

## **Trends in the Regional Geopolitics of Pakistan, China and India from 1947 to 1962**

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### **Abstract:**

*Pakistan, China, and India not only share geographical borders but also share a common history of sufferings at the hands of colonial powers. Though all three of them received independence around the same time, in the latter half of the 1940s, history haunted their political interactions. China and India began their relations cordially enough, but geopolitical disputes soon hampered the relationship. The Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai (Indian and Chinese are mutual brothers) slogan proved short lived and Panchsheel (Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence) could not save their relations for long. The resultant Sino-India war of 1962 changed the regional geopolitical map and made Pakistan and China come closer for a more durable relationship. Pakistan and India had a bad start with wars and mistrust which finally pushed Pakistan and China towards closer cooperation. This paper analyzes the way geopolitical dynamics shaped the regional politics from 1947 to 1962.*

**Keywords:** Regional Geopolitics, Pakistan, China, India, Rivalry, War, Cooperation, *Panchsheel*.

### **Introduction**

The region occupied by Pakistan, China and India is one of the largest sub-regional geographical settings on the world map with a population of nearly 3 billion people (38.9% of the world) and a land territory of 13,070,478sq miles, occupying 8.82% of the world land mass (“Worldometers,” 2018). The three countries have been in odd relations with one another since their independence. The first fifteen years of their relations witnessed some unexpected changes in the triangular relations that influenced the later on history of not only the region but the world as well. Therefore, it is important to understand politics of the region of the time. This paper begins with a look at the origins of the China-India

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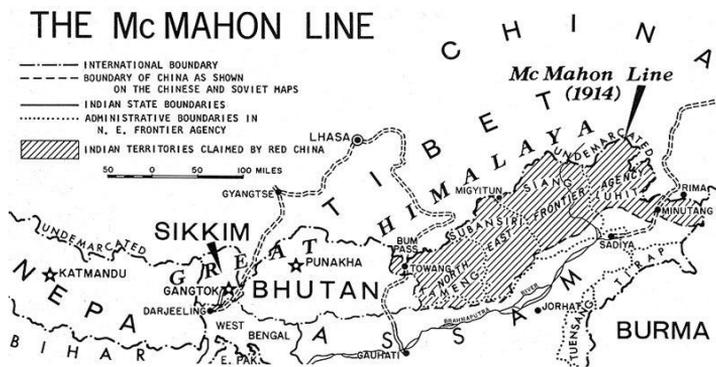
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disputes followed by a discussion of the historical background of the hostile relations between India and Pakistan.

### China and India: From Fraternity towards War (1947-1962)

Pakistan and India got their independence in August 1947 and were joined by the creation of modern China in 1949. The new map of the region posed a number of challenges and opportunities for not only the three of them but for the rest of the world as well. Individually and collectively, both China and India not only occupy some of the largest territories, but also have the biggest population in the world. They share a large disputed border which is almost 125,000 square km along the eastern, middle and western sectors of their respected boundaries with each other (Zho&Mingjiang, 2013). The McMahon Line is located at eastern sector, starting at the junction of China, India and Bhutan. To its west is the Brahmaputra River; and on the Indian side is the state of Arunachal Pradesh. This area alone is 90,000 square km long. The conflicting claims and disputes have made the border a shatter belt for China and India.

Figure-1



Source: <https://thewire.in/2108/how-mcmahon-drew-his-line-and-why-china-wants-it-changed/>

The second sector of disputed area is located in the middle range. This side of the disputed border is about 450 km long with an area of 2000 sqkm. This is the smallest disputed sector between China and India involving some pocket areas. The Karakorum pass is the starting point of the western disputed region of the border which goes on to the tri-junction of the Ngari prefecture of Tibet, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. The area spread is along 600 km that encompasses Aksai Chin that occupies about 33,500 sq. km. This area is now under the control of China. Aksai Chin is of greater strategic value for China as it is the vital

passing point between Tibet and Xingjian. It was included in Kashmir by Johnson Line after the British annexation of Kashmir in 1846 (Zho&Mingjiang, 2013).

