

Diverse Interpretations of the Sino-Indian Conflict

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Abstract

In the summer of 2020, China mobilized its military forces along its undefined border with India in the mountainous Galwan valley. Analysts have made different interpretations of China's move. One school of thought considers China's military mobilization as part of an aggressive campaign against neighbors. Another school regards China's actions as defensive and responsive to India's pugnacious rhetoric and military campaign. Yet another line of thinking views China's military response as much required to check India's territorial expansionism and military aggression in its neighborhood. Each of these perspectives has a logical base. This paper will examine all of these viewpoints, and in doing so, will also seek to explore if an interpretation of the Sino-Indian conflict, where Beijing's reaction is construed as aggression, can be a catalyst in a three-tier process of undermining security in South Asia. One, the incident buttressed the perception about India as a potential counterweight to China; second, India's enhanced importance will drive the western powers to arm India with advanced military technologies; and third, in the process, they disregard India's domestic human rights violations and democratic backsliding as well as regional military aggression.

Keywords

Disputed Border, Military Standoff, South Asia, Biased Interpretation, Religious Violence, Military Aggression

Introduction

China and India rarely had border skirmishes after the 1962 Sino-Indian war. That changed in the summer of 2020. Since May 2020, the Chinese and the Indian military forces have remained on high alert along their respective sides of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), a de-facto borderline drawn between the two countries after the 1962 war.¹ For several days, the two armies engaged in fisticuffs that led to the killing of at least twenty Indian and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers.² There are different explanations of the reasons behind the latest military skirmishes

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between the two countries. At least three schools of thought exist on the issue. Of these, one blames China for its overall aggression in the Asia-Pacific region for various reasons, including the introduction of controversial security law in Hong Kong, the import boycott from Australia, assertive diplomacy with rival powers, and sending naval patrols in disputed areas of South and East China Seas. A contrary perspective is that China's actions were defensive in nature and its move was reactive. The triggers for the 'reactive aggression' include changes in the status of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh by India, its construction of military infrastructure in Ladakh close to the LAC, and India's joining of the US-led international campaign against China. The third line of thought extends from the second one and believes that India deserved the military response of China for the former's coercive policies against its smaller neighbors, including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. These states voice various sets of grievances in their relationship with India that vary from political intimidation and election interference to aggressive moves on land and sea. In their complaints, smaller South Asian countries expect that the international community, in particular the western world, would take note of the Indian activities that impact India's neighbors. They expect big powers to put pressure on New Delhi and persuade it to resolve disputes with neighbors peacefully. The west can indeed play its part to that extent. But the western nations fall short of doing that because they think India would feel annoyed, which in turn could hamper their efforts to prop up India as a counterweight against China's military, economic, and technological rise. Having failed to attract the attention of the international community, India's neighbors are arguably betting on China's economic investments, and military cooperation with them in addition to expecting that China would show its military muscle, which could moderate India's behavior in the region. The fact that Beijing has finally stepped up efforts to contain India's military aggression and territorial expansion, the smaller South Asian countries could not wish for a more befitting response by a major power. This paper has examined each of these perspectives in detail, and in doing so, tried to explore a probable outcome of these trends. One, did the Sino-Indian border conflict strengthen or weaken the western perception about India as a valuable counterweight to China? Two, did the conflict moderate India's behavior domestically and regionally? And third and final, has the west played its part in persuading India to avoid communal

politics and unilateral changes in disputed territories, and resolve its political issues through peaceful and consultative measures? The study found that the west completely ignores India's domestic human rights violations and democratic backslide, in addition to territorial aggression and political intimidation of its smaller neighbors. On the contrary, the west arms India with additional defense and intelligence technologies, and supports its military assertiveness and political ascendancy in the region. The west's indifference to India's domestic and regional behavior may be a major factor for the unending security tension and economic disconnection in South Asia.

Let's examine each of the three perspectives about the Sino-Indian conflict, followed by a detailed analysis of the west's response to India's domestic and regional behavior and its implications for South Asian security.

