



Political visions of India and China in the South Asia region

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Abstract

The standoff in Doklam (2017) between two Asian giants has been solved in the present time, yet it seems that there will be many more such cases in the future. Analysts have presented a number of strategic views about the situation. Why had the two Asian economic and military titans suddenly clashed? Some regard this as a show of supremacy between two fast-developing economies within the same continent, whereas others perceive that this is an attempt to gain control over the booming South Asian market. It is believed that China may be devising a new strategy for India, which cannot be ruled out. The rivalry over who gains more influence in the regional politics, mostly in the SAARC model, has been on the agenda of both powers. China, by confronting India in Doklam, was seen to be trying to establish its hegemonic influence in the politics of South Asia.

Keywords: Doklam, China, face-off, Kashmir, power show-off, terrorism

Introduction

The Doklam standoff between the two Asian giants, although it was peaceful at the moment, is a possible future trigger point in conflicts. It would re-emerge once again any time, as some strategists believe. The Doklam standoff was a cold wakeup call, which indicates that the same can be repeated in the future without any warning. In this standoff, no one had any idea of what might happen regarding the war-like scenario on the tri-junction along the Bhutan-India and China border. The unpredictability and instability of the relations between India and China can be understood by the possibility of future standoffs, as the Doklam incident has just made clear. The tri-junction confrontation was not giving any signals that it would be over soon. It had been described by many in various strategic ways. Why are the two economic and military giants of Asia unexpectedly facing each other eye-to-eye? It was not in such a hurry, although it was already in the pipeline. The society was left in confusion about what was going to happen between the two nuclear neighbours. There were those who claimed that this was nothing but a mere show-off by two fast-developing economies within the same region. Others thought that it was to gain dominance in the South Asian region for the fast-growing market. These opinions might be accurate, and they must have their logic and facts behind them.

Nonetheless, there is one more disturbing fact that is hardly known by people that China has hegemonic ambitions in South Asia, with India as its primary target, and extends it to the rest of the Asian continent. A stable, prosperous, and politically unified India poses a significant threat to these aspirations, as it could challenge China's influence and disrupt its strategic objectives in the region. In light of this, Beijing's interests often stand in direct opposition to the growth and stability of India, as a strong Indian presence in South Asia could undermine China's goals of regional dominance.

Call of the Time

India and China are now under the leadership of two strong nationalist leaders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping, respectively. The two countries are in the process of strong economic growth and development; thus, the South Asian region can be viewed as a key theatre to the growing political and economic competition between the two countries. Since 2014, China has raised many issues and disappointments over its role in the region. The Chinese government has always emphasised that it has a long history of friendship with Pakistan, and thus, it has extended unquestioning support to Islamabad in all its geopolitical issues. This is not just a diplomatic alliance; it involves military collaboration and other major investments through some programs, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The actions of India in the region create tension with Beijing. China is eager to establish its leverage in the region, which might be to interfere or influence the dynamics in a manner that serves its strategic interests. In general, the interaction of India and China is not only about regional primacy; it concerns other implications of global politics and security.

Political Ego at Play

Modi has the vision of developing India into a world power, which is unacceptable among the many political parties back home. A New Delhi nationalist system is not in line with Chinese interests. The reason why several political parties in India and China are not ready to acknowledge Modi as a quickly gaining popularity figure nationally and internationally is conceivable. Not every political party has been in favour of the development programs of the Modi government, including 'Make in India' and 'Kausal Bharat'. His unforeseen policies, such as Goods and Services Tax (GST), surgical strikes, demonetisation, economic weaker upper castes 10 per cent reservation, and his visit to Lahore to meet Nawaz Sharif, posed problems to the opposition parties. It appears that a Chinese agenda might be influencing several political parties in India. China has been trying to convince the Indian masses and the rest of the world that Modi is a failed leader. The Doklam crisis was the perfect opportunity for China, through which it could have established its supremacy within the SAARC region and Asia. Kashmir has always played a crucial role in China's India strategy. As such, there was a need to foil Modi and defeat India in the Doklam incident that appeared to be a political strategy that could have been implemented by China. However, Modi handled the situation skillfully, and his patience and boldness ultimately resolved the Doklam impasse unexpectedly.

Real Intention and Worry

The long-running rivalry of China and India as leading powers in the SAARC has been marked by complex strategic games and increasing tensions. The Doklam standoff indicates the political nature of the intentions of the two countries and displays the increasing strength and aggressiveness of Beijing in its approach towards its neighbours. This competition has been at a crucial juncture, and India has been mounting diplomatic and economic pressures to influence countries where China has been increasing its grip and influence. The Modi government has reacted to these dynamics with a strong strategy of making Kashmir one of the most developed regions in the world. Upon understanding that underdevelopment is a significant drawback towards India's goal as a global power, Prime Minister Modi gives priority to infrastructure investments, economic growth and social harmony. By having such an ambitious vision of development, he not only tries to address the Kashmir challenges but also has taken advantage of these opportunities to prosper Kashmir and has used it in favour of making India one of the important players in the international arena.

Power Show-up

The standoff has become symbolic for both China and India forever. Whatever happened will influence the foreign policy-making of both countries and certify their supremacy in the region for a long time. A genuine question arises: If both decide to diffuse the face-off, who would back off first? Because whoever backs off first would earn the image of a loser, which nobody would like. India's economic and military mismatch was no longer a matter because no one could have afforded a full-fledged war. Even if a conflict had broken out, it would have led to only a short-term military engagement. A well-planned strategy and diplomacy could have handled the situation. In such a situation, whichever country starts the machines first would lose. As logic indicates, India's stance has put it in the best position.

Of course, at any cost, India did not want a conflict, nor did China. It means no country was in a position to win or lose. Even, some argue that the win or loss was not a question because it was just a power show-up. Therefore, China might have understood this puzzle. It is argued that China misjudged Modi and his political maturity and decision-making efficiency.

Coming to the initial question, why did the face-off last so long when nobody could win? The reason was that China put itself in such a great dilemma, and the fear of losing the moral support of the international community. Enormous pressure was mounting on China in that situation. However, it was expected that China would first back off in silence without making any noise, and India would reciprocate with the same gesture. While China never thought India could be so daring in such a situation, India knew China could not cross the threshold and would not engage militarily. New Delhi also wanted to show its neighbours that India, not China, was the preeminent power in South Asia.

Conclusion

The two powerful countries of Asia, China and India, have their individual political ambitions, which are likely to have a great impact on their bilateral long-term relations, especially when it comes to future agreements and collaborative activities. It is unclear what this relationship is going to be, but the desires of China to establish itself as a superpower on the global scene can translate to growing conflict with India. At this point, China should recognise and respect the national interests of India despite pursuing its regional and national interests. It is necessary to focus on positive competition instead of negative rivalry. Competition should be done on fair tactical principles, and cooperation should aim at gaining joint economic benefits for both states. Moreover, the historical, cultural, and civilisational connections between China and India are abundant and can trigger

prosperity in the region. Through the same values and traditions, the two nations can develop a structure of partnership, which would contribute to greater stability in Asia.

Eventually, the ultimate goal must be to have China and India work together in defining and influencing world politics, not to succumb to destructive competition, which may appear to be a mere continuation of the Western plans to separate the countries of Asia and the rest of the developing world, in general. This cooperative approach can bring both countries together in the region and make both nations important players in the global platform. The strategy is capable enough to guide both nations with a common vision for a prosperous future.

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