994, a full dialogue partner in 1996, was an original member of the ARF in 1994, and a summit-level partner in 1997. An ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement was drawn up in 2003, to be achieved by 2013, but matched by a similar ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement signed in 2004 to be achieved by 2010! Both China and India signed ASEAN's Treaty of Amity, Cooperation in Southeast Asia in 2003.

Diplomatic fun and games also surrounded the East Asia Summit held in December 2005. Controversy surrounded the absence of the United States, and the invitation extended to Australia to attend. Yet equally significant was the push by India for inclusion and the invitation extended to her, despite not geographically being in the Asia-Pacific. Here "Great Powers . . . do compete. India and China are no exception . . . the mutual competition for power and influence is interminable. This was evident in the recent East Asia Summit . . . just one example how India and China are competing to influence regional groups and associations".⁹⁴ Political undercurrents were apparent, as "over China's initial objections, India was accommodated in the East Asian Community last year, helping to offset concerns in some ASEAN countries that the arrangement was too China-centric".⁹⁵ In Lee Kuan Yew's word's, "India would be a useful balance to China's heft" in the EAS.⁹⁶ Indian analysts recognised this, for "India must be aware that it has not been invited to EAS because of its rising economic potential alone but more as a balancing force to offset the China factor".⁹⁷ Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific, India's thrust to gain membership of the Asia-Pacific Economic Community APEC was halted by Chinese reluctance at the 2007 Summit to lift the moratorium on new members.

THE ECONOMIC FIELD

As Manmohan Singh puts it, "Our relations with major powers . . . more recently China, have increasingly been shaped by economic factors".⁹⁸ Economics though, is entwined with strategic and geopolitical factors. In their 'rise' as Great Powers, both China and India have embraced and sought to use globalisation to facilitate future multipolarity. In Hu Jintao's words, "China will actively promote the process of multipolarization, globalisation . . . the process of multipolarization and globalisation" provide "precious opportunities" for the PRC.⁹⁹ From Beijing's point of view, globalisation not only helps China's economic development, but also helps restore balance of power to the international system, gives space for multi-polar state relations, aids constraintment of American uni-polar preeminence, and gives breathing

space for China's general ascent to Great Power status.¹⁰⁰ Similar linkages are seen by India, her Foreign Secretary arguing that India's "policy seeks to promote multipolarity in international relations . . . [and] harness the positive forces of economic globalisation".¹⁰¹ Both China and India each see themselves as significant rising powers, helped not hindered by globalisation.

Here some have argued that "recently, geoeconomics has risen to rival, even outweigh, geopolitics as a desideratum determining a country's national interest and its foreign policy behavior", since "in the geo-economics age, matters pertaining to manufacturing, marketing, financing, and research and development (R & D) are transnationalized and eventually globalized".¹⁰² The opposition is a bit forced though. Geography does after all include economic geography as a sub-field, and geopolitical theorists are themselves weaving geoeconomics into their horizons.¹⁰³ Globalisation is taking place, but state identities remain and with it geopolitical interests, cooperation and rivalries shaped by their respective state location and state access/control of vital industrial and energy resources.

Economics do underpin their perceptions of their place in the world. Under Manmohan Singh, and the *Manmohan Doctrine*, an explicit economics-driven Grand Strategy is underway, whereby "leveraging economic and technology growth, India can realize its desire to be a reckonable world player. The key to the success of the Singh Doctrine is sustaining economic progress while building strategic capabilities".¹⁰⁴ Consequently, "sustained economic growth is not only a strategic interest but also the key to what kind of great power India will become, how Delhi will view its role in the world".¹⁰⁵ Deng Xiaoping's logic in commencing China's long-term 70-year programme of economic modernisation in 1978, was simple: "The role we play in international affairs is determined by the extent of our economic growth. If our country becomes more developed and prosperous, we will be in a position to play a greater role in international affairs".¹⁰⁶ However whereas China's economic growth rates ran at 9–10% for the subsequent decades after 1978, India's was around 5–6%, respectable but still measurably lagging behind China, on that and other economic indicators like FDI investment from abroad and GDI domestic savings ratios. In 1982 their respective GDPs were reasonably close, but subsequently diverged. Here, in terms of billions of dollars rounded up, China > India comparative figures were 221 > 195 (1982), 455 > 244 (1992), 1,167 > 479 (2001), 1,233 > 510 (2002), 2,226 > 720 (2005), 2,680 > 906 (2006). This Sino-Indian economic growth rate divergence has concerned Indian leaders: "At the moment, among developing Asian economies, China continues to outperform India. India believes it needs to emulate the Chinese success for translating its potential into outcomes. Keeping up with China is, to an important degree, behind the policy shifts in India".¹⁰⁷ As Pranab Mukherjee, the Defence Minister, acknowledged, "China's economic growth and economic strength is more compared with India's but the impression that they have outpaced

us in the region or on the world stage is not correct. They are playing their role and we are playing ours".¹⁰⁸