China as an Aggressive State

This school of thought prevails in the United States, its allies and strategic partners that characterize China's political, economic, and military policies in the Asia-Pacific region as assertive and what some people term as "wolf-warrior diplomacy".³ This line of thought traces China's military clash with India to Beijing's overall military stance in the South and East China Seas, where China allegedly tries to militarily coerce its neighbors into accepting its hegemony and territorial sovereignty over areas that China's neighbors claim to be their own.⁴ Or it is a manifestation of China's response to show resolve in the face of mounting criticism over mishandling the Coronavirus pandemic.⁵

The proponents of the interpretation that China's move against India was aggressive cite other contemporary instances where China allegedly showed military, political, or diplomatic assertion. For starters, in one of the moves, China introduced a new security law in Hong Kong that curtailed the rights of the Hong Kong citizens; to voice dissent, individual liberty, and pursuit of judicial autonomy.⁶ In another incident, China boycotted imports from Australia. The imports included beef, wine, iron ore, barley and other food items, in response to Canberra's provocative stance against Beijing, demanding to trace the origin of the Coronavirus outbreak to China and issuing statements against Beijing.⁷ Around the

same time, Beijing's naval forces were traversing the maritime zones in the South China Sea in ways about which some of the Southeast Asian nations, in particular Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam, raised concerns. They felt that the Chinese navy had encroached into their respective territorial waters.⁸ These apprehensions have not yet subsided.

Behind all of these developments could be domestic factors as well that got international attention and dealt a significant blow to China's image. One was the alleged mishandling of the Coronavirus pandemic especially in the sense that China informed the world belatedly about the spread of the virus among its population.⁹ Beijing took flak for that, prompting mostly the western countries to try to trace the roots of the Coronavirus and blame China for the intentional spread of the virus.¹⁰ Another issue is the alleged forced labor camps in China's Xinjiang province and persecution of the Uighur Muslims, the inhabitants of Xinjiang, for holding extreme views on Islam. The reported abuses of the Uighur Muslims, which some countries call a genocide, might have created pressure on Beijing to get tough with those countries and engage in what many term as wolf-warrior diplomacy.¹¹ That is, becoming assertive about its domestic policies and criticizing others for their own human rights record, for instance.

But tracing China's military mobilization against India's recent past behavior, such as overall assertiveness in the neighborhood and domestic factors might be misplaced. It would mean to play down the deeply ingrained tension in the undefined nature of the Sino-Indian border, and India's legislative measures that fundamentally changed the status of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh as well as infrastructural developments to bolster defense preparedness against China. Moreover, New Delhi's close alignment with the United States does not sit well with the Chinese who desire a hierarchical systemic order in the Asia-Pacific in which China was at the top and India had a lower rank. Nor would China like the idea of having to fight with India at the same time when it was locking horns with the United States.

That's where comes the second school of thought, which sees china's actions as "defensive" and only "required" to warn India against its unilateral and collusive actions against China.

China's Defensive Reaction

There are many scholars, including in the west, who consider China's military mobilization against India a reaction to India's actions in the disputed territory and a part of the US-led campaign against China. Ashley Tellis of the Carnegie and Yun Sun of the Stimson Center were among the first to point this out in their separate written pieces and virtual talks. Ashley Tellis noted:¹²

In fact, Chinese pugnacity toward India along the LAC represents deliberate intimidation through the use of military force, a development *with roots in events that predate the pandemic* [Italics by the author]. If Beijing's protestations are anything to go by, *Chinese anxieties appear to have grown since the August 2019 Indian decision to transform Ladakh*, which previously had been part of the autonomous state of Jammu and Kashmir, into a union territory directly governed by New Delhi.

Before making the military move, China tried to "rally international opposition to" India's unilateral actions but "failed" to convince other major powers, most of which regard India's actions in its controlled territory as New Delhi's internal matter.¹³ Tellis also mentioned other possible drivers of China's recourse to military hostility that include New Delhi's close strategic alignment with Washington, being a party to the campaign to rebuke Beijing for its failure to confine the spread of Coronavirus within its borders, among other things.¹⁴ Beijing's resentment piled up as a result, and New Delhi's unilateral attempt to transform the disputed status of Ladakh proved to be the ultimate factor that forced China's hand to punish India for its belligerence.

