

Bangladesh - China Political Relations: Security Implications for India

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ABSTRACT

Political relations are a sign of a long-standing, all-encompassing bilateral relationship between two nations. China's increasing involvement in Bangladesh might have both beneficial and harmful effects. China and Bangladesh have had fruitful, long-standing relations since 1975, which have only grown stronger over time. India and the South Asian area are affected by the developing ties between China and Bangladesh. Beijing's notable strengthening of relations with Bangladesh must be seen in the perspective of China's gradual rise to prominence in South Asia since the start of the Belt and Road program. China sees this as a chance to extend its strategic influence into the Indian Ocean region, outside of its usual sphere of influence. The growing Bangladesh-China relations have implications for South Asian region in general and India in particular. Despite India's strategic grievances, Bangladesh has improved its ties with China. However, China has become one of the most reliable sources of armaments and has shown itself to be a helpful counterbalance to India in this area. Bangladesh's military governments were eager to strengthen their strategic ties with China. They had two goals in mind: to dispel the fear of India and to get support and aid from the former. However, China was also eager to acquire strategic control over Bangladesh. China's strategic interests were not served by the 1971 split of Pakistan. China therefore seized the chance to forge closer ties with Bangladesh in 1975 when the country's circumstances shifted against India's interests.

Keywords-- Regional Power Balance, Strategic Partnership, South Asia Geopolitics, India-China Rivalry, Security Implications

vein, both nations have demonstrated their desire to broaden their bilateral collaboration in other areas and have fortified their economic cooperation since 1990. India is the center of most China's policies in South Asia. China has made it a policy to strategically interact with India's minor neighbors since 1962. Bangladesh is one of India's most notable neighbors, along with Pakistan. As a result, China and Bangladesh have developed closer strategic ties throughout time. However, by forging strategic ties with China, Bangladesh has achieved its military and economic goals. Bangladesh has also been able to control its fear of Indian dominance thanks to strategic cooperation with China. In this regard, Bangladesh's strategic connections are impacted by the growing normalization of India-China relations.

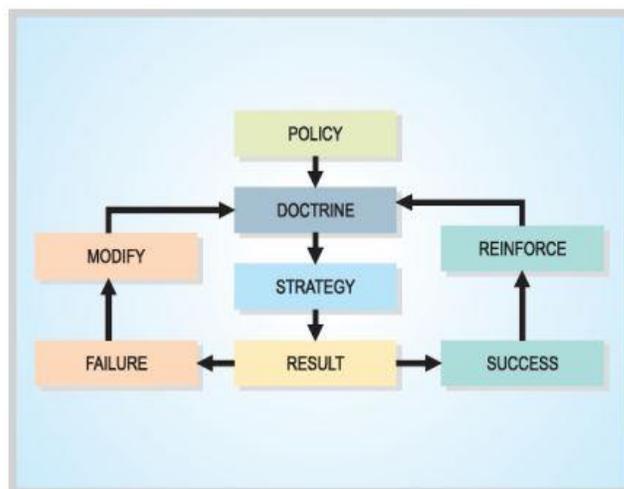


Figure 1: Relationship between Policy, Doctrine and Strategy

Source: Adapted from Joint Doctrine Indian Armed Forces. Cited in Integrated Headquarters Ministry of Defense (Navy) (2007), Government of India, Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defense, Freedom to Use the Sea: India's Maritime Military Strategy, New Delhi:2007:6.

I. INTRODUCTION

Two rival nations try to restore normal relations through the diplomatic procedure of political relations. Rapprochement denotes the time after a relationship has been disrupted when two nations start taking steps to restore normalcy to their relationship. Since the goal of rapprochement is to strengthen ties between two nations, it affects other nations that have bilateral ties with those nations. Following the 1962 border dispute, India and China's usual relationship was upset. Because of how heated things were after 1962, both nations even stopped having ambassadorial-level contact. But since the late 1970s, China and India have taken several actions to normalize their bilateral ties. In a same

India's geopolitical interests are harmed by the China-Bangladesh partnership, especially when it comes to regional stability, security cooperation, and economic competition. With a focus on the political changes in Bangladesh that have accelerated the growth of this connection, this paper explores the new strategic

partnership between China and Bangladesh in the twenty-first century. By looking at the alliance's political and security components, the paper examines the wider ramifications for India's regional influence and security concerns. The paper highlights the geostrategic, geopolitical, and security challenges that India may need to consider and implement in the context of the connection between China and Bangladesh by providing a comprehensive picture of how these developments are changing the power balance in South Asia.