On the other hand India's economy has finally been accelerating, her GDP growth hitting 9.0% for 2005–2006 and 9.4% for 2006–2007, though still beaten by China's 11.1% growth in 2006. Indeed widely envisaged slowdown in China's growth rate coupled with India's acceleration has led to speculation on India's growth rate overtaking China's during 2008. This economic surge makes India a larger player in the surrounding regions, particularly Southeast Asia, though still overshadowed there by China's bigger economic presence. Prestige is at play in this field for both states, where they offer competing models of development. India's argument is that its bigger deregulated economy brings with it a bigger entrepreneurial grass-roots potential, whereas China's state regulated system is hampering long-term sustainable dynamism. India's democracy may make decision making slower (and corruption easier!), but it also perhaps makes it more durable and less under threat of regime meltdown. India's growth and future prospects may be more organic, less dependent on foreign investment, and more able to use its local entrepreneurship. It may also be a better market for Western investors, in the game to attract FDI investment.

Globalisation is generally opening up world markets for India and China, but issues of geopolitical proximity remain notable. For India, "globalisation has also opened the prospects of reconnecting India's frontier regions with the markets in Yunnan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf".¹⁰⁹ However it also brings direct trade competition with China in markets such as Central Asia and Southeast Asia. Although immediate border trade remains at a low level, the wider trade between the two countries is markedly on the increase; in 2004 two-way trade increased over 80%, in 2005 up almost 40% from the previous year at US \$18.7 billion. As Manmohan Singh said in 2005, "Who would have imagined a decade ago that China would emerge as our second largest trade partner?"¹¹⁰ In 2006 bilateral trade increased to 24.9 billion, well on the way to surpass 40 billion by 2010. India's high-tech companies, such as Infosys and Satyam Computer Services, are flocking to China, where there are opportunities for applying research and innovation in cost-effective ways. Conversely, China's manufacturers increasingly view India as a potentially vast market for its manufactures, particularly appliances and cars as well as steel. The role of the adjacent border zones are ambiguous in this economic setting. Certainly the quickest access routes for Tibet and for the upper Yangtze lie through northern and eastern India rather than through China's far away coastal region. On paper the potential is there for cross-border regional trade hopes to replace cross-border security fears.¹¹¹ July 2006 saw front page news, particularly in the Chinese official media, over the reopening of the trade route between India and Tibet through the Nathu La Pass. A more jaundiced geopolitical onlooker would have perhaps stressed the simultaneous opening

of the through Qinghai-Tibet Railway service, capable of funnelling tourists but also further military supplies from China into the region overlooking India. In reality, trade between Tibet and India is relatively small-scale in the economic stakes at issue. Attempts to open up trade between northeast India and southwest China also cut across China's strategic drive to open up routes through Myanmar and away from India.

One aspect of geoeconomics, 'energy resources', are becoming increasingly important for both countries as they become ever more dependent on importing energy resources in ever bigger quantities to feed their growing industrialisation. As India's Minister for External Affairs admitted in 1999, "Energy is security. Any deficiency in energy will compromise the nation's security".¹¹² Similar "energy security" needs arise for China, heavily dependent on oil imports from the Middle East that traverse the Indian Ocean en route to China. Quite simply, "One of the major military objectives of China is to secure its energy sea-lines in the Indian Ocean . . . to attenuate the strategic 'control' of . . . India, on these lifelines".¹¹³ China's own oil diplomacy has seen state interest and direction. Here India and China are in competition with each other for access and control of resources, particularly oil and gas. Already by 2005 around 70% of India's oil was imported. China had been a net exporter of oil until 1993, but now its soaring economic needs have pushed it into increasing deficit, importing 42.9% of its oil in 2005 and set to rise still further, crude oil imports in June 2006 already a further 19% up on May 2005 rates. The two countries are up against each other in the regional and global markets, in which Ganguly for one argued to the US Senate that "although some analysts in India's strategic community do harbor hopes of potential cooperation between India and China in their global quest for energy resources, these hopes represent the triumph of fond wishes over harsh realities. India is in a fundamentally competitive if not conflictual relationship with China".¹¹⁴

