

# China in South Asia: An Emerging Dynamic

- M.R. Josse

## INTRODUCTION

Of late, China's perceived interest and/or presence in South Asia is increasingly being heard or talked about – in academic seminars, diplomatic circles and, indeed, the media. Here, in 2002, a seminar was held on the subject of 'SAARC and China' in which several participants from South Asia, and a Chinese scholar, participated.<sup>1</sup>

Among those who presented papers on that occasion were Ma Jiali, Research Professor at the China Institute of Contemporary Relations, Beijing<sup>2</sup>, and the first secretary-general of SAARC, Ambassador Abu Ahsan<sup>3</sup> of Bangladesh. Prof. Ma, in his paper, explained that "China only wants to establish good relations with surrounding countries and regional organizations" and recalled that "China has already set up a good tie with ASEAN and built the Shanghai Cooperation Organization together with Russia and Central Asian countries."

Ahsan, for his part, not only pointed out that "during 2001 and 2002 ASEAN summits, ASEAN and China reached major understanding which is significant for South Asia in several ways" but also expressed the conviction that "ASEAN-China provides a good guide in as much as our socio-economic background is similar." He, however, added the caveat that "any viable arrangement with China will have to involve a number of ASEAN countries as full partners."

The China and South Asia relationship was also underlined by former Pakistan Foreign Secretary Niaz A. Naik in a paper presented at the aforementioned "SAARC and China" seminar in Kathmandu in 2002. Therein, Naik recommended that Nepal and Pakistan

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<sup>1</sup> 'SAARC and China' seminar organised by China Study Centre, Kathmandu, 23 December 2002, Kathmandu.

<sup>2</sup> 'Relations between China and SAARC'

<sup>3</sup> 'SAARC-China Relations'

should pursue “a sub-regional economic and development cooperation agreement between China, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.”<sup>4</sup>

## **CHINA AND SAARC**

In recent times, at the official or diplomatic level, too, Beijing has signaled her interest in forging some form of association with South Asia, principally through SAARC.

For instance, Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, Sun Heping, in March this year, in response to a specific query from a journal on China’s possible interest in SAARC, had the following to say:

“We appreciate that SAARC has made positive efforts to (further) economic development, social progress and cultural exchange in South Asia. Being (a) close neighbour of South Asian countries, China has always attached great importance to the cooperative relations with SAARC. The Chinese government is ready to work together with the governments of all South Asian countries to promote the cause of peace and development in the region. The time is now basically ripe to establish relations between China and SAARC.”<sup>5</sup>

Equally significant, if less direct, were the observations contained in Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao’s congratulatory message to the 12<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit in Islamabad several months earlier. In it, Premier Wen declared:

“Since its founding SAARC has played an active role in enhancing the economic development, social progress and cultural exchange in South Asia thanks to the common efforts of its member states. Today, leaders of SAARC member states meet to discuss major issues of further stepping up South Asia regional cooperation and moving towards common prosperity. I am sure that this Summit will exert a positive influence upon the regional development and cooperation in this part of the world.”

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<sup>4</sup> Paper presented at ‘SAARC and China’ seminar, Kathmandu, 23 December 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Interview to *People’s Review* weekly, Kathmandu, 25-31 March 2004.

“China and South Asian countries enjoy long-standing friendly relations and cooperation. The Chinese government is ready to work together with the governments of all South Asian countries to promote the cause of peace and development in the region.”<sup>6</sup>

Ambassador Sun once again took the opportunity to stress publicly that, as Premier Wen’s message had subtly implied, “the time is now basically ripe to establish relations between China and SAARC.”<sup>7</sup>

The South Asian media, too, has become increasingly alive to the China/South Asia connection. Thus, according to *The Nation* newspaper of Pakistan, quoting unidentified diplomatic sources on the eve of a SAARC Council of Ministers meeting in Islamabad, July 20-21, had the following to disclose:

“Sources said the foreign ministers of all member countries can deliberate upon some new issues such as the expansion of SAARC with more states joining its fold. They said that one such country is China, which is an important regional player, while another can be Afghanistan.