As a result, Bangladesh's plan to forge an alliance with an extra-regional power to allay its fears of a large and powerful neighbor included a move to strengthen strategic relations with China. Bangladesh was strategically favored to join China with the shared goal of controlling India in South Asia due to China's superior military might over India and their ongoing hostilities following the 1962 border conflict.

II. FEATURES OF POLITICAL RELATIONS

Inclusive Relation: Because political relations encompass a variety of areas of collaboration, they are inclusive. The three main areas of bilateral cooperation are politics, the economics, and defense.

Global/Regional Implication: Despite starting at the bilateral level, a strategic relationship might have regional or worldwide effects. Depending on the capacities of the participating governments, it frequently has significant regional or occasionally global repercussions because security and defense-related interests are the most important.

Security Oriented Relation: Other areas of collaboration in a strategic relationship are determined by security and military interests. Priorities in strategic relationships also differ if the partner states are not equal. The use of economy by a strong party to advance a strategic relationship with a weak partner has frequently been observed.

Long-standing Relation: A strategic relationship is a stable and long-standing relationship between two nations. In this regard, the two nations have a long history of fruitful collaboration.

III. BANGLADESH STRATEGIC INTEREST IN CHINA

Bangladesh, an undeveloped South Asian nation, has several strategic objectives in China. Bangladesh views China as a possible force to allay concerns over India's hegemony in South Asia. India is now the dominant force in the Bay of Bengal region due to its superior naval capabilities compared to Bangladesh. India's naval might is

superior to Bangladesh's. Bangladesh views China as a possible deterrent to India in order to lessen its control over the strategically important Bay of Bengal. China and India have both viewed one another as fierce rivals in the Indian Ocean region. China and Myanmar's military government have already increased their marine cooperation. Likewise, Bangladesh can enhance its maritime cooperation to counter India in the Bay of Bengal region.

In addition, Bangladesh views China as an impartial arbiter to settle its bilateral disputes with other nations. Because of the reassuring nature of its bilateral relations with China, Bangladesh has faith in the country's ability to negotiate and its impartiality. China helped to settle Bangladesh's maritime conflict with Myanmar in November 2008. When "Myanmar had placed an oil drilling rig within territorial waters claimed by Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal," China acted as a mediator to defuse the situation. Bangladesh might ask China to act as a mediator once more in the future.

IV. CHINA'S STRATEGIC INTEREST IN BANGLADESH

By establishing strategic ties with Bangladesh, China, an acknowledged Asian regional power and a rising global force, hopes to achieve the following goals. By strengthening ties with Bangladesh, China hopes to further solidify its strategic control over the South Asian region. Bangladesh has become one of the most important countries in South Asia because of its geostrategic location. China needs energy to maintain the rate of expansion of its quickly expanding economy. In addition, Bangladesh possesses an enormous natural gas resource. China and Bangladesh can trade natural gas after appropriate exploration. The ports of Bangladesh serve as a link between the oil-rich Gulf region and the South China Sea for the transshipment of products. Bangladesh's ports may serve as China's primary transshipment hub since the country imports a significant volume of oil by sea.

In international fora such as the United Nations, Bangladesh is a staunch ally of China. Bangladesh has occasionally publicly reaffirmed its support for the "One China Policy." Bangladesh has always supported the former on the matter of China's alleged violations of human rights. To strengthen its negotiating position in international fora, China, a rising global force, requires the support of nations like Bangladesh.