Yun Sun also makes a similar point. In her view, China regards Asia in a hierarchical order, where Beijing has the primacy and India has a secondary position.¹⁵ The main strategic rival of China is the United States, and the preferred strategic theater of China lies in the western Pacific. China's strategy toward India runs on two parallels. On one, it seeks stability and cordiality in ties with India and wants to balance India through backstopping Pakistan's military and economic rise and having expanded economic (and if possible military) ties with other smaller South Asian countries.¹⁶ China's pursuit of collaboration with India for the "Asian Century," in part through increased bilateral trade and

investments, besides two summits in Wuhan, China, in 2018 and Mamallapuram, India, in 2019 symbolized Beijing's efforts to have friendly and non-hostile ties with New Delhi.¹⁷

On the opposite parallel lies China's outright hostility, which is grounded in its failed endeavor to nurture cordial ties with India due in large part to the threat perception dilemma. That is, China may consider the United States as the primary competitor, but India regards China (in addition to Pakistan) as a primary rival and tries to impede China's military and economic investments in South Asia.¹⁸ It does that through independent actions and in coordination with the United States and its allies. These measures include broadening India's own economic and security ties with South Asian countries except Pakistan, and sabotaging and criticizing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that runs through Pakistan's administered region of Gilgit-Baltistan, to which India also lays claim.¹⁹

Beijing tended to consider India's competitive efforts as natural to the hierarchical relationship between the two countries and one that did not warrant a military reaction. Even after their 2017 military standoff at Doklam, a tri-junction between India, Bhutan, and China, both countries had friendly summits in 2018 and 2019.²⁰ It showed that Beijing did not want to make an enemy out of India. If India is an enemy it would essentially make China fight a two-front war with the US on the western shores of the Pacific and with India on the borderland.²¹ But that calculation arguably changed after India changed the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, creating two separate union territories to be governed directly from New Delhi. India did not stop there. Amit Shah, the Indian home minister, belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made statements in which he threatened to seize back the Beijing-administered disputed territory of Aksai Chin.²² That was apparently a red line for China's tolerance of New Delhi's growing assertiveness. And China responded by stationing its military troops at various points along the western side of the LAC, including Pangong Tso lake, Hot Spring, Depsang, and Galwan valley—where actual fistfight occurred and resulted in deaths.²³ The Modi doctrine, which implies increasing assertiveness in India's ties with its neighboring states led China to adopt counteracting techniques accordingly.²⁴

This line of thinking extends to the third school of thought that looks at China's aggression or assertiveness as a necessary reaction to India's growing coercion of its smaller neighboring states.

India Deserved the Militaristic Response

This thinking prevails at least in Pakistan and may rhyme as well in other smaller South Asian states, especially Bangladesh and Sri Lanka that want to thwart India's border encroachments, political interferences, and outright military incursions. But to do that, they lack the wherewithal or simply consider the cost of doing prohibitive. Therefore, they would be happy to outsource their political dispute or military opposition to China (or some other major power). Going by China's policies, it would never like to fight India for the sake of other South Asian states. Picking a fight with India is not Beijing's priority. But any of China's military, economic or political steps that keep India's assertiveness in check could soothe smaller South Asian countries' anxieties.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh and India signed an agreement in 2015 to peacefully resolve their bilateral border dispute. However, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recently announced new policies to award citizenship to what it called 'persecuted' minorities in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and enlist only those immigrants in the National Registry of Citizenship (NRC) who had migrated to India before 24 March, 1971. These policies have created acrimony in New Delhi's ties with Dhaka.²⁵ The government in Dhaka lamented Indian insinuation that the Hindus and the Sikhs faced discrimination or mistreatment in Bangladesh.²⁶ In Assam, the Indian state that borders Bangladesh and where the NRC is being updated, nearly 2 million Bengalis face deportation.²⁷ Moreover, there is a growing perception in Bangladesh that BJP's Hindu-nationalistic policies have not only engendered anti-Muslim violence in India, but in Bangladesh, these policies have provoked anti-Hindu sentiments as well. In Bangladesh cases of killings, hatred against Hindus and demolishing of their worship places have come to light presumably as a reaction to India's policies.²⁸ Bangladesh would like if the United States or other major powers raise this issue with the BJP-led government in India. But if major western powers are unwilling to play a role, a militaristic response by China could protect their interests against India.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka faces India's political pressure to grant rights to the Lankan Tamils (previously India supported the Tamil rebellion and terrorism), frequent election meddling, and maritime boundary tension at Palk Bay, northern Sri Lanka. Despite having signed the maritime boundary agreement in the mid-1970s, Sri Lankan navy has captured, and in some instances allegedly killed Indian fishermen who had crossed into the Sri Lankan territorial waters.²⁹ Sri Lanka recorded its protest with the Indian government but to no avail. Colombo's former high commissioner to New Delhi wrote in August 2020:³⁰

Can India not challenge the international maritime boundary in Palk Bay? If India challenges us, there is hardly anything we could do, other than to express dissatisfaction. Our experience at the Indian food drop in June 1987 showed *how other countries avoided responding negatively against India or issued lukewarm responses* [Italics by the author for emphasis].

