

China - India : Expected tensions in the Bufferzone

Tanguy Struye de Swielande



NOTE D'ANALYSE 21

Note d'Analyse 21

Tanguy Struye de Swielande

China – India : Expected tensions in the Bufferzone

Juin 2012

Note d'Analyse 21

Du programme « Union européenne – Chine », Chaire InBev Baillet-Latour

Publication périodique réalisée par la Chaire InBev Baillet-Latour, programme « Union européenne-Chine ». Les opinions émises dans les notes d'analyses n'engagent que la responsabilité des auteurs. Il est interdit de reproduire partiellement ou intégralement sur quelque support que ce soit le présent ouvrage sans qu'il ne soit fait explicitement mention des sources.

Direction : Tanguy de Wilde et Tanguy Struye de Swielande.

Conception et mise en page du présent numéro : Alain De Neve.

Pour nous contacter :

Site Internet : <http://www.uclouvain.be/265598.html>

Email : Tanguy.Struye@uclouvain.be

© Chaire InBev Baillet-Latour, programme « Union européenne-Chine », 2009.



Docteur en sciences politiques de l'Université catholique de Louvain (UCL), **Tanguy Struye de Swielande** est professeur à l'Université catholique de Louvain, aux Facultés universitaires catholiques de Mons et à l'École Royale Militaire. Il est également coordinateur de la Chaire InBev Baillet-Latour « Programme Union européenne-Chine » et chercheur au Centre d'Études des crises et des conflits internationaux (CECRI). Ses domaines de compétence sont la politique étrangère et de sécurité des Etats-Unis, la géopolitique, la géoéconomie et les grandes puissances.

Introduction.....	5
1. Border tensions : the importance of “buffer states”	6
2. Pakistan - Afghanistan.....	11
3. Myanmar (Burma) – Indochina - Bangladesh	15
Conclusion	20

Introduction

At the end of the 1940s, India, which gained independence in 1947 and the People's Republic of China, founded in 1949, seemed to have developed a new political model that would logically lead them to cooperation rather than antagonism. Yet ten years later, the two neighbouring states found themselves more and more in opposition, especially because of their ideological differences (Bandung Conference - 1955), Tibet (1959) and their border disputes (Aksai Chin - 1957)¹. These tensions also lead to the Sino-Indian War of 1962² and after a long wait, it was only in 1976 that the two states re-established diplomatic relations. Even though the Indian Foreign Minister Vajpayee visited China in 1979, tensions between the two countries continued, due to Chinese aggression in Vietnam that same year. In the following decade the tension remained and it is only in the early 90s that a new rapprochement was possible. This was however short-lived because of India's nuclear tests in 1998, which were a signal not only to Pakistan but also to China.

If relations between China and India were difficult during the Cold War and then again at the time of India's nuclear tests, there has been something of an entente since 1999-2000 through bilateral meetings of the various state leaders and ministers. The meeting between Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Chinese President Hu Jintao in June 2003 resulted in a joint statement, stating that "the common interests of India and China outweigh their differences", that "neither party shall use or threaten to use force against the other" and that "the two countries agreed to strengthen bilateral relations qualitatively at all levels and in all areas while addressing differences through peaceful means in a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable manner"³. The four-day visit to India of the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in April 2005 even ended with the signing of a "strategic partnership". The next year, devoted to Sino-Indian relations, concluded with a cooperation agreement (May 2006), which

¹ Common border of 4,056km (Line of Actual Control).

² India still claims Aksai Chin under Chinese administration since 1962. This vast area of 38,000 square kilometers is considered by New Delhi as part of Ladakh, which is itself part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The challenge for the question of the Aksai Chin is not without significance for the Chinese for two reasons: first, because the road through this region connects Tibet and Xinjiang, and secondly it would implicitly recognize the McMahon Line (agreement signed in 1914 between the British and an independent Tibet) and thus de facto recognize that Tibet was independent at that point of time, which would weaken the China's position against Tibetan claims.

³ See St. Mézard, I., "Les relations sino-indiennes, tendances récentes et évolutions en cours", in *AFRI*, 2007, p. 301.

envisaged among other things to increase confidence building measures between the two countries. And while China and India organized joint naval exercises in 2003 and 2005, it was in May 2006, that the two countries signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” in the field of defence (exchanges between the Ministries of Defence and ground forces, establishment of a defence dialogue, organization of joint military exercises, etc.)⁴. Moreover, trade between the two countries continues to increase, up to 60 billion dollars in 2010. China is today India’s largest trading partner. The two countries have also started cooperating on energy, climate change and WTO. In 2011, the two countries even started a strategic economic dialogue on principally economic issues, but it also has a purpose of confidence building measures.

If, *prima facie*, the relations between China and India seem quite good, especially in the economic sphere, several sticking points remain, such as the unresolved delimitation of their common border⁵, the proposed enlargement of the Security Council to include India, the U.S. and India agreement on civil nuclear cooperation, the China and Pakistan relationship, etc. The two countries remain in fact essentially rivals, each vying to expand its sphere of influence at the expense of the other. Mistrust between the two powers results in a fiercely fought geopolitical game in the immediate neighbourhood of the two states.

1. Border tensions : the importance of “buffer states”

A buffer state is defined by Mathisen as follow: « *Small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival states (or bloc of states)* »⁶. These States are thus in a position as Amir Abdur Rahman explained for Afghanistan of « *a swan on a lake, with bears on one shore and wolves on the opposite shore, ready to snatch it up should she swim too close* »⁷. For Sir Lewis Mamier a bufferzone is a “sandwich system of international politics”⁸. In this system called the “buffer system”, you need to

⁴ Bajpae, C., “The Panda and the Peacock”, in *China Security*, Vol. 3, n° 4, Autumn 2007, p. 106.