The relationship between China and Bangladesh has developed into a "strategic partnership of cooperation" after Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2016 visit. The economics and defense are the "twin pillars" of Bangladesh-China ties. China has put a halt to projects that would enable communication between Bangladesh and India, while the project's cancellation was not attributed to strategic

competition. One example of this is the cancellation of the Akhaura-Sylhet dual gauge project in northeastern Bangladesh, which might have been extended further to northeastern India.

V. BANGLADESH-INDIA RELATIONS

One of the main factors that has always influenced Bangladesh's foreign policy seems to be the important "India factor." Without a question, Bangladesh's biggest and most significant neighbor is India. Bangladesh and India have a vast land border, and scholars and decision-makers in both nations consider their relationship to be strategically, politically, economically, and physically important. India strategically encloses and blocks Bangladesh on three sides, while the Bay of Bengal blocks it on the south (Hossain & Islam, 2019). With many charges and rebuttals, ties between Bangladesh and India have often been tense, complex, and crisis-ridden. However, a solid, courageous, and healthy relationship is necessary for both nations to prosper. The recent visit by India's Foreign Secretary and a delegation from Bangladesh to India may mark a turning point if a long-term solution to the water-sharing problem is found.

VI. BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS

China has been a powerful land and maritime force from ancient times, and throughout its history, it has neither colonized nor conquered any other nation. Major states have recognized Bangladesh's geopolitical significance. Bangladesh's location near the Indian Ocean is its most significant geopolitical advantage or key location. Bangladesh's geographic location is also significant to China, particularly given India's standing as the most powerful nation in South Asia. In order to forge a solid regional position against its other bitter competitors, the United States and India, China even hopes to view Bangladesh as a significant economic and geopolitical partner.

China is one of Bangladesh's main trading partners in terms of the economy. The two nations now trade 37% more than they did before. Bangladesh has been China's import-dominated state for many years (Kabir, 2017). In Bangladesh, China has even granted quota-free access to a number of goods. In addition, China's military ties with Bangladesh are not far behind.

VII. CHINA-INDIA RELATIONS

Their connections are important because of China and India's combined population, economic potential, and geopolitical significance. Their cooperation is crucial to the

stability and development of the entire planet because they together comprise almost one-third of the world's population. However, the historical context has also made their interactions a little more complex.

China-India relations have a rich history because both nations have had to overcome the challenges of modern statehood. (Taylorfrancis.com) It is impossible to overstate the significance of their relationship given their combined economic might, geopolitical influence, and significant demographic effect. The dynamic development of this relationship in the twenty-first century reflects the changes in global politics.

VIII. SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

The developments occurring in the South Asian region are linked to any implications for India's security. Stated differently, there is a connection between India's security worries and the security-related events occurring in other states in the area, and vice versa. In security studies, the term "region" has a distinct meaning and conceptually differs from "subcontinent." A "security complex" is a collection of states that are geographically close to one another. "A group of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another" is how Barry Buzan defines this security complex on a regional level. Accordingly, "region" is more strategic in character, whereas "subcontinent" is more geographical (Sahani, 2005:80). Along with shared economic, political, and strategic interests, the South Asian states have a lot in common in terms of civilization, history, culture, and society. These characteristics support the South Asian subcontinent's transition to a security region. However, following the Indian subcontinent's split and decolonization, the term "South Asia" became widely used. Additionally, during the British colonial era, the area constituted a single geographical unit. A new intra-regional security spectacle resulted from the subcontinent's geographical reorganization following the partition. India's presumptions that Bangladesh's strategic ties with China pose a threat to its national security are based on the interconnected security complex of the South Asian area. Because of Bangladesh's geostrategic location, any security-related developments there directly affect India's security. Similarly, because of the complexity of its interactions with both Bangladesh and India, China's strategic alliances with these two nations have broader ramifications for India. India has more reason to be concerned about its security because military and defense cooperation is an essential component of this relationship.

Direct Military Threat

The most important aspect of any conventional conflict is military mobilization. The concept of warfare and threat assumptions have been reinterpreted by the technological advancements in modern warfare, such as nuclear bombs and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). It hasn't lessened the significance of ground military bases and troop mobility in winning a war, either. China can use nuclear-capable ICBMs to target any region of India.