“Sources said having close friendly ties with China, Pakistan is of the desire that it joins SAARC and it can also lobby for its membership. However, they added that India will feel uneasy about China’s possible inclusion in SAARC.”<sup>8</sup>

In an exclusive PTV interview in Islamabad covered live by India’s NDTV channel on July 21, 2004, Pakistan Foreign Minister Khursheed Mehmood Kasuri, sitting alongside SAARC Secretary-General, Q.A.M.A. Rahim, when queried about China’s possible membership in SAARC, in the context of a report that it figured in the Pakistan Prime Minister Sujaat Hussain’s speech, responded in the following fashion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> From address by Ambassador Sun Heping on “China’s Foreign Policy in South Asia” delivered on 28 May, 2004 in Kathmandu, at a lecture jointly sponsored by the Nepal Council of World Affairs and the China Study Centre, Kathmandu.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Nation*, Islamabad, 16 July 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Paraphrase of statement heard/seen by paper writer, 21 July 2004.

Kasuri stated it was something that some newspapers had referred to, but it had not been on the agenda of the Council of Ministers which had been finalized months in advance: hence it was not discussed by the Council of Ministers.

Interestingly, however, a news anchor of the NDTV channel that broadcast the aforementioned PTV item reported that Pakistan had brought it up recently, at an informal level.<sup>10</sup>

One can thus safely assume that while the subject of China's possible association with, if not membership of, SAARC had not been *formally* discussed at the SAARC Council of Ministers in Islamabad on July 20-21, 2004, it had nevertheless been raised *informally* by Pakistan, the current Chair of the regional organisation.

Would it be unreasonable to expect, from the above, that one is likely to hear more about "China and SAARC" when the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit convenes in Dhaka in January 2005?

## **CHINA AND SOUTH ASIA**

China's interest in, or nexus with, South Asia – quite apart from SAARC – has lately also attracted the notice of public commentators, at least in Nepal.

One commentator, for example, noted that "history, geography and culture closely link China and South Asia to each other" pointing out, among other things, that China has common borders with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan.<sup>11</sup>

Another, for his part, referred to China's association with the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) where "since 1983, it has been a member along with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan as equal partners in integrated mountain development of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region."<sup>12</sup>

He then observed, "it can, if it likes, be engaged in two trans-border, sub-regional cooperation programmes to integrate the highland mountain economies and societies of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Upendra Gautam's write-up, *People's Review* Kathmandu, 29 May-4 June 2003.

the Hindu Kush-Himalaya to involve Afghanistan-China-Pakistan, on the one hand, and Bangladesh-Bhutan-China-India-Myanmar-Nepal to encompass the Himalayan sub-region, on the other hand.”<sup>13</sup>

Going even further, he was of the view: “Together China and South Asia can establish spiritual and adventure tourism resorts and wilderness parks capitalizing on the mountains, their pristine beauty and aura. The high altitudes can be the laboratory for all manner of organic farming for fruit, vegetable, and seed production.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, he proposed that “through the modality of sub-regional cooperation, using ICIMOD as the platform or ‘entry point’ it is felt that China should take the ‘short route to SAARC’ and thereby contribute to the peace and prosperity of the peoples living in high altitudes that have, so far, been by-passed by national development efforts because of their remoteness and isolation, as well as because of their political fragmentation into several nation states at the cost of the integrity of their natural endowments and social capital.”<sup>15</sup>

Meaningfully, China’s interest in South Asia, aside from the SAARC dimension, has been articulated at the official level. Thus, speaking at a public forum in Kathmandu, former Chinese envoy to Nepal, Ambassador Wu Congyong, specifically linked China’s “Develop West Strategy” with South Asia.

