

## Associate Paper

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### **India's Rise as a Great Power, Part Two: The Pakistan-China-India Dynamic**

**Dr David A. Robinson**  
*FDI Associate*

#### **Key Points**

- Pakistan is unstable and is accused by India of supporting regional terrorism.
- Nuclear exchange and accidents remain a key threat, with global implications.
- India perceives China to be strategically encircling it with South Asian allies, including Pakistan.
- India's military expansion will not change the fundamental regional power balance.

#### **Summary**

In considering India's rise as a great power, this paper focuses specifically on India's relations with its strategically significant neighbours, Pakistan and China. Though India's increasing projection of influence may change the regional dynamics, the fundamental balance of power among India and its neighbours will not change dramatically in the near future. Pakistan is already overwhelmed by the military strength of India, thus its strategic outlook will remain unchanged, while China and India have increasingly intertwined relations and evenly-matched conventional and nuclear forces, ensuring relative regional stability.

#### **Analysis**

##### ***The Problem of Pakistan***

India's geographically closest and most frequently problematic relationship is with its neighbour and prodigal twin, Pakistan. India's rise as a great power will have its most immediate impact on the extremely dangerous stalemate which exists between the two

states. Many security concerns converge in Pakistan, as: the state has been a key supporter of the Taliban in Afghanistan, factions of which the Pakistani Army is now fighting in a de facto civil war; elements within the state support Islamic terrorist organisations that periodically attack India, provoking regional crises; and, the Pakistani Army has a growing nuclear arsenal, which could be vulnerable to misuse by malicious elements within the state. India and Pakistan engaged in wars in 1965 and 1971, with crises about continuing Pakistani support for insurgents in the disputed Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir erupting periodically, and threatening war in 1990. Following Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998, Pakistani incursions across the Line of Control in the Kargil region of Kashmir led to another limited war, and the veiled nuclear threat by Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed that, 'We will not hesitate to use any weapon in our arsenal to defend our territorial integrity.'<sup>1</sup> Major terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir on 1 October 2001 and in the Indian capital Delhi on 13 December 2001 again threatened war, though merely resulted in major military manoeuvres by India, code-named *Operation Parakram*. The lack of military retaliation by India despite grave provocation seems to suggest that India is successfully deterred by Pakistan's nuclear capability, and this in turn only fuels the eagerness of some elements within Pakistan to provoke India. Pakistan has adopted an "asymmetric nuclear escalation posture", which has deterred Indian conventional military power and thus enabled Pakistan's 'aggressive strategy of bleeding India by a "thousand cuts" with little fear of significant retaliation.'<sup>2</sup>

India is four times larger and seven times more populated than Pakistan. As Pakistan averages only 300 miles in width, it is susceptible to a central assault that would split the country in two. A number of important Pakistani cities also lie close to the international border in the Indus River basin. As Pakistan is thus extremely vulnerable to conventional attack by India's larger military, it defines such an attack as an existential threat to the Pakistani state. Pakistani Lt. Gen. Khalid Kidwai thus outlined that Pakistan would use its nuclear weapons if: India attacks Pakistan and conquers a large part of its territory; India destroys a large part of Pakistan's land or air forces; India blockades Pakistan in an effort to strangle it economically; or, India pushes Pakistan into a state of political destabilisation.<sup>3</sup> This asymmetric escalation posture is designed for a rapid first use of nuclear weapons against conventional attacks, thus leaving India without the ability to punish terrorist attacks through conventional retaliation. As elements within Pakistan continue to provoke India, this creates an extremely dangerous imbalance reliant on India's restraint to maintain peace.

Vipin Narang notes that, 'Scholars who study the South Asian nuclear balance have argued that if a limited clash between India and Pakistan were to expand into a full-scale conventional war, escalation to the nuclear level would likely result.'<sup>4</sup> Most of the "war-game" scenarios played out by the US military also foresee any conventional conflict

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<sup>1</sup> Ganguly, S., 'Nuclear Stability in South Asia', *International Security*, Vol. 33, No 2, Fall 2008, pp. 55-56.