After its independence in August 1947, India became the successor state to the British government and thus inherited the McMahon Line. The People's Republic of China came into existence in October 1949 and took control of its bordering region, Tibet, in 1951. As it felt threatened by China; India, thereby extended both its administrative and military control in the eastern sector of the border. India also took control of Tawang, a Buddhist Cultural Centre and the biggest monastery outside Lhasa. Tawang has an important religious, cultural and geographical connection with Tibet which is now under China's control. During the time when India controlled Tawang, China remained silent while Tibet opposed it.

The Indian capture of Tawang coincided with an era of cordial relations between India and China. The incident, however, created tensions for the time being. The relations were restored to normalcy after Tawang's forceful inclusion into India. India began building up the infrastructure, it also established military check posts, and sent patrolling parties and survey teams. Under the spirit of *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai* (Indian and Chinese are mutual brothers), India and China signed a treaty in 1954, which called establishing trade and other channels of intercourse across the borders of Tibet between the two countries. It also proved to be the starting point for the *Panchsheel* (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) which called for mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence (Dillon, 2016). The peace process between India and China was beefed up in 1954 as they went for this historic agreement (Arpi, 2004). The then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru and the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, during his visit to India on June 28, 1954, issued a joint statement calling it not only a framework for Sino-Indian relations but deciding to adopt it as a method for peaceful interaction with the whole international community. The mutual understanding was cordial and depicted the longstanding struggle of both the countries against foreign occupation. The statement also said that "*Panchsheel*", will help in creating an area of peace which, if circumstances permit, can be enlarged thus lessening the chances of war and strengthening the cause of peace all over the world" (Arpi, 2004, p. 140).

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking at banquet held in honor of Premier Zhou Enlai in New Delhi on June 26, 1954, said:

*These principles are good not only for our two countries but for others as well...each country would have freedom to follow its own policy and work out its own destiny learning from others, cooperating with others, but basing itself essentially on its own genius ("Panchsheel," 2004, p. 6).*

The warm relations in the aftermath of the settlement of the border related issues in the mid-1950s went through a series of tests as the situation in Tibet underwent certain changes. Tibet has been one of the biggest shatter belts between China and India. The Prime Minister of India wanted certain modifications in the McMahon Line and China resisted. This led both the countries to a military clash in August 1959. Although initially, the actual border dispute had started in 1954 when India occupied several posts in the region. China approached the Foreign Ministry of India in 1958 for the peaceful resolution of the border dispute through dialogue but to no avail.

Chinese-Tibetan relations continued to worsen when China started bringing in political reforms in the region. The introduction of the 'democratic reforms' sparked uprising and unrest in Tibet as it was to transfer power from the Dalai Lama led theocratic government to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The People's Liberation Army (PLA), in the early 1956, started military action against the local insurgents by destroying the monasteries in the eastern part of Tibet. The Dalai Lama went to India and issued certain warnings while living in exile in India threatening China to stop reforms and military action in Tibet. Direct negotiations were held between Zhou Enlai and the Dalai Lama in the embassy of China in Delhi. China agreed to his demands and suspended reforms in Tibet for the next five years (Hoffman, 1990). However, the unrest continued despite these developments. It seemed that neither Beijing nor Lhasa had control over the deteriorating conditions in Tibet.

In March 1959 the unrest precipitated in Lhasa, triggered the Chinese suppression policy. The demonstrations led towards a revolt against the Chinese officials and cadres in the area. On March 12, 1959, the 'People Assembly' of Tibet declared independence from China. Deteriorating situations around the palace of Dalai Lama convinced him to escape undercover to India. Nehru welcomed him into India and provided him with shelter and accommodation along with an unarmed entourage of 120 people (Hoffman, 1990).