In Wu’s words: “The ‘Develop West Strategy’ which is now pursued by China opens up new wider vista for the economic cooperation between China and the South Asia(n) countries including Nepal.”<sup>16</sup>

At this juncture, it may be noted that “China’s western region consists of 12 provinces/autonomous regions and a national level municipality. Four of them are Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous regions. Yunnan borders

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<sup>12</sup> Madhukar SJB Rana, *China in South Asia?*, *Kathmandu Post*, 1 June 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Address to a gathering organised jointly in Lalitpur on 8 May 2003 by the Nepal Council of World Affairs and the China Study Centre, Kathmandu.

Myanmar, Tibet on India, Bhutan, Sikkim (the official Chinese map does not show Sikkim as a part of India), Nepal and Pakistan, and Xinjiang on Pakistan.

“Sichuan province (with an area of 480,000 sq. km and population of 83.29 million) and Chongqing Municipality (with an area of 82,000 sq. km and population of 30.9 million) perform as the industrial, natural resources (gas, minerals, water, etc) and security backbone for several constituent provinces and autonomous regions of west China.”<sup>17</sup>

### **DEFINITIONAL ISSUE/MYTHS**

Quite aside from the growing Chinese interest in SAARC, in particular, and, more generally, in South Asia as noted above, there is, I believe, the important definitional aspect of recognising what exactly ‘South Asia’ means. Thus far, there is no uniform or universal definition of that essentially arbitrary geographic terminology. This definitional issue must be tackled satisfactorily before any in-depth consideration can be attempted on the subject of this paper or, indeed, of most other papers under discussion here.

At one level, there is a common or knee-jerk tendency to equate South Asia with SAARC. Yet, many foreign offices and scholars tend to include Afghanistan and Myanmar, non-SAARC member states, as falling within the ambit of South Asia. That is not satisfactory if for no other reason than it fails to recognise a pre-SAARC ‘South Asia’.

Furthermore, despite the general perception that Nepal lies wholly south of the Himalayas, it needs to be pointed out that her territory, in fact, encompasses both sides of that mountain range. If ‘South Asia’ is thus narrowly defined as including territory south of the Himalayas, clearly Nepal herself cannot be considered entirely as a South Asian state. Phrased otherwise, Nepal also shares many geographic or topographical characteristics with China’s Tibet Autonomous Region. If Nepal is an integral part of part of ‘South Asia’ is Tibet, then, too?

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Upendra Gautam, *People’s Review*, Ibid.

In any case, the frailty of any terminology that locates states arbitrarily within one single convenient geographical box or the other, has by now been thoroughly exposed. Thus, if one were to take the case of Pakistan, clearly she possesses Central Asian/West Asian geographic characteristics or moorings, in addition to her South Asian linkages. Despite her membership of SAARC, can those geographical realities, then, simply be wished away in the framing of her foreign and security policy, among others?

Besides, there is the pat, if erroneous, theory that tends to project the Himalayas as a water-tight security barrier or cordon between South Asia and territories beyond and, in so doing, advances the notion or corollary that South Asia lies entirely south of that magnificent and towering mountain range.

Before proceeding any further, let me now attempt to deal with the fragility of the commonly held perception that the Himalayas form a natural or impregnable divide that separates or isolates South Asia from China's Tibet. As Pakistani scholar, Noor A. Husain, has perceptively argued:

“It is wrong, it is a broad sweeping generalization, to say there has been no invasion across the Himalayas. I do not want to go into the lessons of history, but till as late as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Tibetans came right through the Himalayas. The Chinese and Tibetans moved into Gilgit to support the Rajah against an external invasion and stayed there for five years.”<sup>18</sup>

As this paper presenter noted in seminar in Kathmandu last year, Nepal, after unification under the House of Gorkha, herself launched two military expeditions into Tibet, across the Himalayas: in 1788 and 1791. In 1792, 10,000 Chinese troops crossed over the Himalayas from the other side to assist the Tibetans and advanced as far as Nuwakot, the northern gateway to Kathmandu, forcing her to sue for peace. Indeed, in the case of Sikkim, too, conflicts with Tibet across the Himalayas were not unknown, including

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<sup>18</sup> Sridhar K. Khatri (ed.), *Regional Security and South Asia*, (Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuban University, Kathmandu, 1987, p. 242.)

those in 1888 when a British expeditionary force was mounted resulting in the settlement of Sikkim-Tibet hostilities.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, “five or six times, the Tibetans attempted to conquer Bhutan” in the sixteenth century alone.<sup>20</sup> In fact, that the Himalayas constituted an impenetrable obstacle for the security of India (or British India, before that) in the colonial era was disproved when the British themselves launched a successful military expedition against Tibet in 1904 through Sikkim and the Chumbi Valley.