What is noticeable is how "ferocious bidding wars, most of which China has won" have been taking place over energy resources, in which "hovering over India's energy quest is its biggest competitor: China".¹¹⁵ Ganguly explained to the US Senate that "India sees China as its principal competitor in this global quest for energy. Indian officials are loath to admit publicly the existence of such competition, to avoid possible political friction with their behemoth northern neighbor", able to stir up trouble all around India's borders.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, with the two countries "locked" in their "energy game", India's prime minister raised the issue in 2005, "China is ahead of us in planning for its energy security. India can no longer be complacent".¹¹⁷ As analysts looked on, the feeling was "China and India can compete for oil in a new version of the Great Game".¹¹⁸ China's 2005 oil success in Kazakhstan, where her National Petroleum Corporation brought up PetroKazakhstan over the heads of India's Oil & Natural Gas Corporation, was "grim news" for India, in a zero-sum situation.¹¹⁹ Within India's

“energy crisis”, “geographical contiguity” plays a discernible role in the varied oil manoeuvrings and associated transport schemes carried out in Central Asia by China and India, as it does in Myanmar and the South China Sea.¹²⁰

The stakes are high. Some moves to coordinate rather than compete have been seen between India and China. January 2005 saw India acquiring a 20% share in the development of the largest onshore oil field in Iran, operated and 50% owned by Sinopec, China’s state-run oil company; a similar arrangement to the earlier deal struck in the Sudan where India’s Oil & Natural Gas Corporation bought a 25% stake in 2002 in Sudan’s Greater Nile oil field operated by the China National Petroleum Corporation. In such a vein, India and China signed a bilateral agreement in January 2006 for the two states to cooperate in securing crude oil resources overseas, which Vatikiotis regarded as “the start of a new era of energy geopolitics focused on Asia, and reveals something of how Asia’s emerging superpowers intend to behave”.¹²¹ Dadwal saw such Sino-Indian agreement as a “historic collaboration” reflecting how “in today’s globalised and environment-conscious world, regional cooperation in the energy sector is increasingly becoming a necessity if individual countries have to gain access to secure and sustainable energy resources to achieve their desired economic goals”.¹²² Certainly India’s signatory, Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas, Mani Shankar Aiyer, was optimistic when interviewed: “It is clear to me that any imitation of the ‘Great Game’ between India and China is a danger to peace. We cannot endanger each other’s security in our quest for energy security”.¹²³ In China, Aiyer also delivered a keynote speech on ‘India and China in Asia’s Quest for Energy Security’, in which he stressed the growing importance of energy resources to both states, though admitting “it is, therefore, hardly surprising that almost everywhere in the world that an Indian goes in quest of energy, chances are that he will run into a Chinese engaged in the same hunt. The Chinese hunter has been rather more successful than the Indian on several occasions in the recent past”.¹²⁴ For him the vision was of an Asian Oil and Gas Community. Two problems jump to mind with this. First, China’s concerns to maintain its sovereignty are pronounced and are not likely to change in the foreseeable future. Second, China still seems ready to cut bilateral state-state deals. Indeed, before the ink was even dry on the January 2006 cooperation agreement, Indian oil ministry officials found out that Myanmar had agreed to sell natural gas from a field partly owned by an Indian company exclusively to China – a “jolt” repeated in 2007 as well.¹²⁵

Economics feeds into the wider considerations. China has its “Malacca dilemma”, the choke point posed by the Malacca Straits where most of its oil from the Middle East comes through.¹²⁶ The Chinese leadership is well aware of its strategic significance, and the ability of potential adversaries like America and India to establish their control over that zone. As the *China Youth Daily* (June 15, 2004) put it, “It is no exaggeration to say that whoever controls the Strait of Malacca will also have a stranglehold on the

energy route of China". China's alternative options, a Kra canal through southern Thailand, road links to the Myanmar coast, the building up of Gwadar as a land corridor, all reflect China's "oil obsession" which bring China further into the Indian Ocean, thereby in turn threatening India's own maritime routes.¹²⁷ A *security dilemma* in the making? Sea Lines of Communication, SLOCs, are of course highly charged issues. Different motives over SLOCs are discernible amongst military analysts (to control and show power projection in), politicians (as a spatial map within their Grand Strategies and diplomatic relations) and business figures (as something to be maintained most effectively); and between different states along its reaches. Khurana argues from an explicit IR neo-liberal point of view, and in the wake of globalisation, that "geo-strategic convergence between the two" is feasible, over the issue of securing stable energy supplies and their common maritime lifelines ("securing the maritime Silk Route") against third party disruption.¹²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Sino-Indian relations present a mixed picture. Admittedly, "In the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, much of the debate on security in the Asia-Pacific was dominated by how geo-economics would emerge as a dominant theme as opposed to geo-politics".¹²⁹ In fact the opposition is too forced; geopolitics at times involves geo-economics when it comes to questions of how easily or difficult a state might find it to access resources, especially in the energy field. Sea Lines of Communication are a question of geopolitics, but also of geo-economics. Trade and investment patterns are not necessarily global, they remain at times very regionalised. Geopolitics remains an important vehicle for analysing both powers. Such dynamics are why Vaughn is correct in arguing that "the dynamics of interstate tensions in Asia continue to be defined most accurately in geopolitical terms".¹³⁰ Mackinder-Mahanian paradigms on land-maritime power projection remain relevant for understanding India and China's drive and responses to each other.