<sup>2</sup> Narang, V., 'Posturing for Peace? Pakistan's Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability', *International Security*, Vol. 34, No 3, Winter 2009/10, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ladwig III, W.C., 'A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine', *International Security*, Vol. 32, No 3, Winter 2007/08, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

between India and Pakistan escalating to the use of nuclear weapons within the first 12 days.<sup>5</sup> New analyses of this eventuality reveal that a conflict between India and Pakistan, in which 100 nuclear bombs were dropped on cities and industrial areas within the two countries, would kill more than 20 million people from the blasts, fires and radioactivity. In addition, the explosions could produce enough smoke to cripple global agriculture. Smoke generated by burning cities could create a climatic response that immediately reduces sunlight, cools the planet, and reduces precipitation worldwide. This “nuclear winter” would reduce or eliminate agricultural production over vast areas, simultaneously decreasing crop yields nearly everywhere. Approximately one billion people worldwide today live on marginal food supplies and would be directly threatened with starvation.<sup>6</sup> While some analysts maintain that nuclear weapons would be used in only a measured way, the chaos, fear and interruption of communications that would follow nuclear war’s commencement leads some to doubt that attacks would be limited in any rational manner. Additionally, Pakistan could face a decision to use its entire nuclear arsenal quickly or lose it to Indian forces which seize its military bases. Thus, unrestrained nuclear war in South Asia potentially has cataclysmic regional and global consequences.

Following the terrorist attack by Kashmiri militants in December 2001 and the subsequent military standoff with Pakistan in *Operation Parakram*, the Indian Army announced a new limited war doctrine in April 2004 called the Cold Start doctrine, which aims to allow conventional retaliation without posing an existential threat to Pakistan. Under Cold Start, the Indian army would avoid delivering a catastrophic blow to Pakistan, and instead make shallow territorial gains, 50-80 kilometres deep, that could be used in post-conflict negotiations. This doctrine aims to deny Pakistan the justification of “regime survival” for employing nuclear weapons in response to a conventional Indian attack. However, Walter C. Ladwig III foresees that, ‘An operational Cold Start capability could lead Pakistan to lower its nuclear red line, put its nuclear weapons on a higher state of readiness, develop tactical nuclear weapons, or undertake some equally destabilising course of action.’<sup>7</sup> The danger of escalation is further compounded by the relatively immature “command and control” and early warning systems of both the Indian and Pakistani nuclear arsenals. There also remains the danger of nuclear accident as, if one nation accidentally detonates a nuclear warhead on one of its own military bases, it probably will not have adequate surveillance intelligence to know that it has not been attacked by its enemy, and thus may falsely “retaliate” against the other country.

Meanwhile, in the context of the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, Pakistan believes that the United States would intervene to prevent war, as it relies on Pakistani troops along the Afghan border and supplies for American forces are transported through Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan believes the only potential military action available to India is air-strikes against Islamist training camps, which itself is not a serious problem, and may actually help Islamabad by killing destabilising jihadists while generating massive support among

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<sup>5</sup> Ricks, T.E., 24 June 1998, *Wall Street Journal*, ‘India-Pakistan Nuclear Rivalry’. Cited at <<http://www.defencejournal.com/aug98/indiapakrivalry.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> Robock, A., & Toon, O.B., ‘Local Nuclear War, Global Suffering’, *Scientific American Magazine*, January 2010, p. 79.

<sup>7</sup> Ladwig, ‘A Cold Start for Hot Wars?’, p. 169.

Pakistanis for their government. The dual problems of nuclear escalation and American reliance on Pakistan for counter-insurgency meant that following terrorist attacks in Mumbai by Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba on 26 November 2008, which killed 163 people, India was unable to respond with conventional military strikes. Any attack by India might either destabilise the Pakistani Government, or escalate the conflict to nuclear exchange. In the event of state disintegration, Pakistani nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of militant elements who would attempt to use those weapons against India or the West.

Unfortunately, there is no easy path to stabilising reform within Pakistan. Pakistan essentially has a feudal political establishment, run by a civilian aristocracy of wealthy agricultural landowners and industrialists, and the Army.<sup>8</sup> The civilian political parties primarily function as patronage networks, without deep-seated ideological differences, and merely struggle to control state resources. As a key aim of the agricultural and industrial élites is to avoiding paying income taxes, the Pakistani Government is also chronically in debt. The Army is seen by most Pakistanis as the primary defender of the nation and the ultimate guarantor of domestic stability. The ever-present threat of India is used to justify the Army's disproportionate share of national resources, and the Army itself also owns and manages a large agricultural and industrial empire. Domestically, the Army is the ultimate power-broker between the political parties, and has acted on several occasions to remove the party in power. As successive governments have received bailouts from international financial institutions, neither the civilian political élites nor the Army have felt any real incentive to institute fundamental change.