Chairman Mao interpreted the Indian act as anti-Chinese and blamed Nehru for inciting the Tibetan uprising. All this triggered propaganda and counter-propaganda on both sides. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union supported the Indian decision for granting diplomatic asylum to the Dalai Lama and characterized it as humanitarian and defensive. The changing

geopolitical dynamics of the Cold war in the South & South East Asia region rapidly engaged China and India over Tibet, while the Soviets tried to play an intervening role that further developed distances between the two communist regimes. In the context of Tibet situation, the border issued surface between India and China both in the eastern and western sectors as well. During the suppression process of the Tibetan revolt, China had militarized the Sino-Indian border. India responded with its *forward policy* to counter any military escalation.

China started developing an old route into a motor able road between Aksai Chin and Xingjian in 1953, which was completed in September 1957 (Zho&Mingjiang, 2013). According to Cohen (2009), any geographical areas which are highly fragmented from within and engaged in great power rivalries are called *shatter belts* or *crush zones*. Eventually, these zones become points of major conflict. Similarly, the border regions between China, India, and Pakistan have become shatter belts or crush zones due to disputed territorial struggles. In October 1958, the Indian government conveyed a message to the Chinese government claiming Aksai Chin as a part of India. Nehru notified Zhou Enlai that tract of territory belongs to India without any doubt and there should be no dispute about it. Zhou replied in January 1959:

*Sino-Indian border is never demarcated, border dispute exists between the two countries, Aksai Chin has been the part of China and the McMahon Line is illegal and can be recognized only if India accepts Aksai Chin as part of China. (Maxwell, 1999).*

Nehru, of course, rejected the proposal. The relations further deteriorated when Nehru hinted of sending Indian troops along the border and claiming territories on the Chinese side of the border. The tension finally culminated in the Sino-Indian war on October 20, 1962. The war ended in the victory of China on November 22, 1962. It ended when China announced ceasefire on November 20. It was an all-out war, spreading to two sections of the Indo-Chinese border eastern and western. Chinese forces crossed the McMahon Line at various points, capturing Rezang and Tawang in the eastern and western theaters respectively and Indian posts were removed from Aksai Chin, bringing it under Chinese control (Bhasin, 2006). The war coincided with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, making both USA and USSR busy enough not to spare time and resources for supporting India against China in the war. The Chinese ceasefire came along with its withdrawal from the captured areas, though not to pre-war positions making her geopolitically more dominant.

### **Geopolitical Rivalry between Pakistan and India (1947-62)**

South Asian politics has been dominated by the Indo-Pak rivalry since 1947. Enmity between the two countries has formed various shatter belts and gateways. The genesis of the dispute is found in the partition of the Indian Subcontinent into two countries that was envisioned in the 3rd June Plan. The central point of the dispute has been the Kashmir issue, one of the 565 princely states in India. The future of Kashmir was closely associated with future of India after its independence. According to the 3rd June Plan, the Indian princely states were either to join India or Pakistan. Among all princely states, the issue of Jammu & Kashmir was a complicated one; primarily Jammu & Kashmir itself was comprised of a number of princely states, and most importantly its geostrategic location, natural resources, ethno-linguistic composition, diverse religious settings were its unique features. Issue of Kashmir required special attention during the time of partition, but the case was dealt on similar lines as the other princely states of India.

At the time of the British exit from India, Kashmir was left indecisive to join Pakistan or India. The situation in Kashmir led to the first Indo-Pak war, or Kashmir War in 1947-48. The war started as a result of a local uprising against the government of the Maharaja. The unrest in various parts of Kashmir resulted in uprising and rebellion especially in Muzaffarabad, Poonch and Gilgit Agency. Maharaja went for oppressive measures against the protesters and demonstrators that further precipitated the uncertain situations.