China may use its nuclear weapons to attack most of the world, including the continental United States, as well as the rest of the area. The DF-31, DF31A, and JL-2 are examples of newer systems that will provide China with a more resilient nuclear force. India's security is thus seriously threatened by China's military might alone. But China's advantage over India extends beyond its efforts to modernize and strengthen its military. China has pursued a strategy to strengthen military ties with India's neighbors since 1962. Prior to 1975, China's most significant pawn in the war against India was Pakistan. China's engagement with Pakistan has put India's western frontiers in serious peril. Bangladesh became another key ally of China against India after 1975. India's security greatly depends on Bangladesh's geostrategic location. Bangladesh is situated between the unstable northeastern part of India and the country's mainland. The only route connecting the northeastern part of India to the mainland is the Siliguri Corridor, a tiny sliver. Bangladesh can block the Siliguri Corridor and sever India's ties with the northeast in the event of a war.

China and other world leaders have been involved in an arms race for a long time in an effort to buy and manufacture the most cutting-edge military hardware. China has made steady progress in manufacturing its own military equipment. After the US and Europe placed China under an arms embargo in reaction to the 1989 Tiananmen Square repression, China stopped looking to the West for contemporary technologies. In a report published in December, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) calculated that Russia accounted for 77% of China's total weaponry purchases between 2016 and 2019. Additionally, Russia's major arms exports to China rose by 49% during this time frame in comparison to the preceding five-year period, according to the Weapons Research Centre.

China also imports naval guns from Russia such as the AK-176, which can be used against aerial targets at sea or flying at low altitudes, and the Mi-8MT/Mi-17, a transport helicopter that can also serve as an armed gunship. However, the bulk of imports from Russia in recent years consist of AL-31 and D-30 turbofan engines developed for fighter aircraft manufactured in China.

Additionally, China imports Russian naval weapons such as the Mi-8MT/Mi-17, a transport helicopter that can also be employed as an armed gunship, and the AK-176, which may be used against aerial targets at sea or while flying at low altitudes. Nonetheless, the majority of Russian imports in recent years have been AL-31 and D-30 turbofan engines, which were created for Chinese-made fighter aircraft.

According to SIPRI data, China became the world's second-largest arms exporter behind the United States in 2017 after increasing its military production capabilities and decreasing its reliance on imported weapons in recent years. According to SIPRI, from 2015 to 2019, China was the second-largest manufacturer of munitions worldwide. China's weapons development has advanced to the point that it is now on level with or perhaps ahead of Russia, despite its heavy reliance on Russian imports.

China's military spending has increased for the last 26 years, the longest run of continuous, unbroken expansion in the research center's database, according to SIPRI. The nation's military expenditures were anticipated to have reached US\$252 billion, a 1.9% rise from the year before. SIPRI reports that from 2016 to 2019, Pakistan received 38% of China's total weaponry exports, followed by Bangladesh (17%) and Algeria (8%). From 40 nations in the five-year period between 2010 and 2014 to 53 countries between 2015 and 2019, the number of countries to which China sells has also increased. Between 2022 and 2028, eight conventional submarines are anticipated to be delivered to Pakistan by China. Among other military weaponry, the two nations also work together to produce JF-17 fighter jets, anti-tank missiles, portable surface-to-air missiles, missile boats, and tanks.

IX. INDIA AS AN EMERGING POWER

The strategic aspect of India-China relations changed in the latter half of the 1990s. When China and India emerged at the same time, their interests diverged in many areas. However, the worry of the status quo dissolving soon is heightened by China's faster international development than India's. Once more, the US was strategically committed in the area to counter any potential shift in the balance of power. Bangladesh's strategic significance is being revitalized by this potential conflict of interest. The character of Bangladesh-China ties will once more be determined by any additional policy departure. The potential resurgence of Bangladesh's strategic significance has been in line with some events that are focused on India. In addition to improving interregional trade, the blending Indian economy ultimately creates a whole new opportunity for regional integration. There are a lot of opportunities for Bangladesh in the developing Indian economy. The region's

geo-economic significance has increased because of India's economic rise. However, conflicting potential economic interests are pushing China and India to explore Bangladesh as a new market. Bangladesh's top two import destinations are China and India, respectively. To put it another way, India's growing economy is also expanding its solidarity with other big global powers and creating new opportunities for collaboration in other fields.