For the time-being, the Army is objectively the most stable and responsible force to control the country. The Pakistani military is the only state institution that works effectively, and without it Pakistan would probably have disintegrated long ago. The dire alternatives are representatives of the rising wave of radical Islam who arose from the madrassas under the patronage of General Zia ul-Haq, and gained their training in the US-backed *mujahedeen* struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. These elements, and more recent jihadist recruits, are currently involved in Kashmiri terrorist organisations like Jaysh-e-Mohammad, and Lashkar-e-Taiba, as well as in the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban which occupy Pakistan's border provinces. While the Pakistani Army and intelligence services are often unwilling to directly challenge these forces (and, indeed, currently cultivate relations with the Kashmiri groups and the Afghani Taliban), and external (and, particularly, American) attempts to move forces into Pakistani territory would almost certainly make things worse, this unstable situation is likely to continue.

As India's power increases, so will its ability to strategically encircle Pakistan, through relations with Iran and Afghanistan, and via naval power. At the same time, India's patience for Pakistan's continuing terrorist provocations will probably lessen. Nevertheless, Pakistan's deterrent capabilities remain, as attacks on the Pakistani state – either unsuccessful or successful – are likely to result in either nuclear exchange or widespread chaos and bloodshed. If India continues restraint, however, and reaches out to more moderate

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<sup>8</sup> Schmidt, J.R., 'The Unravelling of Pakistan', *Survival*, Vol. 51, No 3, 2009, p. 29.

elements within the military and civilian political parties, it could leverage its growing economic strength to gradually help a more moderate Pakistani state develop.

### ***The Challenge of China***

On a grander strategic level, relations between India and China will be highly significant as India emerges as a great power. There is a growing interdependence between the two Asian giants, as China is now India's number-one trading partner, with more than \$52 billion in bilateral trade, and estimates are that China-India trade will surpass US-China trade by 2020. China's powerful manufacturing sector complements India's combination of a raw materials and cutting-edge technology economy. Strategically, a strong and influential India helps to create a more multipolar world, consistent with Chinese interests, although China increasingly regards India as its main Asian rival. China is thus involved in a complex game of encirclement with India. China has armed Pakistan with nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology, and has built 'strong military-to-military ties with Burma, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka as part of what Indians see as a strategy to tie India down, Gulliver-like, in its region.'<sup>9</sup> China is also developing deep-water ports throughout the Indian Ocean to support its projected blue-water naval capacity.

Meanwhile, on the border, China continues to press its claims to vast tracts of Indian territory. Over the past years, increased friction in the border area between India and China has led to incursions by Chinese troops, the wounding of several Indian border police, and a build-up of military forces on both sides, as Beijing has been uncharacteristically assertive in its claims to sections of India's Arunachal Pradesh state. The Indians responded by moving 30,000 troops and their latest warplanes into the area, leading some analysts to predict a China-India war within five years.

China rejects the McMahon Line that forms the border, and places the traditional Sino-Indian border at the base of the Himalayan foothills. Stratfor's George Friedman argues that, for China, control of Tibet is of vital strategic importance, providing a barrier against its populous and economically and militarily-advancing neighbour. The high mountain passes of Tibet provide virtually impenetrable terrain which is easy to protect militarily. Along the frontier directly south of this border, in India, is one of the largest population concentrations in the world. If China were to withdraw, Beijing fears that this population could migrate into Tibet, and Tibet could gradually turn into a beachhead for Indian power that would directly abut Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. The Chinese thus see control of Tibet as a matter of fundamental national security. They also see the 1959 decision by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to give asylum to the Dalai Lama, and the continuing support for the Tibetan government-in-exile, as perpetuating this threat. Thus, 'Beijing's price for a border settlement and for normalisation of ties with India, appears to be that India dismantle the

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<sup>9</sup> Twining, D., 10 May 2010, 'Diplomatic Negligence: The Obama administration fumbles relations with India', *Weekly Standard*, Vol. 15, No 32. <<http://weeklystandard.com/articles/diplomatic-negligence>>.