⁵ The two governments concluded an agreement on the political process and guiding principles for the settlement of the Sino-Indian border issue in April 2005. This was supposed to lead to a “political settlement” of the dispute in the framework of “general and long term interests “of the two powers. (St. Mézard, I., “Les relations sino-indiennes, tendances récentes et évolutions en cours”, in *AFRI*, 2007, p. 302). In February 2012 they hold their 15th round of discussion without any breakthrough.

⁶ Quoted in Greenfield Partem, M., « The Buffer System in International Relations », in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, n°1, March 1983, p.4.

⁷ Cited in Greenfield Partem, M., « The Buffer System in International Relations », in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 27, n°1, March 1983, p.19.

⁸ Quoted in Wight, Martin, *Power Politics*, edited by Hedley Bull & Carstaan Holbraad, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1978, p. 159.

take into account the capacities of the actors and the balance of power and the foreign policy orientations of the states inside the system. Consequently the establishment or preservation of the buffer state should « *deliver greater benefits than its division or unilateral occupation by one of the parties which would lead to the war they seek to avoid. Otherwise it is likely that the great powers will try to seize control of the buffer state* »⁹.

In Tibet in recent years, we are seeing an increased Chinese military presence in the region, not only to control the Tibetan people but also to consolidate its position in relation to India¹⁰. This is especially true as in Tibet, China has a non-negligible advantage: it holds the high ground. For Baconnet, "with its high plateau overlooking the region, Tibet is to China what the Golan Heights (overlooking the plains of Damascus and Galilee) is to Israel, a key outpost and a vantage point"¹¹. Beyond the geostrategic importance of Tibet to China, offering strategic depth as concerns India, it provides the main water systems of South Asia. The largest rivers of the area have their source in Tibet including the Mekong, Yangtze, Brahmaputra, Indus and Salween. Control of the region by Beijing allows it to have a certain sway over neighbouring countries. Especially given that the economic, social, demographic growth of the country results in an increasing need for water for industry, agriculture, the population, etc. Despite its many waterworks projects in the last fifty years, China has certain difficulties: water pollution, empty reservoirs in the cities, dried up rivers etc. However, China with about 20% of the world population has only 7-8% of the world's fresh water and arable land is increasingly limited. Particularly given the parallel problem of distribution: "If southern China has 80% of the water resources and 55% of the population, northern China is the poor cousin: it has less than 15% of available water while hosting 45% of Chinese people"¹². The importance of the Tibetan Plateau should consequently not be underestimated, China intends to divert a portion of the waters of various rivers to the north of the country, which could have important

⁹ Sweijs, T., op.cit., p. 10.

¹⁰ Read a time line of India-Tibet relations: Muni, DS, "The Tibetan 'Uprising' 2008: India's Response", in *ISAS Working Paper*, n°59, 1 June 2009.

¹¹ Baconnet, A., "Tibet, la géopolitique a ses raisons que la morale ignore", in *Monde chinois*, n° 19, Autumn 2009, p. 91.

¹² Galland, F., "Géopolitique du dessalement", in *Note de la FRS*, n°18, 28 September 2008, p. 5.

consequences, for example for Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, etc.¹³.

Tensions have for example arisen since the end of 2008 between Beijing and New Delhi regarding Chinese water projects (the Zangmu dam) on the river Brahmaputra (Tsangpo Yalung / Siang), which originates in Tibet, and then flows through India and Bangladesh to join the Ganges and finally into the Bay of Bengal. Before joining India, it turns 180 degrees (at Shuomatan or the Great Bend). It is here that China wishes to divert the river as part of its South-North project, which includes three artificial rivers (Yalong, Dadu and Jinsha) to supply northern China.¹⁴ It is this diversion, rather than any dams, that is of such great concern to India. It would have important socio-economic consequences not only for India but also for Bangladesh, resulting, in the worst case scenario, in population movements that could cause insecurity in some India / Bangladesh border regions¹⁵. India is also concerned that this will have an impact on its own water projects in the region of Arunachal Pradesh. China also plans to connect the Yellow River (the Huang He) and the Yangtze River to ensure the water transfer from South to North. The project consists of three diversions: 1) downstream of the Yangtze River (near Nanjing) south of Tianjin; 2) midway, to ensure the water supply to Beijing and Tianjin and 3) and a diversion on the West to divert water from the Yangtze on the Tibetan plateau and transfer it to the source of the Yellow River. The project cost is estimated at \$50 billion¹⁶. The control for these rivers permits their use for agriculture and hydroelectric dams to generate power. But we must realize that the diversion of the water of the Tibetan plateau will also impact on other rivers.

Tibet has also many mineral resources (zinc, cobalt, lead, etc.), and apparently some oil and gas reserves (Tsaidam and Lhunpula basins) even if the extent is presently unknown. Finally, China intends to develop the region to encourage trade with Nepal, Bhutan and northeast India. India, while seeing an

¹³ Baillet, P., "Chine : une apocalypse hydraulique", in *Politique internationale*, n°107, Spring 2005.

¹⁴ Ramachandran, S., "India quakes over China's water plan", in *Asia Times*, 9 December 2008.

¹⁵ Beijing may therefore alienate Dhaka which it sees as a potential ally in its policy of encirclement of India.

¹⁶ Galland, F., "Gestion des ressources en eau : problème stratégique pour la Chine", in *Défense nationale*, July 2007; Gernelle, E., "Le canal à contre-courant", in *Le Point*, 20-27 December 2007.

opportunity to open up a presently isolated part of its territory, also sees a Chinese desire to dominate the border region through the economic means. Ultimately, Tibet is a major issue between Beijing and New Delhi because as George Ginsburg observed, "whoever controls Tibet dominates the Himalayan foothills; whoever who dominates the Himalayan foothills threatens the Indian subcontinent and whoever that can threaten the Indian subcontinent may at any time to seize all of south Asia and even the whole of Asia"¹⁷.