Geography comes back into consideration with Saran's comment that "the simultaneous emergence of India and China as Asian and global powers in fact makes it imperative for them to be sensitive to each other's interests and aspirations . . . that they work together to mutually support their rightful place. . . . We in India believe that there is enough space and opportunity in Asia and beyond for the two countries to grow".¹³¹ The only trouble is that the immediate spaces in Asia where they are going into, i.e., Southeast Asia and Central Asia, and their respective backyards of East Asia and South Asia, are ones where their interests are involved, and often in diverging rather than converging ways. To take one example China's 'string of pearls' geopolitical projection cuts across India's SLOC, whilst India's 'necklace of friendship' with countries like Singapore, Vietnam and Japan

can seem more like a choker for China. Quite rightly Saran judged, “If we are looking at Asia in the coming years, there is no doubt about a major realignment of forces taking place in our continent”, but that tends to pitch India against China, as the two leading Asian heavyweights.¹³²

Finally there was Saran’s response to “perceptions in some quarters that India and China seek to contain each other. To the protagonists of such theories, I would only like to say that India and China, as two continental-size economies and political entities, are too big to contain each other or be contained by any other country”.¹³³ In one sense he was right, they are big, approaching parity, they cannot easily contain the other. But of course in conjunction with others, which is usually what a *containment* strategy involves, they can try to achieve that very thing. China has probably established a more comprehensive encirclement of India than has India of China. China’s ability to directly threaten the heartland of India from its adjacent base of Tibet (shades of Mackinder?) is unmatched by any comparable Indian land position. China’s links with Pakistan, and also Myanmar, are not matched by India’s land presence in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Mongolia, either in terms of depth or size. However there are some countervailing trends, where India’s links with Japan and most of all with the United States make India a worrisome factor for Chinese strategists. Specifically evoking Mackinder and Spykman, Karnad argues that “India – as the premier ‘rimland’ power – will have to quickly consolidate its comprehensive military strength and choose its options wisely in order to play the key role of system balancer and stabiliser, whose support can tip the balance for or against the mainly maritimid [shades of Mahan] US in its tussle with the prospective Eurasian heartland giant, China”.¹³⁴ This is why Mohan sees that “India is now emerging as the swing state in the global balance of power, it will have an opportunity to shape outcomes on the most critical issues of the twenty-first century . . . and to play a key role in the great struggles of the coming decades”.¹³⁵ In other words, in terms of its geopolitical location “to emerge as the indispensable element of the future balance of power in Asia”.¹³⁶ This is why Beijing reckons that “most importantly, India is the best bet to restrict a future strong China, as per U.S. regional strategy in Asia”.¹³⁷

Faced with each other, both China and India have similar policies. India’s ‘Great Game’, its Grand Strategy in effect, vis-à-vis China is a *hedging* strategy, one of *congruement*, with elements of *containment* (with the USA and Japan) as well as bilateral *engagement*, whilst driving for its own pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean. As van Praagh put it, India’s “Greater Game” may indeed be “India’s race with destiny and China”.¹³⁸ China’s Great Game with India is a similar *hedging* one, i.e., *containment* (through encirclement and ‘strategic proxies’) as well as *engagement*, whilst driving for pre-eminence in Pacific Asia. Both are hoping to gain enough energy resources and time to complete their respective peaceful rises by the mid-twenty-first century. As Goldstein said for China, but which also is applicable for India,

such an approach of peaceful rise “finesses questions about the longer term”, they both have such “a strategy of transition”.¹³⁹ As two Rimland powers, they may over time emphasise a Mahan path to the oceans and to sea power, or they may seek a Mackinder path to establish land power and preeminence inside Asia. Conflict or cooperation remains possible in either direction. Geopolitics and ‘the logic of geography’ remain relevant for these two giants, these two emerging Great Powers from, in, and around Asia.

NOTES

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