Tibetan settlement in Dharamshala and request the Dalai Lama take up residence in another country.<sup>10</sup>

On a broader front, 80 per cent of China's oil and gas supplies transit the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, so the Chinese navy is increasingly making its presence felt in the area in order to secure its lines of supply. For China, like India, the steady flow of imported resources is not just an issue of economic growth, but also of the longevity of the Chinese Communist Party. Chinese leaders increasingly fear that adversaries could blockade sea lanes and strategic bottlenecks such as the Strait of Malacca, and are thus moving to an offshore defence policy that will include "distant ocean defence". China's actions, however, may impinge upon India's interests and destabilise relations.

Jason Blazevic argues that, following "defensive realist" strategies, each nation will attempt to gain power for self-preservation and other nations will see this move as a strategic threat, thus decreasing collective security. As part of this competition, China has been developing a so-called "string-of-pearls" strategy, expanding influence into ports in Burma, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. According to a report by US defence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, 'China is building strategic relationships along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in a way that suggests defensive and offensive positioning to protect China's energy interests.'<sup>11</sup> China emerged as the biggest military spender in the Asia-Pacific in 2006, and now has the fourth-largest defence expenditure in the world. Its navy is also considered the third-largest in the world behind only the US and Russia, and is superior to the Indian Navy. In this context, India perceives Chinese actions as power maximisation, and fears that China's forward-basing strategy will be used to contain India and rapidly achieve hegemony in the Indian Ocean.

Meanwhile, China and India have adopted nuclear "assured retaliation" postures (what they sometimes refer to as "credible minimum deterrence"), which rely on a small but secure and survivable nuclear force that assures a retaliatory strike against a primary opponent. In many ways, this seems like the most stable aspect of the competition between India and China, though it is yet to be seen what reaction a new generation of *Surya* missiles might provoke in China. Meanwhile, analysts like Stephen Walt expect that China will follow a consistent but non-provocative build-up of its military capabilities and diplomatic alliances over the long-term, aiming to gradually edge the United States out of a hegemonic position. India is likely to mirror this build-up and thus tension, and possible low-level confrontation, may result on the India-China border and in the Indian Ocean region.

### **Conclusion**

India's rise to great power status is inevitable and will occur quickly over the coming decades, especially while the United States believes this will assist it in maintaining a global strategic balance. This will lead to a greater projection of India's power outside of its borders and especially into the Indian Ocean region, which it sees as being essential for its economic

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<sup>10</sup> Nalapat, N., 'The History of Sino-India Tensions', *The Diplomat*, 1 December 2009. <<http://the-diplomat.com/2009/12/01/the-history-of-sino-india-tensions/>>.

<sup>11</sup> Blazevic, J.J., 'Defensive Realism in the Indian Ocean: Oil, Sea Lanes and the Security Dilemma', *China Security*, Vol. 5, № 3, 2009, p. 63.

and social stability. The two states that India's ascent will have the greatest strategic impact on will be its neighbours, Pakistan and China. For contrasting reasons, however, this impact may not change the fundamental power balance that exists today. Pakistan is already overwhelmed by the military strength of India, and thus its primary defences are the threat of nuclear exchange or state disintegration – neither of which will definitely be undermined by rising Indian power. In contrast, China and India will have increasingly complex and intertwined relations, but the economic and strategic issues that bind them and the evenly-matched nature of their conventional and nuclear forces are likely to maintain relative peace and strategic stability. India sees itself as an emerging great power in an increasingly multi-power world, and is thus maintaining a strategy of poly-alignment. With the balance of forces developing as they are, that ambition is likely to become a reality.

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**About the author:** Dr David A. Robinson lectures in History at Edith Cowan University, Perth. He is an early-career academic with research specialities in Modern African History, particularly that of Mozambique, and China's relationship with Africa. Dr Robinson has been published in a number of prestigious journals including *Eurasia Review*, the *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, *Australasian Review of African Studies* and *American Diplomacy*. He is the author of the political affairs blog 'Looking for Trouble: Analysis and Opinion on the Global and Local'.

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Desborough House, Suite 2, 1161 Hay Street, West Perth WA 6005 Australia.  
Tel: +61 8 9486 1046 Fax: +61 8 9486 4000  
E-mail: [lluke@futuredirections.org.au](mailto:lluke@futuredirections.org.au) Web: [www.futuredirections.org.au](http://www.futuredirections.org.au)