Even outside the problem of Tibet, the two countries continue to have a major disagreement over the demarcation of their common border. Although India and China reopened the Nathu La Pass between Sikkim¹⁸ and southern Tibet (4,000 m) in July 2006, after more than forty years, border tensions remain. The Himalayan-Tibet part of the Indochinese border is characterized by having only three passages, as the average altitude is 5,000 m: Trisuli and Sun in Nepal(1,800 m) and Dihong in Arunachal Pradesh (600 m)¹⁹. Like Beijing, New Delhi has recently strengthened its military presence along the border of Arunachal Pradesh, and in the Siliguri Corridor (at the junction of India, Tibet and Bhutan). This area, known as the 'Chicken Neck' (Siliguri Corridor) is vital because any loss of control would separate India from a part of its own territory. India has deployed at the Tezpur base, several aircraft squadrons of Sukhoi and Mig 21²⁰. In 2008, India brought in two divisions of 15,000 men each, to be deployed in the disputed regions of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh²¹. Indian strategy is not confined to only hard power. Indian Prime Minister Sing has announced a development plan for the Arunachal Pradesh region, including infrastructure projects connecting the town of Mahadeypur to the district of Tawang²². New Delhi wants to avoid the danger that one day Beijing could control the 'Chicken Neck' by being present in both Nepal and Bangladesh, and thus cutting the Indian state in two.

¹⁷ See Arpi, C., "Tibet: la clef de la paix en Asie", in *Diplomatie*, May - June 2008, n°32, p.32.

¹⁸ Joining Sikkim (a small kingdom located between Nepal and Bhutan) to India in 1975.

¹⁹ Gonon, E., "Inde-Chine : les différents territoires d'une interaction frontalière litigieuse", in Lasserre, F. and Gonon, E. (dir), *Espaces et enjeux : méthodes d'une géopolitique critique*, Paris, Harmattan, 2001, p. 302.

²⁰ Pandit, R., "Sukhoi base in east to counter China, 28 September, in *TNN*, 2007; Malik, M., "India-China Competition Revealed in Ongoing Border Disputes", 2007 (<http://www.pinr.com>).

²¹ In the Kashmir region (State of Jamu), India also has a border dispute with China, and has taken steps to increase its presence along the border (reopening an air base at Daulat Beg Oldie). Curtis, L., "US-India Relations: The China Factor", in *Backgrounder*, Heritage Foundation, November 25, 2008.

²² China continues to make claims for Arunachal Pradesh, particularly because of the presence of the Tawang Monastery, a place of worship for Tibetans.

In this border area between India and China, two countries play a pivotal role: Nepal and Bhutan. If India has always considered Nepal as being within its sphere of influence, some see a certain subservience [strong cultural and economic relations²³, the presence of a million Nepalese on the Indian Territory, an open border²⁴, better geographic situation on the Indian side (Gangetic Plain) than the Chinese side (Tibetan Plateau)], since the fall of King Gyanendra in 2006 and the creation of a republic in 2008, the relationship between the two countries has become decidedly strained. Landlocked Nepal depends heavily on India for trade (imports, exports, energy, etc.), and also for its security. In fact a clause in the Indo-Nepal treaty of 1950, bans Kathmandu from acquiring weapons, without Indian authorisation. Despite this apparent tight control, New Delhi fears a rapprochement between Beijing and Kathmandu, with the former, as noted by F. Bobin "adeptly supporting on every occasion the Nepalese regime in place (...) and entirely free of any ideological considerations"²⁵. Moreover, the crisis Nepal is once again facing since May 2009 does not bode well for the country's stability. Many analysts believe that this instability is the result of a proxy war between Beijing and New Delhi²⁶. The strong position of the Maoists in Nepal clearly worries New Delhi that fears contagion to other areas of India. The Maoist revolution could indeed extend to the state of Chhattisgarh, which has been very fragile in the last few years due to the presence of Maoists (Naxalites)²⁷. Finally, the dispute between India and Nepal concerning the Mahakali River Treaty is also problematic.

²³ See Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty of 1950.

²⁴ With more than 1,700 km of common border, there are some tensions around border demarcation in areas along the border where rivers change their channel.

²⁵ Bobin, F., "Katmandou joue la carte chinoise pour tenir l'Inde à distance", in *Le Monde*, 17 April 2008.

²⁶ Bobin, F., "Le Népal, théâtre d'une âpre lutte entre Inde et Chine", in *Le Monde*, 30 May 2009.

²⁷ The Maoist threat in India concerns more than 150 districts in 13 states. While the threat is ideological, it is primarily due to a lack of social and economic reforms and the lack of any future perspectives for the population. If India today is in the middle of an economic boom, many areas, especially rural areas, are not yet seeing any benefit. This is even more marked since the regions in the east (Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Orissa) are rich in raw materials (bauxite, chromium, nickel, coal). (For details see: Verma, A., "Naxal Threat in India: A Long & Arduous Battle Ahead lies", South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 3526, December 2, 2009). We can also keep in mind that in April 2010, 75 Indian police officers were killed in the state of Chhattisgarh.

In recent years, Beijing has increased its political and economic influence in the country. China wants for example to expand its railway network to Nepal (Kathmandu-Lhasa railway line) and Nepalese infrastructures (road Kathmandu-Hetauda, up to the Indian border) and between Nepal and Tibet. Outside of the existing Kodari Friendship Highway, several new routes are planned over the next few years²⁸. Through this infrastructure policy, China is promoting economic development in the region, while at the same time having a greater say in Kathmandu. Nepal, however, intends to follow carefully the recommendation of Prithvi Narayan Shah, founder of Nepal: "The kingdom is a yam caught between two boulders. Maintain friendly relations with the Emperor of China. But also, keep friendly relations with the Emperor of the Seas (formerly the British monarch, now India)"²⁹.