Pashtun Tribals from Pakistan joined the militant uprising in Kashmir and thus a large-scale militant movement started in the valley. A lashkar (private militia) of nearly 5000 tribals crossed into Kashmir from Abbottabad in October 1947 (Sahagal, 2011). They were initially successful and achieved some important victories. Feeling pressed, Maharaja asked for help from India. Nehru promised to help him if he ceded Kashmir to India. Maharaja Hari Singh declared Kashmiri accession to India on October 26, 1947. This led to the first Indo-Pak war. The war culminated into the distribution of Kashmir into two parts: Indian held and Pakistan held Kashmir. The war stopped but the issue remained without solution.

Figure-2



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/510877151462986984/>

On January 01, 1948, India asked for United Nation's help in the Kashmir issue. In response, the Security Council adopted Resolution No. 39 (1948). The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) for investigating and mediating the Kashmir dispute was established in the resolution. In April, through Resolution No. 47 (1948) the commission was enlarged and transformed as its membership was increased to five. The commission was instructed to help India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute and for holding a plebiscite to this end. The commission visited India and Pakistan and in the light of its observation modified its work in three phases; ceasefire, truce agreement and resolution of the dispute through the consultation of both India and Pakistan. With the mediation and help of the commission, India and Pakistan agreed to a ceasefire agreement on July 27, 1949, called the *Karachi Agreement*. The agreement affected a ceasefire after a protracted war over Kashmir and established a ceasefire line of 830 km between the disputed territories of India and Pakistan. The commission created United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) for observing the enforcement of the ceasefire agreement. In March, 1951, under its Resolution No. 91, the Security Council decided to continue to supervise the ceasefire through UNMOGIP (Ganguly, 2003).

The Kashmir issue coincided with other geopolitical problems between India and Pakistan as a result of their independence. An acceptable division of certain areas especially in Punjab and Bengal remained a big challenge for the British government. The division of the two provinces created various geopolitical challenges that later on dominated the foreign policies formulation of Pakistan and India. Indian Independence Act 1947, in the light of 3rd June Plan, created two boundary commissions, one for Punjab and another of Bengal. Cyril Radcliff, a British lawyer, led both the commissions. He reached India on 8 July, 1947 for his mission.

The basic formula for the division of Punjab and Bengal was to include Muslim Populated areas into Pakistan while Hindu majority ones into India though, there was a loose provision for consideration of 'other factors' as well which were not properly defined (Schofield, 2000). The partition of Punjab proved integral to the question of Kashmir for the reasons of roads and outlets access to the valley. Two important access routes to Kashmir went through Pakistan: the first one was Rawalpindi-Murree-Muzaffarabad-Baramula-Srinagar and the second one was Sialkot-Jammu-Banihal pass (Schofield, 2000). The third route went through the district of Gurdaspur, which made it disputed and complicated for the politics of India and Pakistan. Gurdaspur, a district of united Punjab, comprised of the four Tehsils of Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Batala and Shakargarh. Pathankot connected the State of Jammu and Kashmir with India (Snedden, 2015).

Under the principles of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, the district of Gurdaspur with a Muslim majority of 51.14% should have gone to Pakistan. Mountbatten was not in favor of whole of Gurdaspur becoming a part of Pakistan. Out of the four Tehsils, Pathankot had Hindu majority, which made Mountbatten decide its future on an area wise, rather than a district wise basis. It created conflict and the future leadership of Pakistan became concerned, as it was a deviation from the intent and notion of the Indian Independence Act. Ch. Muhammad Ali, a member of the Radcliffe Commission regarded Mountbatten comments as 'highly improper' (Chester, 2002, February).

At the end, the three Tehsils of Pathankot, Batala and Gurdaspur were awarded to India by the Radcliffe Commission. Geopolitics, associated to Gurdaspur District obviously, affected the future peace of the region. Lord Birdwood had observed that had the District of Gurdaspur been awarded to Pakistan, 'India could certainly never have fought a war in Kashmir' (Birdwood, 1956).