He also expressed grievances on part of Colombo against India's "big bossing" behavior with its smaller neighbors.³¹ Thus, the Lankan Island will also not mind if a country like China has a military showdown with India to neutralize its hegemonic behavior in the region. There is also a precedent of Sri Lanka's partnership with the United Kingdom and the United States and non-aggression and mutual defense arrangements with other neighboring states against India's threat or territorial assertiveness.³² One wonders if similar thinking prevails in Colombo behind its deep economic and security ties with Beijing.

Nepal: In November 2019, India issued a new map of the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh under its control that included the Kalapani area. This area lies to Nepal's west and is claimed by Nepal.³³ During the Sino-Indian war of 1962, Nepal had allowed India to station its troops along its border with China. After the war, the Indian army vacated defense installations from other areas but not from Kalapani. The Indian army had made it safe zone, thanks to its height and tactical significance.³⁴ Ignoring Kathmandu's protestation, the Indian government announced the construction of an 80-kilometer road in the Kalapani region in May 2020.³⁵ Kathmandu raised serious concern at India's development of infrastructure in the disputed territory without consultation with the Nepalese government. The Nepalese government

summoned the Indian high commissioner in Kathmandu to record its protest, deployed its police force, and passed a resolution in the Parliament to formalize its territorial control over an area of around 400 square kilometers.³⁶ Had Nepal been a powerful country, it would have marshaled its military force and warned the Indian government of the consequences if the projects were not stopped. The fact that India did not bother much even after the diplomatic protest and resolution in the Nepalese Parliament speaks volumes about New Delhi's domineering attitude toward its smaller neighbors and also exposes the west's powerlessness to hold India to account on these matters.

Pakistan: Pakistan is another country in South Asia that lies at the receiving end of Indian aggression. Pakistan and India administer territories of Jammu and Kashmir, under their respective control, with a demarcation line dividing the two parts, called the Line of Control (or LoC). Both countries lay claim to the whole of former state of Jammu and Kashmir, have fought wars over it, and continue to deploy troops along the LoC. The United Nations-supervised plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir for the Kashmiris to decide whether to accede to Pakistan or India has remained in limbo, given India's obstinate opposition. Pakistan seeks international mediation after having failed to resolve the dispute bilaterally.³⁷ India considers the issue as only bilateral and expresses serious reservations to any suggestion of a third-party mediation on the matter.³⁸ In August 2019, India went a step further and unilaterally changed the special status of part of Jammu and Kashmir under its control. As mentioned before it has now carved out two union territories, namely Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.³⁹

Beyond that Indian politicians have been issuing threats to take over the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh including areas controlled by Pakistan and China.⁴⁰ At times, false flag operations are carried out against its own armed forces deployed in the Indian occupied region of Kashmir. India alleges that terrorist attacks were Pakistan-sponsored without any investigation, and threatens with airstrikes in Pakistan on militants' hideouts.⁴¹ Pakistan also features in the election campaigns in India. Strong rhetoric against Pakistan helps political parties in India to garner votes by raising the issue of security tension with Islamabad. On one occasion, Indian airplanes crossed into Pakistani territory and dropped their payload in an uninhabited area. Since

Pakistan is a strong country with nuclear weapons and a powerful military force, the country responded to India's airstrikes with counter-airstrikes.⁴² But India's military aggression and warlike political rhetoric against Pakistan is unlikely to subside, not until the BJP remains in power. If China decides to take on India and holds it to account for its military aggression in the region, Pakistan would be a cheerful spectator.

Broad Implications of Interpretations

Image of India as a counterweight to China

India's neighbors may desire a toning down of India's assertiveness, but they are unhappy as the United States (or other major powers) have paid no attention to how India treats its smaller neighbors. Instead, they are only interested in what China is doing in its neighborhood. The US and its allies consider India as a partner in their anti-China campaign and therefore find little utility in criticizing India for suppression of its own minority communities, and aggression against smaller neighbors.⁴³ Ironically major western powers consider New Delhi as a victim of China's aggression.⁴⁴ If they adopt a dualistic policy with respect to South Asia by maintaining a cavalier response to the grievances of India's neighbors, the impact on regional security and strategic stability would be far from propitious.