Bhutan also acts as a buffer zone between the two larger neighbours. Although traditionally close to India, on which it depends in part for its defence, Bhutan with an army of barely 6,000 men, faces several armed groups. For some years however, there has been a rapprochement between Thimphu and Beijing because, among other things, public works have been carried out in the country by Chinese firms. That said, the two countries do not maintain formal diplomatic relations, because there are border disputes between them. As T. Mathou noted: "Ultimately, any destabilization of one of the two countries (Nepal and Buthan) would likely affect not only the regional geopolitical balance but also the stability of northern India, particularly its north-eastern states, thick with secessionists' movements"³⁰.

A final aspect, greatly underestimated in the region, is the importance of Buddhism. Faced with China's policies, India has turned to Buddhism to counter Chinese influence in bordering areas³¹.

2. Pakistan - Afghanistan

Since independence, the relationship between Pakistan and India has been tense and complex³². After considerable tension in 2001-2002³³, India and

²⁸ Singh, R., "The China Factor in Nepal", in *Indian Defence Review*, vol. 25, 2, April-June, 2010.

²⁹ From Ramirez, Ph., "Le Népal entre la Chine et l'Inde", in *Outre-Terre*, n°21, 2007, p. 235.

³⁰ Mathou, T., "Bhoutan et Népal : les royaumes himalayens à l'épreuve de la démocratie - Un enjeu régional entre l'Inde et la Chine", 1 July 2007.

³¹ India hosts the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile on its territory.

³² Three wars: 1947-1948, 1965, 1971-1972 and then on the brink of war in 1999 and again in May 2002.

Pakistan began a normalization process of their bilateral relations in 2003. Several confidence-building measures were put in place (return of ambassadors in both countries, resumption of civilian air links, release of prisoners, proposed trade concessions, etc.). The two countries seemed to prefer the path of dialogue. The visit to India of President Musharraf, 16 - 18 April 2005, was the occasion to highlight this new approach. A new step was taken after the Kashmir earthquake in September 2005, and in 2006 the two countries established a hotline for maritime security. As concerns the essential questions, the two countries are negotiating on the basis of the "2 plus 6" formula. The "2" referring to the major issues: Kashmir³⁴ and bilateral security after nuclearization. The "6" refers to six other litigations; the glacier Chian Tse, commerce, trade, and inter-personal relations between the peoples, etc. While the period 2003 - 2008 has seen reduced tensions between the two countries, a great deal of mistrust continues. There has been no breakthrough on the issues (Kashmir, terrorism, the nuclear issue) and the Mumbai bombings in late 2008 have increased mutual distrust, especially as New Delhi notes with suspicion the growing and explicit relationship between Beijing and Islamabad. The negotiations between Islamabad and Delhi resumed in July 2011, after some "cricket diplomacy" in March 2011³⁵.

China and Pakistan have a very strong relationship politically and militarily. For Beijing, Islamabad is used to balance against Delhi. On April 5, 2005, China and Pakistan signed the *Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation* comprising a set of agreements dealing with defence issues³⁶, trade, and technology exchanges. China counts also on Pakistan to restrain Islamists in the region of Xinjiang. The two states are also heavily engaged in the development and expansion of the port of Gwadar (near the Gulf of Oman). The port could guarantee the transport of oil coming from the Gulf countries and Africa. Oil from both regions could be carried by pipeline to Xinjiang in

³³ Mid-December 2001, terrorists tried to get inside the Indian Parliament. In response, India moved troops to the border region of Rajasthan in Kashmir. This caused a similar reaction on the part of Pakistan. They remained in this tense situation for several months, on the verge of nuclear war. The situation was only calmed though major diplomatic efforts from Washington.

³⁴ If Kashmir mainly concerns the relationship between Pakistan and India, it also concerns China, in particular the region of Aksai Chin. Aksai Chin was annexed by China during the conflict with India in 1962 and allows better contact between Tibet and Xinjiang, via the China National Highway 219.

³⁵ AFP, "La diplomatie du cricket œuvre à nouveau entre l'Inde et le Pakistan", in *Le Monde*, 28 mars 2011.

³⁶ China supports Pakistan's defence (F-22 P Frigates, Al Zarrar and Al Khalid tanks, JF 17 aircraft, nuclear technology, missiles, etc.).

the northwest of China, via the port of Gwadar. The disadvantage of this route, however, is its high cost, given the distance and difficult terrain, and keeping in mind that Gwadar is located in the rather unstable Baluchistan province. However, this route has the great advantage of avoiding the Strait of Malacca. In addition, as J.-L. Racine mentions, “Pakistan continues to offer China a way to limit the regional influence of India, and to continue having a significant part of the Indian Army tied up in Kashmir”³⁷. To promote trade and open up the Xinjiang region, both countries are investing heavily in infrastructure both road (Karakoram Highway) and rail. Finally, China continues to strengthen its activities in the country, in mining (zinc, copper ...), in the construction of hydroelectric dams, and civil nuclear power.

Faced with this collaboration, India is developing the port of Karwar in the Persian Gulf (Kadamba base) to protect sea routes and monitor the development of Gwadar port. For A. Lamballe: "The construction of a very large base at Karwar, 100 km south of Goa, in the State of Karnataka will provide new possibilities of action. At the existing naval bases in Mumbai, Vishakapatnam and Cochin, the Navy must share facilities with commercial ships and submarines as well as an air base and various other facilities"³⁸. The port should, once the changes are completed, be able to handle about forty ships and submarines. India continues to support the development of the Iranian port of Chahbahar strategically allowing the encirclement of Pakistan. Tehran and New Delhi in fact collaborate militarily, especially in maritime affairs (joint exercises)³⁹. But this cooperation also involves "establishing a logistics corridor North-South linking Russia, Central Asia (Turkmenistan in particular) and India via Iran"⁴⁰. The September 2000 *Inter-Governmental Agreement on International North-South Transport Corridor*, links Indian and the Iranian ports (Bandar Abbas/Chahbahar), then on by train to the Iranian Caspian Sea ports (Bandar Anzali/Bandar Amirabad), then on to the Russian

³⁷ Racine, J.-L., “Les relations entre la Chine et le Pakistan”, Groupe d’étude de l’Observatoire sur l’évolution politique et stratégique de la Chine, *Asia Centre*, SciencesPo, Paris, 11 December 2008, p. 6.