That carefully propagated myth was even more dramatically exploded when China’s People’s Liberation Army almost reached Tejpur in the plains of northern Assam through passes in the eastern Himalayas, after a short and one-sided armed conflict between India and China in 1962.

Moreover, China’s maiden nuclear explosion in 1964, followed thereafter by rapid advances in development of intercontinental ballistic missile capability, has surely rendered the theology that the Himalayas constitute an insurmountable barrier between South Asia and Tibet entirely untenable or outmoded. Clearly, too, the overt nuclearization of India and Pakistan in May 1998, and their development of ballistic missiles capable of traversing the Himalayas, if necessary, may be considered to have given that carefully fostered creed or belief system a final burial.

To return, however, to the central focus of this paper, it is difficult to summarily reject the ‘China (Tibet/Xinjiang) in South Asia’ reality either on grounds of geographical or historical logic.

### **LINKED BY MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS**

The Chinese, as most in this room are aware, often refer to the fact that China (Tibet/Xinjiang) is linked to South Asian states by “mountains and rivers.” That expression, ladies and gentlemen, is not merely a diplomatic platitude; it is a hard geo-

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<sup>19</sup> V.H. Ceolho, *Sikkim and Bhutan*,(Vikas Publication, Delhi, 1970, p. 20).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.* p. 122.

political fact of life that must be taken into account in any academic exercise that seeks to probe the emerging ‘China in South Asia’ dynamic.

Reference has already been made that China is a member of the Kathmandu-based ICIMOD along with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan – countries to which she is linked by the Himalayas-Hindu Kush mountain ranges.

As Chinese publications indicate, however, China’s Tibet is connected by the Himalayas to India, to Nepal and to Bhutan. At the Karakorom (Kala Kulun in China) Mountains, China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region adjoins Kashmir, a territory disputed between India and Pakistan.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, as Hussain reminds us, “we must not close our eyes to the fact that China, historically, geographically, geo-politically by virtue of being in Tibet and Sinkiang (Xinjiang) is a South Asian power.”<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, as I can personally vouch from an intensive, recent 10-day visit to Tibet, Chinese maps, even today, show China’s eastern boundary with India as lying along the foothills, east of Bhutan, and just north of the plains of Assam. As the Sino-Indian border remains disputed in this sector till today, can one justifiably assert outright that China possesses no South Asian credentials?

As far as Bhutan – whose very etymology ‘Bhot Ant’ suggests the ‘end’ of ‘Tibet’ (Bhot) – is concerned, not only do the Himalayas connect it with Tibet but also “four passes, three in the west and one in the east were once the most important gateways to Tibet.”<sup>23</sup>

That aside, considering that China has, in India’s eyes, taken possession of a significant chunk of the territory of Kashmir she claims as hers, as per the March 1963 Sino-Pak Treaty, to dispute China’s South Asian linkage would be to assert that Kashmir falls outside the ambit of South Asia!

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<sup>21</sup> *Tibet*, China Intercontinental Press, West China series, June 2001, p. 8

<sup>22</sup> Sridhar K. Khatri (ed) *Regional Security in South Asia*, p. 242.

Let us now examine the significance of the geo-political reality that major South Asian rivers and/or their tributaries originate in the high Tibetan plateau. Perhaps the most important of them is the Yarlung Zangbo river better known here, as well as in India and Bangladesh, as the Brahmaputra. Travelling recently for considerable distances along the northern and southern banks of the mighty Yarlung Zangbo, in spite due to prolonged rains, it was easy to imagine the severe impact that it would have downstream in India and in Bangladesh.