Regardless, the Sino-Indian border face-off has arguably buttressed the perception of the western powers about India as a valuable counterweight to China. First of all, why do the US and other western powers think India is on their side in their anti-China campaign? For them India is the largest democracy, has a strong economy and a rising military power. Besides, it is willing to partner with them in sustaining the existing rules-based order led by the US in the Asia-Pacific region. Also, it offers help in countering threats to that order. Being a counterweight does not imply fighting a war with China and winning it alone. It only means that India has the economic and military capability to offset the challenges that China could pose in the form of violating the existing liberal order; by threatening its neighbors with territorial expansion, or promoting its own values and economic model. The anti-China bloc seeks to counter such possible moves by China through a combined strategy—a part of what they have lately labeled as 'integrated deterrence'.⁴⁵ The

maritime exercises that India regularly holds with the US, Australia, and Japan, or the statements that New Delhi issues or advocates in support of the liberal international order (democracy, free-market economy, and human rights) are construed to be advancing the cause of the United States against China.⁴⁶ Though India has not always been forthright in being part of an anti-China bloc but its alignment with the western powers has raised its international standing in the anti-China camp. And that is a predominant push factor behind China's latest moves against India.

In response to Beijing's deployment of forces along the disputed border in the Himalayas, India counter-mobilized its troops, banned Chinese digital applications, and curtailed the Chinese investments in the fifth-generation communication technology network. India's stance helped it gain international traction as a helpful candidate in joining a permanent movement to contain China's economic and military rise. The Sino-Indian border conflict became an inflection point in India's relationship with China as much as with the US, Britain, France, Japan, and Australia.⁴⁷

India's human rights violations and regional behavior

Quite a few things are happening on India's domestic front, and in its neighborhood that should have caught the attention of the western powers and made them pressure India to address them. Under the BJP, India is growing into an authoritarian, religiously polarized and a fundamentalist state. The 2021 report of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), the largest dataset on democracy worldwide, downgraded India from the largest democracy category to an "electoral autocracy." The report noted a significant level of restrictions on civil society, academia, and media freedom⁴⁸ and most of the decline had occurred since 2014 when BJP came into power in India with 'a Hindu-nationalist Hindutva agenda'.⁴⁹ The political campaign on the back of Hindutva ideology has alienated the non-Hindu citizens of India and created fissures in Indian polity. The Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens target Muslims and grant favorable treatment to Hindu immigrants. The Hindu nationalism on part of the BJP and its electorate has resulted in cases of mob violence, lynching of Muslims and lower caste citizens etc.⁵⁰ Moreover, under the garb of enhancing security and promoting economic development in the disputed territory of Indian-

administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) the BJP unilaterally changed its special status as an autonomous territory, made two divisions, and encouraged Hindus from other parts of India to buy property, and make investments in Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir.⁵¹ Owning property by non-Kashmiris was illegal before the promulgation of the new law. To many observers it was a hideous move to change the demography of the disputed territory in favor of the Hindus. Most of the Muslim politicians in the occupied J&K have been jailed, and the general public has had to suffer the economic and communication blockade for months.

India's neighborhood has not remained immune to the effects of New Delhi's policies. As noted earlier Hindu-led religion-based violence against Muslims in India has also triggered violence against Hindus in Bangladesh.⁵² On the question of India's Citizenship Amendment Act, Dhaka protested against New Delhi's policies and postponed a scheduled visit of its officials to New Delhi in August 2020.⁵³

A few years ago Sri Lanka had reportedly 'expelled' the station chief of India's external spy agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), stationed in Colombo alleging involvement in supporting an opposition political party.⁵⁴ Relations between Colombo and New Delhi have also remained tense due to latter's political support of the Lankan Tamils and occasional vote at the United Nations to conduct an investigation of war crimes committed by Sri Lanka's 2009 government against the Tamil insurgents.⁵⁵ Earlier in 2021 the Sri Lankan government canceled the contract with the Indian government for the latter's investments in the East-Coast Terminal of the Colombo port and offered it instead to invest in the west-coast terminal.⁵⁶ India has reportedly been unhappy at this development, not least because China has had a free hand in developing the Colombo Port City and having the Hambantota port on a 99-year lease.⁵⁷ A maritime boundary dispute is another matter creating a wedge in the Indo-Lankan ties. Colombo's plans to reacquire the oil tank farms in its eastern territory of Trincomalee have further put India on tenterhooks regarding growing Chinese expansion in India's neighborhood and shrinking Indian presence in other neighboring countries.⁵⁸