³⁸ Lamballe, A., “L’Inde un acteur important”, in *Revue Militaire Suisse*, n°2 March - April 2008, p. 48.

³⁹ India however, has strong competition from China in Iran. In fact, relations between Iran and China are at a much more advanced stage than those between Iran and India. Read about the China-Iran rapprochement : Eiffing, V., “Chine - Iran : vers une maturité pragmatique ?”, in *Notes d’analyse* from the Chaire Inbev Baillet - Latour on EU China relations (Université catholique de Louvain), n°7, January 2010.

⁴⁰ Garnier, G., “Les enjeux de la compétition maritime entre l’Inde et la Chine”, 2004-2005 (DEA thesis), Institut Français de Géopolitique, Université de Paris VIII, p. 164.

Caspian ports, and finally via the Volga River to northern Europe and Rotterdam, or the Black Sea-Mediterranean. This route is more or less 6,500 km instead of more than 16,000 km through Suez⁴¹. As part of this project, a railroad line could appear between Chahbahar and Zaranj (Afghanistan)⁴². At the military level, India is refining its doctrine of the "double front": the capacity to carry out simultaneous offensive operations on both western and northern fronts.

When we think about Pakistan, Afghanistan must come to mind. India is a major contributor (6th) to Afghanistan. The Indian presence in the country is seen mainly in the construction of certain infrastructure projects (eg. the Zaranj-Delaram highway linking Kabul to Iran), the agreement in 2011 on the exploitation of the Hajigak iron mine, and the training of diplomats and police officers, not to mention the growing cultural influence of Bollywood. Furthermore, Kabul and Delhi concluded in Autumn of 2011 a strategic partnership, reinforcing the military ties between the two states. For India, their action is primarily to ensure at least Afghanistan remains neutral (that is not a support base for Pakistan) or at best an Afghanistan under Indian influence, giving it a certain strategic depth in relation to Pakistan, and also to China.

Pakistan wants to ensure Afghanistan is both a state subject to its influence, and politically and militarily weak. It seeks to ensure that the Durand Line is not questioned and to restrict any possible Indian influence. This approach is the source of their ambiguous attitude towards the Taliban and other radical Islamist groups in the region. In some cases by playing the Islamist card, Islamabad wants to remind States of the region and particularly Afghanistan, that **it** determines the rules of the game. However, as long as Pakistan continues its support for radical Islam, trade relations and the construction of an energy corridor between Pakistan and Central Asian states will not go forward. For most Central Asian states, the nearest port is Karachi. There is also on the table, the Turkmenistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan (TAP) pipeline project, which India joined in 2006 (TAPI). But these economic projects can only be achieved and cost-effective if there is stability. However, as F. Bobin noted "Since its birth, Pakistan lives in the fear of encirclement: to the east, the threat of India, to the west, the danger of Afghanistan fanning irredentist

⁴¹ Fair, C., "Indo-Iranian Ties: Thicker than Oil", in *Meria*, Vol. 11, n°1, Article 5/7 - March 2007.

⁴² Fair, C., "India and Iran: New Delhi's Balancing Act", in *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2007, p. 149.

Pashtunistani dreams. For them, Afghanistan must be entirely subservient; "Finlandization" is their objective to create the vital strategic depth needed in the case of war with India. All of Islamabad's strategic doctrine comes down to this obsession"⁴³.

Though absent militarily, Chinese influence in Afghanistan is increasingly important. Beyond the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's observer status of Afghanistan, the two countries concluded in 2006 a comprehensive partnership agreement including, among other the contract to operate the large Aynak copper mine (Logar Province)⁴⁴. This presence also helps to have better control over energy routes and the Silk Road. With the retreat of ISAF in 2014, the Chinese activities in Afghanistan will probably be intensified in the near future.

3. Myanmar (Burma) – Indochina - Bangladesh

Myanmar, situated between China and India, has a key geostrategic importance because of its coastline along the Strait of Malacca and the Bay of Bengal and its relationship with Southeast Asia. It also has only the border that is accessible and permeable enough to facilitate a land invasion of India from China or vice versa⁴⁵. Myanmar today is of a crucially important key for China⁴⁶. Beijing benefits from access to the ports of Akyab, Cheduba and Bassein, offering access to the Indian Ocean. There is also a great deal of Chinese activity in the exploitation of the gas fields. At the end of March 2009, both countries confirmed an agreement for the construction of a gas pipeline and an oil pipeline (2,000 km long) to connect the Bay of Bengal (Kyaukryu port) to China⁴⁷. One pipeline will transport gas from the Shwe field to the province of Yunnan, while the other pipeline will transport oil from the Middle East and Africa in order to avoid passing through the Strait of Malacca. They should be operational by 2013⁴⁸. CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) has a 50,9% stake in the project, while 49,1% is in the hands of

⁴³ Bobin, F., "Pakistan - Etats-Unis : un jeu dangereux", in *Le Monde*, 12 September 2008.

⁴⁴ Hariharan, R., "China's Influence in India's Neighborhood," Paper No. 2804, 12 August 2008.

⁴⁵ China shares with Myanmar a mountainous border of 2,185 km and with India a 1,463 km border.

⁴⁶ Jagan, L., "Myanmar best bad buddies with Beijing", in *Asia Times*, June 13, 2007.

⁴⁷ Until recently, fuel for the province of Yunnan was supplied by truck and since 2005 by a pipeline from Maoming (Guangdong) to Kunming. These pipelines are also of great importance for the economic development of the region.