Geopolitically, Kashmir has been important throughout history in regional calculations. Its location has been central to China, India and Russia. The heights of Pamir on its north-west and the 'Roof of the World', Tibetan Plateau on its north-east and east, Kashmir and its affiliated geographic units of Gilgit-Baltistan has always been at the cross roads of civilizations and therefore, a flashpoint between India and Pakistan after independence. Thus, a conclusion can be deduced that Kashmir due to its natural territorial location has been important for its potential as a buffer zone, or an avenue or both- as history shows.

The Kashmir issue started defining Pakistan's relations with India and became a central determinant of Pakistan's foreign and security policies. Viewed as an integral part of Pakistan, its foreign policy focused upon the settlement of Kashmir according to the UN resolutions. India is adamant that the Kashmir issue is a bilateral issue, and has, therefore, either avoided the dispute being discussed at any international forum or engaging a third party to mediate the Kashmir dispute. While Pakistan has remained keen to rope in the US to play the role of a mediator since the Cold War, in case the UN is not successful in persuading India to comply with its decisions regarding the issue. However, recently India has been trying to highlight the Kashmir dispute and seek the US role in response to the mega development project between China and Pakistan, called the China Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC). CPEC project has to go through the region of Gilgit-Baltistan, which India believes to be a region associated with the Kashmir dispute. This brings a diplomatic victory for Pakistan as India is finally willing to engage on the Kashmir dispute at multilateral platforms which it has previously avoided. Despite these developments, however, India continues to subdue the indigenous opposing political voices within the Indian held Kashmir.

Pakistan's creation coincided with the Cold War between USA and USSR. Pakistan had three foreign policy options: an alliance with USA, alliance with the USSR or to remain non-aligned. During the initial years under the creator of Pakistan, the Quaid-e-Azam, the country remained neutral. It was the time that Pakistan struggled for its diplomatic recognition at the bilateral and multilateral levels. During his days, Pakistan fought a war with India over Kashmir. The Kashmir issue made India a traditional enemy of Pakistan and, therefore, it went for establishing diplomatic relations with Soviet Union in April 1948. It was the time that USA extended an invitation to Nehru for a visit to Washington, while it did not extend any such invitation to Pakistan ("The foreign Policy of," 2012). Pakistan's decision at the time reflected pragmatism and rationality.

While keeping the Indian foreign policy behavior in mind, Pakistan went for a counter move. All this was happening on the pattern of, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend and the friend of my enemy is my enemy." Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, commented, "Pakistan cannot afford to wait. She must take her friends where she finds them" ("The foreign Policy of" 2012). He expressed his wish to the Soviet ambassador for visiting Moscow and he was responded through an invitation for a visit to USSR. The planned visit never materialized though, although in December 1949, the first Pakistani ambassador arrived in Moscow. The relations between Soviet Union and Pakistan, however, could not remain cordial in the coming years.

In the last month of 1949, United States extended an invitation to Liaquat Ali Khan for a visit to USA. The invitation was accepted and in May 1950 he went to Washington. The visit resulted into cordial and friendly relations between the two countries. In the United Nations, Pakistan supported the USA's use of force against North Korea. The move was against the interests of the Soviet Union. It coincided with Pakistan recognition of the Peoples Republic of China and development of diplomatic relations (Khan, 2011).

Pakistan concluded Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with the US in 1954. Later in the same year, Pakistan became the member of the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) along with Britain, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Philippine, Thailand and France. In 1955, it joined another defence agreement, the Baghdad Pact with Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Great Britain. The Baghdad Pact was later renamed as Central Treaty Organizations (CENTO) in 1958 after Iraq left it. Pakistan signed another agreement of Cooperation with the United States in 1959. Under all those agreements, Pakistan received defence and security assistance. This was the time that the military had an institutional role in defence and foreign policy as the serving Chief of Army Staff, Ayub Khan remained the Minister of Defence. The ultimate purpose of all the agreements was to maximize the security of Pakistan, a choice that is best explained by the Rational Actor Model.