The Maldives has lately witnessed an "India Out" campaign on streets and social media. Politicians and the public have accused their government of engaging in secret talks with New Delhi to allow India to establish a

military base in the Maldives.⁵⁹ Local media have also written extensively against Indian activities on their soil. The anti-India campaign by the public led the Indian high commission in the Maldives to write to the Maldives prime minister to take note of 'propaganda' in public and local media against India and that it could put the life of the high commission staff at risk.⁶⁰

Pakistan has recently circulated a 131-page dossier containing three chapters about publicly available reports of international bodies and Indian media outlets regarding India's human rights violations and war crimes in the Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir.⁶¹ The Indian government was reportedly involved in patronizing the Islamic State (IS) terrorists. The purpose was to fake a link between the freedom struggles of the Kashmiris with terrorism. In a recent report published by India's prominent former diplomats, Shivshankar Menon, Shyam Saran, and some other well-known Indian scholars, recommended to the Indian politicians to shun anti-Pakistan politics and stop making Pakistan an issue in election campaigns as these things had obstructed the development of positive momentum in bilateral ties between the two neighbors.⁶² But it's hard to be optimistic in the current political atmosphere in India, where after a recent cricket match defeat of India against Pakistan extremists in India launched a campaign against the Indian team captain for hugging the Pakistani players after the match, and a Muslim bowler of the Indian team for below par performance.⁶³ Pakistan cannot expect a peaceful move from across the border in such an environment.

Western powers response

The western world has coddled India, with no regard to all of what India's Muslims and neighboring countries have been complaining about. Since the US considers India as a net security provider in the region and is now upgrading the campaign against China from competition to confrontation, it is becoming even less likely to see it raise concerns regarding India's human rights violations and unending regional security tension in its neighborhood. China has made substantial investments in infrastructure, transport, and communication sectors in the region and beyond on a scale that the US and its allies have failed to match. The US seeks to partner with Indo-Pacific and European partners to provide alternative

investments to developing countries in order to curtail China's influence. It also helps New Delhi to acquire the advanced military technologies and hardware that India's neighbors view as destabilizing for the South Asian region. For Islamabad, India's military advancement creates a security dilemma and forces it to invest in arms acquisition or qualitative enhancement of existing armaments to maintain conventional and strategic deterrent against its arch rival.

Conclusion

This study has made the following broad inferences:

- a) China's military mobilization against India was reactive, not offensive, in nature. As argued by experts, India is not China's primary competitor and China did not desire any confrontation with India. Only New Delhi's territorial aggression and diplomatic hardball against China forced the latter to review its India policy.
- b) India's turning to authoritarianism, anti-Muslim policies, and unilateral changes in the legal status of disputed territories, military aggression, interference in smaller South Asian states, and acquisition of advanced military hardware had preceded China's military moves.
- c) It could be inferred that India has exploited the bogey of China threat to seek international attention as a victim and acquire high-tech defense hardware and ease its way to becoming a member of exclusive international organizations such as the U.N. Security Council and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- d) India's regional assertiveness is a result of its domestic religious polarization where supremacy of Hindus over other religious communities is becoming legally and politically acceptable. This reflects in India's neighborhood policy as well where it seeks territorial expansion with no regard to concerns of smaller neighbors. Or it bullies smaller South Asian countries to do what it wants them to do. This is evident in pressurizing Sri Lanka on the Tamil rights and the maritime boundary dispute, forcible expulsion of Bengali Muslims, and disregard for the Nepalese border concerns.
- e) The west, led by the US, largely ignores India's democratic decline, state-patronized religious violence, and anti-Muslim policies. This

is also because they want India to share their burden for curtailing the military and economic rise of China.

- f) With moral decline in their conduct of foreign policy, the US and its allies supply India with advanced military and ISR technologies. Their objective is to arm India with enough military muscle to be able to defend against the Chinese military power. The US and its allies would usually criticize other countries for similar acts of intimidation and repression. But they appear totally indifferent when it comes to their strategic partners. This lack of respect for moral principles and indifference of the west in allaying their anxieties vis-à-vis India have contributed to the perception of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh that perhaps a bigger power like China could handle the Indian threat more aptly than they could do it independently or in coordination with each other.

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