⁴⁸ However, the pipelines pass through a region of Myanmar (Kachin) known for its political instability.

MOGE (Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise)⁴⁹. Finally, there is a last reason for the interest of China in its neighbour. More than a million Chinese live and work in Myanmar. Beijing looks to ensure a certain stability of the regime, to avoid any massive return to the border towns which would almost certainly entail social unrest⁵⁰. Trade relations with Myanmar are important to the Chinese provinces in the region so that they can open up and export through Myanmar. The Kunming-Rangoon corridor is developing rapidly as a trade route both by road and by sea. This policy is a direct consequence of the ‘Go West Policy’, launched in 1999, which was to develop and open up the interior regions through infrastructure development to offset any imbalances and ensure social stability⁵¹. The arrival of Thein Sein at the Presidency in 2011, and the “ouverture” of the regime to the world (e.g. rapprochement with the US) have led to some frictions between the two countries⁵², China being afraid of losing its grip on Myanmar.

Faced with this Middle Kingdom policy, India wants to remove the Chinese influence in Myanmar⁵³. While the Chinese presence in Myanmar is important, its military presence in the country remains rather unclear; however, India sees there, a real security threat. Given this perception of a "real" threat, India is strengthening its presence⁵⁴ in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands⁵⁵. India similarly sells military equipment and supports the generals of the regime in their fight against insurgent groups operating in the border region. The two countries have held joint naval exercises for many years. But Myanmar also has an economic interest. To this end, India concluded in early 2006, a series of agreements to exploit gas fields and build a gas pipeline from Arakan to India through Bangladesh, the project, while not yet abandoned, is no longer relevant today. This uncertainty is even more the case since the relationship

⁴⁹ Ramachandran, S., “China secures Myanmar energy route”, in *Asia Times*, 3 April 2009.

⁵⁰ Jagan, L., “Myanmar best bad buddies with Beijing”, in *Asia Times*, June 13, 2007.

⁵¹ For more details read: “China's Myanmar Dilemma” in *Asia Report*, International Crisis Group, n° 177, 14 September 2009.

⁵² The new government has announced the suspension of the construction by Chinese enterprises of the Myitsone dam, potentially very important for China.

⁵³ For a historical overview of the relationship between India and Myanmar, see Lintner, B. “India stands by Myanmar status quo” in *Asia Times*, November 14, 2007 and Lall, M., “India-Myanmar Relations - Geopolitics and Energy in Light of the New Balance of Power in Asia”, in *ISAS Working Paper*, n°29, 2 January 2008.

⁵⁴ Development of ports (to moor submarines, destroyers and amphibious crafts) and airports (Shibpur in Andaman and Campbell Bay in Nicobar, to handle air refuelling tankers, SU-30MKI, drones).

⁵⁵ Egrettau, R., “India and China vying for influence in Burma - A New Assessment”, in *India Review*, vol. 7, n° 1, January-March, 2008, pp. 44-45.

between Bangladesh and Myanmar is also complex, given the dispute over claims to some offshore areas rich in hydrocarbons. New Delhi, however, appears to have been awarded a contract to modernize and develop the port of Sittwe, which should open up the north-east region of India. India and Myanmar are also discussing the construction of the Moreh-Mae Sot road, connecting India to Thailand via Myanmar to promote economic cooperation between South Asia and Southeast Asia, between the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC) and the *Association for South East Asian Nations* (ASEAN)⁵⁶. But this route faces practical problems (difficult terrain) and insurgencies in this part of Myanmar (Chin and Naga)⁵⁷. Additionally, trade between China and Myanmar is far greater than that between India and Myanmar. The Stilwell Road (a road through Burma used during the Second World War to supply the Chinese forces) could be rehabilitated, connecting India and China via Myanmar. While China has modernized some of the old road, India and Myanmar have not yet reached any agreement on the project.

Again, given its search for energy resources and its determination to block India, Beijing's interest in Bangladesh is not to be underestimated, given their large gas reserves and strategic position. China in fact modernizes the port of Chittagong on the Bay of Bengal. China has also signed a military cooperation agreement in 2002 with Bangladesh and is the principal supplier for the Bangladeshi army. It also invests in the telecommunications network and builds the highway linking Chittagong to Kunming via Myanmar (900km). The relationship between neighbouring India and Bangladesh, on the other hand, is rather tense for several reasons. There is the Indian desire to build a dam (Tipaimukh dam) on the Barak River, which would, according to Bangladesh, have important economic and environmental consequences, by drastically reducing water resources in the region⁵⁸. There is also a border dispute between the two countries (also including Myanmar) about the demarcation of their maritime boundary in the Gulf of Bengal, and concerning the island (South Talpatty / New Moore) on the Hariabhanga River, the issue concerns the control of oil reserves⁵⁹. India also built a wall on its border with

⁵⁶ Amelot, F., "La compétition énergétique indo-chinoise en Birmanie", in *Géostratégiques*, n° 19, April 2008, p.154.

⁵⁷ Egreteau, R., "India and China Vying for Influence in Burma – A new Assessment", in *India Review*, vol. 7, n°1, January-March, 2008, p. 50.

⁵⁸ Animesh Roul, A., "India, Bangladesh: Diplomacy Dam", in *ISN Security Watch*, August 4, 2009.

⁵⁹ Karim, A., "Bangladesh-India Relations: Some Recent Trends", in *ISAS Working Paper*, n° 96, 12 November 2009.