That, it turned out, was an apprehension which I later discovered, was well founded. It was underscored, among other things, by the UN's appeal for US \$210 million to flood victims facing "grave" food shortages after two-thirds of Bangladesh was submerged, destroying crops and killing over 700 people.<sup>24</sup>

"Great rivers of Asia that find their origin in Tibet include the Ganges, Hindus (Indus), Brahmaputra, Mekong, Salween and Irrawaddy"<sup>25</sup> Chinese publications point out.

Several tributaries of the Ganges flow into Nepal directly from Tibet before merging with the river that Hindus regard as sacred. Among such are the Karnali, the Narayani (Gandak) and the Kosi rivers. The Raibok river rises in Tibet, flows through Bhutan, enters India and ultimately merges with the Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. Moreover, the Sutlej also originates in Tibet, flows into India before it joins the Indus in Pakistan.

It will perhaps be instructive to recall that the claim that the origin of the Ganges is in Tibet is not well advertised in India; certainly, the assertion just referred to above in a recent Chinese publication and a large-scale Chinese physical map I scrutinized in Lhasa at the Tibet Environment Administration office seemed to indicate that the claim was valid.

One must thus wonder why there has not been a greater acknowledgment of the same in India. On a personal level, I'll readily admit that this vital geographical fact/claim was

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<sup>23</sup> *Bhutan: Himalayan Kingdom*, Published by The Royal Government of Bhutan, 1979, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> AFP news item, *Himalayan Times*, Kathmandu, 13 August 2004.

<sup>25</sup> *Tibet, op. cit.* p. 13.

not brought to my notice during my school, college or university years in India. One was taught that it's origin, unlike the Brahmaputra's, was entirely in India! Incidentally, I may mention that other authoritative documents also indicate as much.<sup>26</sup>

Incidentally, before proceeding any further into this discourse it may be germane to note a recent turn of events that forcefully underlines the 'China in South Asia' angle. China informed India that "a lake formed by landslides in Tibet Autonomous Region of China is threatening to burst its banks and inundate hundreds of villages in neighbouring India."<sup>27</sup>

A later news story went on to report that Himachal Pradesh authorities "reviewed the preparedness to meet any eventuality in case of flood in the Sutlej."<sup>28</sup>

Yet, despite such intimate physical integration between China, "an important, though virtually unacknowledged, upper riparian state"<sup>29</sup> and South Asia, there has been a studied reluctance in the past to bring China into the South Asian fold, even for exploiting or harnessing the abundant water resources of the Himalayan region for shared benefit.

That has been particularly true for India, and the reasons are no doubt political – despite the proclaimed improvement in relations with China. One explanation for India's reluctance in doing so would seem to lie in her colonial past. Indeed, I have argued in the past that "Delhi's insistence on a bilateral over a river basin or multilateral approach is largely viewed as a legacy from the British Raj."<sup>30</sup>

As this writer argued at a seminar in Kathmandu in 1994: "If a breakthrough in achieving a truly meaningful cooperative development in Himalayan water resources is desired, a completely fresh strategy has to be fashioned...The key obstacle is the old fashioned balance-of-power, spheres-of-influence mind-set that dictates that bilateralism, not international river basin or regional methodology, be considered the cornerstone of the

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<sup>26</sup> *Map of The People's Republic of China*, China Cartographic Publishing House, Beijing, January 2001.

<sup>27</sup> AP news item, *Himalayan Times*, Kathmandu, 8 August 2004.

<sup>28</sup> PTI news item, *Himalayan Times*, Kathmandu, 9 August 2004.