The geopolitical and geostrategic position of Pakistan was the main attraction for the West and USA in the context of Cold War. USA needed the territory of Pakistan for its physical presence for countering Soviet expansionism. There were rumors in 1953 that Pakistan allowed the US to use its bases. Soviet Union and China protested against Pakistan both in soft and strict terms (Ahmad, 1963, p. 54).

China's place in Pakistan's geopolitical consideration has been central for its connectivity with the disputed Indo-Pak, Sino-India border and Kashmir. In the regional geopolitics perspective, India developed territorial disputes with both of its neighbor; Pakistan and China. In the context of mutual territorial disputes, Pakistan and China were having problems from the same source- India. Therefore, it looked natural for Pakistan and China to cooperate against the common opponent. However, China's approach was different, it has consistently tried taking steps in its foreign policy to establish cordial relations with India (*Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai*), however, the memories of 1962 war has checked India from fully letting go of its suspicions towards China. The bi-polar world was also responsible for defining the priorities of China and Pakistan's foreign policy towards each other and the region.

### **Pakistan and China towards Closeness**

The background of Pak-China relations can be traced back to 1950 when Pakistan severed its diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Republic of China) and recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC). Formal diplomatic relations were established between the two on May 21, 1951.

Though the Pakistani government was pro-West, it never adopted an anti-Chinese posture. Pakistan supported USA on the Korean issue but never sent its forces. 1955 was important for China's struggle for gaining a seat in the United Nations. China needed Pakistan's support and it was a hard decision for the latter in the context of the Cold War politics. The matter was thoroughly discussed in a Cabinet meeting on September 14, 1955. Three different opinion groups discussed three differing options. The first option was about supporting USA over China's membership issue because of its military and financial aid to Pakistan. The second opinion was to remain neutral but that could have won good will on neither side. The third way was to go along with China and support her case in the United Nations. The last one was adopted and Pakistan cast its vote in favor of China (Small, 2015).

Supporting China on the floor of the United Nations proved very fruitful in bringing Pakistan and China closer to each other. The Prime Minister of Pakistan was invited to China and he visited Beijing. The premiers of both the countries agreed upon cooperation in their cultural and commercial relations. The Chinese approach towards Pakistan's joining of Western alliance was rational and understood its reasons. This was still the honeymoon time of Sino-Indian friendly relations though certain problems were surfacing. The actual break up between the two was witnessed later on over border issues as discussed earlier.

The time also coincided with the Sino-Soviet Split that changed regional geopolitics. In 1961, Soviet Union finalized MIG fighter aircrafts deal with India. China considered the Soviet move as anti-China because it had fought with Indian forces on border in 1959. It felt like encirclement to China (Barnet, 2001).

At the start of the 1960s, regional and global politics took a turn that brought Pakistan and China even closer to this day is referred to with such terms as 'sweeter than honey', 'higher than the Himalaya', 'deeper than the ocean', 'time tested friend' and 'all weather friends'. The 1962 Sino-India war changed the geopolitical landscape of the region. The once *Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai* became enemies and the new regional geopolitical order was designed by the pattern 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. The territorial disputes of Pakistan and China with India provided a common ground to develop their relations with warmth and zeal.

### Conclusion

The years from 1947 to 1962 witnessed an ocean of change in the geopolitical behavior of Pakistan, China and India due to the fact that the relations were dependent upon geopolitical realities. The region bifurcated into friends and enemies because of disputes over borders and regions, inherited from the colonial past. China and India could not frame durable relations as the neglected border dispute over Sikkim and Tibet surfaced to the level of war in 1962. Thus, their once friendly relations transformed into the worst form of enmity. India became a common rival for Pakistan and China. It became easy to bring Pakistan and China closer towards each other. The following years witnessed an exemplary friendship between Pakistan and China that defined not regional politics but had implications for the world politics too. India joining the consortium with China and Pakistan will help resolve political disputes, and allow economic integration in the region for a peaceful co-existence and development of the entire region.

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