Bangladesh⁶⁰ to stop the penetration by Islamic extremists⁶¹, Indian insurgents⁶² and illegal immigrants. For Gourdon and Berthet, "*This demographic and social movement could eventually lead to the secession of the entire northeast region (of India), which acts as a kind of buffer zone, predominantly tribal, between India, China and Myanmar, for a long time subject to intense activity on the part of Anglo-Saxon missionaries, Marxist revolutionaries and Islamic groups generally favourable to secession from the Indian Union through the formation of independent states (Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, etc.)*.. "⁶³. Continuing with Gourdon and Berthet "*Bangladesh (...) has become for India a concern at least as important to that posed by Pakistan. It locks India out from the Indochinese peninsula, whose commercial importance is increasing for Delhi*"⁶⁴. However, since 1997 there exists at the economic level, BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), composed of members of SAARC and two ASEAN member countries (Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal). They cooperate in various areas: communication, energy, trade, investment, transport, technology, etc. Economic ties between the two countries have also developed from 1 billion dollars in 2001 to \$2.55 billion in 2007. Additionally, to further promote cooperation in the region, a new initiative was launched in March 2010. It involves Bangladesh, India, China and Myanmar (BCIM), and seeks to build trust between members through cooperative, primarily economic, initiatives⁶⁵. Since 2010, there is also a political rapprochement between the two states: 51-point joint communiqué of January 2010, the visit of Prime Minister Singh to Bangladesh in 2011 (negotiations concerning the frontier, sharing of water and the transit of goods from Nepal and Bhutan to Chittagong via Indian territory).

China is increasing its presence along the Mekong River mainly through the *Greater Mekong Subregion Programme*, launched in 1992 by the Asian Development Bank, which includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan Province. The aim of the initiative is to strengthen political and economic cooperation between member states. China covets the economic corridors beginning at the city of Kunming to, respectively, the port of Bangkok (Thailand), the port of Haiphong (Vietnam) and the port of

⁶⁰ A common border of 4,000 km.

⁶¹ For example the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI).

⁶² The *United Liberation Front of Assam* or *National Democratic Front of Bodoland*.

⁶³ Carpentier de Gourdon, C., Berthet, S., "L'Inde à l'aube d'un monde multipolaire", in *AFRI*, 2006, p. 253.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 253.

⁶⁵ Chowdhury, IA, "Bangladesh-China: An Emerging Asian Diplomatic in Equation Calculations", in *ISAS Working Paper*, No. 105, 31 March 2010, p. 2 and 9.

Kyaukpyu (Myanmar). So China is financing and building roads in southwest Asia, from the Yunnan region to Bangkok. Through these projects, China intends to develop its western region to attract investment for sustainable development. China also wants to make the Mekong River navigable⁶⁶ and build dams which would cause economic problems with fishing and rice production, droughts and environmental degradation for the other countries in the region⁶⁷. In addition to these consequences, Hanoi does not look favourably on the project for security reasons⁶⁸: a navigable Mekong would become an "access for Chinese penetration"⁶⁹. Even more given that China and Vietnam dispute the demarcation of their common border (1,350 km)⁷⁰ and maritime sovereignty over part of the South China Sea (Spratly and Paracel Islands) because of among other things, energy issues and fishing rights. China also signed a military agreement in November 2003 with Cambodia to provide training and equipment to Cambodian forces. China can furthermore count on a large exodus of its population (about one million) working in information technology, import - export, hospitality trades, ... China's direct assistance is estimated at \$200 million per year and Beijing is the largest investor in Cambodia. China also builds roads and railways, and in return it operates mining concessions and their oil companies have access to offshore fields in the Gulf of Sihanoukville⁷¹. It can be seen that the Mekong region has a strategic importance and influence for China in addition to the economic (import of raw materials and exports of its manufactured goods) and military aspects (keeping the United States and India at bay). This was a clear part of the Defence White Paper of 2002.

Faced with this Chinese breakthrough in Southwest Asia, India is working to stay in the game. With five member states of ASEAN (Myanmar, Vietnam⁷²,

⁶⁶ For a Thai: "We have adapted our boats to the Mekong, but the Chinese want to adapt the Mekong to their boats, they want to make a canal". (Quoted in Compain, F., "La Chine a fait main basse sur le fleuve", in *Le Figaro*, 2 April 2010).

⁶⁷ Since 1995 an intergovernmental agency (the Mekong River Commission) consults on sharing and management of the water resources, sustainable development, etc. The members are Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

⁶⁸ In 2000, China signed an agreement on the navigation of the Mekong (*Agreement on Commercial Navigation on Lancang Mekong River*) with Laos, Myanmar and Thailand.

⁶⁹ Galland, F., *L'eau. Géopolitique, enjeux, stratégies*, CNRS éditions, Paris, 2008, p.135.

⁷⁰ In 1999, the two countries reached an agreement that still left some questions unanswered. These were resolved in December 2008 by a new agreement.

⁷¹ Danjou, F., "Le poids de la Chine au Cambodge", 27 December 2009.

⁷² Vietnam is the ASEAN country in which India invests the most. This is hardly surprising given that both countries seek to counterbalance China. Within the Mandala strategy,

Laos, Cambodia and Thailand), India embarked on the construction of the TransAsian Highway, connecting Delhi to Hanoi, by road and rail, as part of the Mekong-Ganga Co-operative project, launched in 2000 (Vientiane Declaration) and whose goal is the economic development (tourism, culture, education, transport, communications) of the Mekong basin⁷³. India launched also in 1991 its Look East policy to boost its economic relations with ASEAN countries, in a second face the relationship has had a more political side: security rapprochement between Delhi and some ASEAN countries (mainly Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia).

Conclusion

If India and China have resumed dialogue in recent years and developed trade and diplomatic relations, the statements of the Indian President Patil to Parliament in February 2009 should be taken with a grain of salt "regular high-level exchanges, growing economic and trade ties, increased defence contacts and enhanced people-to-people exchanges. Our Strategic and Cooperative Partnership with China is progressively acquiring a more regional and international perspective"⁷⁴. Because of their economic weight, India and China are trying more and more to see their close proximity as an opportunity (border "network-centered") and not strictly as a security issue, emphasizing their interdependence and thus their stability. In the border regions, if the security problem was not as serious, they could indeed consider an economic interdependence that would encourage trade and economic development of the regions in question (from Central Asia to the South China Sea). However, from a geostrategic point of view, the relationship is characterized by significant tensions, and the question is who will manage to encircle or contain who.