<sup>29</sup> M.R. Josse, *The Case for 'New Thinking'*. (Ajaya Dixit ed., Water Nepal, Vol. 4. Number 1, September 1994, Kathmandu, p. 258.)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, *op. cit.* p.260.

edifice of such cooperation. The sooner that reality is grasped the better. If it means China must come into the picture, so be it.”<sup>31</sup>

Here it may be salutary to note that India ignored King Birendra’s regional water resources exploitation vision thus articulated at the 26<sup>th</sup> Colombo Plan Consultative Committee meeting in Kathmandu on 5 December, 1977, attended, among others, by senior Indian officials. “If water constitutes one of the potent sources for Nepali economic growth, we do not intend to look upon them from the standpoint of national interest alone. It is our conviction that if cooperation can be called for, especially, cooperation of Asian countries such as Nepal, India, China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and all other regional countries, a vast resource of bountiful nature can be tapped for the benefit of man in this region.”<sup>32</sup>

Especially noteworthy is that Nepal’s 1977 proposal, a direct precursor to SAARC, envisaged regional cooperation *only* in the sphere of water resources exploitation and that China, to date, still does not figure in the SAARC arrangement. However, as indicated earlier in the not too distant future I believe some sort of linkage may be established between China and SAARC, perhaps as a ‘dialogue partner’. A well-known Bangladesh scholar and water-resources expert has observed: “Water impinges on the security of the states and their peoples: political, economical, social and ecological...So far, the Brahmaputra has remained practically untouched.”<sup>33</sup>

Then, referring to King Birendra’s proposal (mentioned above), he recalled that American President Jimmy Carter and British Prime Minister James Callaghan “in separate statements made in New Delhi in January 1978, offered their countries’ technical and financial support to any regional water development project that India, Nepal and Bangladesh may put up. But India did not react favourably to the offer. This

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, *op.cit.* p. 265-266.

<sup>32</sup> *Proclamations, Speeches and Messages*, HMG, Ministry of Communications, Kathmandu.

<sup>33</sup> B.M. Abbas A.T., *Water Resources and South Asian Regional Cooperation: Development Prospects or Security Problems*, Regional Security in South Asia (Sridhar K Khatri ed., Ibid. p 187.)

was in line with India's insistence on bilateralism in dealing with the problem of the Ganges inspite of the fact that the river is international.”<sup>34</sup>

If India has had problems of associating multilaterally with Nepal and Bangladesh in such efforts, it is easy to understand why she has shied away from any common rivers exploitation project that would include China, which, as we have noted, is the source of many of South Asia's major rivers. Yet experts are increasingly of the view that “only river basin development can solve the problems of floods and droughts”<sup>35</sup> as in tragically witnessed virtually every year in South Asia.

To return, once more, to the central theme of this paper: acceptance of the emerging new dynamic of ‘China in South Asia’ would greatly help in bringing economic prosperity and hope into the lives of a huge chunk of the world's population that inhabits our region.

At this juncture, an explanation about China's non-inclusion Mekong Committee may be in order. As explained by the Secretariat of the Interim Committee for Coordination of Investigations of the Lower Mekong Basin: “Although part of the territories of Burma (Myanmar) and China were located within the Mekong upper basin, political reasons prevented both nations from being included in the new cooperative venture in 1957. China at that time was not a member of the United Nations community and provided the main reason for not creating a Mekong Committee made up of six riparian counties of the Mekong. Burma, for its part, did not exhibit any particular interest in membership for political or geographic reasons.”<sup>36</sup>

### **FICTION OF SEPARATION**

It should also be mentioned that China's interest in Mekong basin issues have increased as is underscored by her participation in a 10-day workshop on “Water Law and Management of the Mekong River Basin” in Bangkok, June 2-11.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.187.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.188.

<sup>36</sup> M.R. Josse, *The Case for 'New Thinking'* quoting The Mekong Committee: A Historical Account (1957- 89): Mekong Secretariat, Bangkok, p. 264.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, *op. cit.* p. 264.

Much more recently, or after the change in government in India in May 2004, another important dimension to the emerging 'China in South Asia' dynamic may be considered to have been added. Specifically, I refer to Indian External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh's proposal for a common nuclear doctrine between India, Pakistan and China, first unveiled at his maiden press conference in the Indian capital after the change of regime.