X. IMPROVING INDIA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

Since the latter part of the 1990s, Bangladesh and India's bilateral relations have seen impressive growth. The resurgence of the Awami League government during this time has facilitated the amicable resolution of numerous controversial problems in both countries. Notably, Bangladesh and India have tried several initiatives to improve their bilateral ties during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's second term. The January 2010 visit by Prime Minister Hasina to India created numerous prospects for both nations. "Mutual legal assistance on criminal matters, transfer of sentenced persons, combating international terrorism, organized crime, and illicit drug trafficking" (*Ministry of External Affairs, 2010a) were among the many agreements inked during the visit. Additionally, a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen cooperation in the "power sector" was signed by both sides. India announced a US \$1 billion credit line for Bangladesh during this visit. In September 2011, Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh returned the favor. The historic "Protocol to the Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Land Boundary between India and Bangladesh and Related Matters" was signed by both nations during this visit (*Ministry of External Affairs, 2011). With the consent of the local population and the formal approval of their respective governments, Bangladesh and India agreed to "exchange 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh with 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India and preserve status quo on territories in adverse possession" under the terms of this protocol. Bangladesh's relations with China are profoundly impacted by the nature of India-Bangladesh relations. According to Rashid (2008), Bangladesh is "sandwiched between two rising Asian giants, India and China." Bangladesh should therefore continue to have friendly relations with both China and India. But since China and India are still reeling from their post-1962 hostility, it will be difficult for Bangladesh's policymakers to build ties with one country without upsetting the other.

In 2015, India and Bangladesh inked a land border agreement for the purpose of resolving border issues, giving the residents of the settlements along the border their identity, and lowering the risk of immigration. Through a video conference, Prime Minister Modi and Sheikh Hasina

laid the cornerstone of the 130-kilometer India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline on September 18, 2018. In order to improve Bangladesh's energy efficiency, the petroleum products that India formerly transported by rail will now be sent straight to Bangladesh via this pipeline.

About 1800 kilometers separate the northeastern Indian states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. 10 Insurgents were wreaking havoc in several states and were active in the border region. They used to enjoy a safe refuge in Bangladesh. These kinds of operations have declined as India and Bangladesh's relationship has improved. Anti-Indian activities are no longer permitted in Bangladesh. Infrastructure development has resulted from the stability this has brought to northeastern India.

XI. CONCLUSION

The strategic ties between China and Bangladesh have grown over time. They have expanded their relationship beyond the military and economic spheres and demonstrated sufficient interest to work together to address other emerging global concerns. In hindsight, China's aid diplomacy was linked to their economic ties, which were centered on India. But in the 1990s, they not only independently reshaped their economic ties but also gave their bilateral collaboration a new meaning. Growing trade between China and Bangladesh is creating new opportunities to encourage collaboration in new fields. Their different economic booms are unquestionably pushing them to engage in strong bilateral commerce as well as regional and global economic integration. Throughout the 1990s and even after, the strong development orientation, leap towards a global economy, and reform-oriented domestic structure continued to be the deciding factors in Bangladesh-China economic relations. They have also maintained their military ties and reaffirmed their long-standing dedication to one another's national interests. The security-related developments that take place in a security complex determine the dynamic security implications. Hypothetical conclusions derived from current events in areas pertaining to a nation's security encompass security implications for that nation. The security-related events occurring in Bangladesh because of India's strategic alliance with China have repercussions for India's security. The relationship between Bangladesh and China has grown stronger over time since 1975. Both nations have now resolved to create a "Closer Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation" after reaching a new level of bilateral relationship.

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