As demonstrated in the article, Chinese objectives are clear: to have good relations with the regimes in place to contain India, increase its economic and security relations, and develop alternative routes to the Strait of Malacca. For Chellaney: *"China steps up the pressure on India on three fronts. It is developing two North-South 'corridors' on either side of India: the Karakoram corridor, which starts out from Xinjiang and joins the Pakistani port of Gwadar, built by the Chinese near the*

Vietnam also plays an important role for India. Thus, the Indian army is working to gain to access the port of Cam Ranh Bay.

⁷³ Carpentier de Gourdon, C., Berthet S., "L'Inde à l'aube d'un monde multipolaire", in *AFRI* 2006.

⁷⁴ "Indian president praises progress in relations with China", in *Xinhua* February 2009.

entrance of the Strait of Hormuz, through which transits 40% of world's oil supply. The other corridor links Yunnan Province to Myanmar ports on the Bay of Bengal. In addition, China is consolidating an East-West Tibetan route, along the northern border of India"⁷⁵. This repositioning of China is down to a desire for greater control over the Indian Ocean.

For its part, India is confronted on all its borders by states with which it has complicated relationships, in spite of their economic interdependence, and is pursuing a policy of greater openness and dialogue with its neighbours⁷⁶. New Delhi is therefore partly influenced by the Mandala theory⁷⁷ developed by Kautilya⁷⁸ in Arthashastra: the immediate neighbours are “natural” enemies, and any state on the far side of the neighbouring state is a “natural” ally. Thus my enemy's enemy is a friend⁷⁹. This explains for example the rapprochement between India and Iran or Vietnam and why the buffer states are so important in its relationship with China. India has also for several decades practised the Indira Doctrine (after Indira Gandhi), a kind of Monroe doctrine applied to South Asia. This strategy known as “Look East Look West” was strongly influenced by Lord Curzon, former Viceroy of India (1899 - 1905) and British Minister of Foreign Affairs. The latter strongly insisted on the centrality of India in the Indian Ocean region. In his book of 1909, *The Place of India in the Empire*, he explained that its human and material resources and its business acumen make it a country that can spread to Africa and across Asia. Lord Curzon wrote "On the West, India must exercise a predominant influence over the destinies of Persia and Afghanistan, on the North, it can veto any rival in Tibet; on the North-East and last it can exert great pressure upon China, and it is one of the guardians of the autonomous existence of Siam "⁸⁰. If it is clear that this vision was as part of the British Empire, his vision still remains present in the contemporary strategic policy of India⁸¹.

⁷⁵ Chellaney, B., “L'Inde s'inquiète”, in *Le Figaro*, 15 October 2007.

⁷⁶ The Gujral Doctrine, developed in the 1990s.

⁷⁷ Mandala which in Sanskrit means “circle”. Refers, in the original sense, to ‘meditation’ to achieve a deeper state of consciousness.

⁷⁸ Advisor to the Emperor Chandragupta (3rd century BC).

⁷⁹ Pardesi M.S., “Deducing India's Grand Strategy of Regional Hegemony from Historical and Conceptual Perspectives », *Working Paper*, n°75, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, April 2005, p.28.

⁸⁰ Bandimutt, P., “India and Geopolitics”, in *India Forum*, September 2006 (<http://www.india-forum.com/articles/148/1/India-and-Geopolitics---Part-I>).

⁸¹ Batabyal, A., “Balancing China in Asia: A Realist Assessment of India's Look East Policy”, in *China Report*, 2006, 42, 179, pp. 181-182.

Ultimately, we see that the relationship between the dragon and the elephant are complex and still largely determined by geo-strategic and geo-economic issues, despite booming trade relations. For it is clear that economic interdependence has not led to a *pax economica*, due to other factors, including ideology, culture, nationalism and national interest.

One final word, concerning the buffer states. The states situated in this buffer zone are teared up between the adherence to the sphere of influence of India or China. This “between two”, formula used by Violette Rey, is characterized by the preeminence of the external forces on the internal forces with the fragmentation of political territories⁸². As we have seen most of the buffer states in the region are indeed at the mercy of potential future aggression, division, occupation or satellitisation. To avoid these negative scenarios, often the buffer state maintains a low profile or neutrality to prevent provoking great powers or modifying the established balance of power in the buffer system. But this is not a guaranty to survive. We need to bear in mind the example of Belgium during the two World Wars. Consequently some of the states in the region are what Wight called Trimmers (oppose the powers against each other)⁸³. They are looking for strategic dividend, playing the card of multivectorialism: maximum of alternatives and options. Not surprisingly, we observe a rapprochement between for example Myanmar and the United States, Bangladesh and the United States or Vietnam and the United States.

It is too early to tell if in this complex and fragmented world they will succeed to emancipate themselves but this evolution is interesting and would deserve more research. By adopting this approach these states hope to satisfy the interest of great powers, without becoming a target of the great game. They want a “balanced engagement” and the art of diplomacy will be to accommodate in their foreign policy the contradictory interests of the great powers. If they achieve this, they will become a factor of stability. Consequently if small powers cannot influence directly the organization of the system on the systemic level, they can nevertheless participate at the stability of the system, by adapting their policy and encouraging a policy of integration, facilitating the contact between the great powers. They would form some “trust building mechanism”.

⁸² Rey, V., Groza, O., « Bulgarie et Roumanie, un « entre-deux » géopolitique dans l’Union européenne », in *Espace Géographique*, n°4, 2008.

⁸³ Wight, M., *Power Politics*, edited by Hedley Bull & Carstaan Holbraad, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1978, p. 160.