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As reported in the mainstream India media, the proposal represents a further refinement to former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's disarmament proposals.<sup>39</sup> Despite the initial excitement over the proposal in New Delhi, and some puzzlement or cautious optimism in Islamabad, China soon shot it down.

Indeed, Chinese assistant foreign minister Shen Guofeng stated in Beijing that China was not in favour of welcoming India and Pakistan into the international nuclear club. "The international community should stick to the spirit and principles enshrined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as the consensus reached in the UN Security Council resolution 1172."<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, Singh told Parliament that no talks had been held with Pakistan and China on his proposal.<sup>41</sup>

Although Singh's common nuclear doctrine clubbing India, Pakistan and China together has admittedly not taken off, the point I wish to emphasise here is that there is inherent in that concept an admission by India of China's vital role in matters directly impinging on a key strategic issue. Phrased differently, that proposal correctly acknowledges that China cannot be viewed in isolation or separately from South Asia, particularly in matters relating to comprehensive security, environment security, trade liberalization in South Asia, and so forth.

In an altogether different way, the process of globalization now underway in much of the world would also tend to militate against the fiction of treating China and South Asia as if they existed on two very different planets. As it is, post-Deng Xiaoping China has not

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<sup>38</sup> *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 2 June 2004.

<sup>39</sup> *Telegraph*, Kolkata, 6 June 2004.

<sup>40</sup> PTI news item, *Times of India*, New Delhi, 30 June 2004.

only morphed from an ideological state into a strictly geopolitical power. It has also become one of the most important players on both the global as well as the broad Asian stage.

The latter, incidentally, is well underlined by the recent Qingdao Initiative, emerging from the June 2004 conference in Qingdao in China's Shandong Province, on South-South cooperation in Asia. Similarly, it is also reflected, I believe, in China's hosting since 2001 of the Boao Annual Forum for Asia, in the Hainan Province of China.

To recall, the latest Boao conference was held on April 24-25 this year bringing together “on a common platform government leaders of Asia, other politicians, academics, experts and representatives of the business community, civil society and the media who...meet in the spirit of cordiality, camaraderie, constructive exchange and shared interests.”<sup>42</sup>

Finally, let me recall two concrete recent developments that would reinforce the ‘China in South Asia’ dynamic or emerging reality: one relates to anti-terrorism cooperation and the other to environment security afflicting South Asia.

Not long ago, China and Pakistan, it was reported, were to hold anti-terrorism exercises (they have since been held). They were intended to “improve the capacity of jointly combating terrorism”<sup>43</sup> They were also designed “to contain and crackdown on the forces of separatism, extremism and terrorism”<sup>44</sup> and were to take place in the mountainous terrain of Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County in the Xinjiang region, bordering Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>45</sup>

Since trans-border terrorism is a scourge that afflicts South Asia today, clearly active Sino-Pakistan cooperation in that area enhances the view that China's role in South Asian security is indeed an emerging reality or dynamic.

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<sup>41</sup> *Hindu*, Chennai, 8 July 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Dr Mohan Lohani, *Kathmandu Post*, 30 April 2004.

<sup>43</sup> *Xinhua* report quoted by AFP, *Himalayan Times*, 30 July 2004.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Reference has already been made of the nexus between the expected (as of this writing) imminent burst of a landslide-created lake in Tibet and fears of flooding on the Sutlej down stream in Himachal Pradesh and India's request for a flood warning mechanism on the Chinese side that has reportedly gone unheeded.<sup>46</sup> As per the same news report, there are three flood monitoring stations on the Brahmaputra (the Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet).<sup>47</sup> China's role in promoting environmental security in South Asia is, in any case, obvious enough.

The conclusion from the above is clearly that China cannot be artificially separated from a region with which she is so inextricably connected: by history, geography, ecology, and vital common interests whether they have to do with military security, terrorism or environmental security. Enlightened self-interest would clearly suggest that that the emerging 'China in South Asia' dynamic is freely acknowledged and acted upon appropriately by all concerned.

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<sup>46</sup> *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 11 August 2004.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*