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India's National Security Challenges
In the Coming Decade

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I will be speaking in my personal and individual capacity and not on behalf of the government or even a non governmental agency. I will be speaking from the perspective of a diplomatic practitioner and not that of an academic. Hence my presentation is not in the nature of or similar to a paper for a journal. My analysis and arguments are based mainly on observable ground realities and insights gained in the course of a 39 year diplomatic career and subsequent Track II and Track III interactions. I also take into account perceptions about events and policies that are fairly widely shared within the mainstream global strategic community and in particular within the Indian strategic community and which are available in the general public domain.

A cursory look at the map of contemporary global hotspots of instability and potential flashpoints of conflict would make it self-evident to even a novice observer of world geopolitics that India's immediate neighbourhood, stretching from Iran to Myanmar and the Tibetan region of China to Sri Lanka, is the most security deficit region of the world today. Located in the centre of this region, no country in the world has faced a more intimidating and security threatening environment than India. Let me give some substantive examples:

- In the short period since India's independence in 1947, India has faced more direct attacks than any other country in the world, having been subjected to 5 wars – 4 by Pakistan, the first launched within months of independence in 1947 in Kashmir, and thereafter in 1965, 1971 and 1999 and one by China in 1962. Such attacks represented robust direct assaults on the Indian State, its self esteem and self confidence, its territory and territorial integrity.
- Pakistan began sending armed militants and terrorists into Kashmir in 1989 and this destabilizing proxy war, a low cost strategy of bleeding India, has since been pursued relentlessly; in fact, Pakistan has expanded its patronage of terrorist activities to other parts of India and the attack on India's Parliament in November 2001 and on multiple soft but premium targets in India's financial capital, Mumbai, in November 2009 are spectacular examples. Such attacks have also been extended to Indian targets outside India, the preeminent example being the attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul in July 2008. Not only the State and its institutions but the people of India have been made a target too.

Bleak as India's external security scenario has been, my suspicion is that the next 5 years are going to be critical for India in terms of safeguarding its territorial integrity, internal stability, economic well being and role in its immediate neighbourhood in particular and in Asia in general. This is because of the following specific factors operating simultaneously: increasing instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan with distinct prospects of extremist radical Islamic elements wielding increasing clout if not actually returning to power in Afghanistan and increasingly taking over de facto control in sensitive parts of Pakistan, both developments fraught with dangerous spillover consequences for India; China's questioning Indian sovereignty over the state of Jammu and Kashmir in a manner it had never done before and ominously in conjunction with its growing substantive presence in areas of Jammu and Kashmir illegally occupied by Pakistan; China's

stepping up of its strategic encirclement of India as part of its burgeoning multi-faceted assertiveness vis-à-vis India; and, last but not least, India's mounting internal security problems due to the sudden eruption of unprecedented turbulence in Kashmir; spreading left wing extremist insurgencies in several states of India; clear signs of Islamic radicalism spreading and Hindu extremism also acquiring a higher profile; mounting corruption, growing good governance deficit and the debilitating exigencies of coalition and vote-bank politics, etc

The Pakistan Factor

Since Pakistan came into existence in 1947, India has been the focal point of its foreign and national security policies. Pakistan's objectives have been: first, to destabilize India domestically and demonise India internationally; second, to be treated on par with India on the international stage; third, to keep needling India to ensure that India is preoccupied with and tied down to dealing with Pakistan thus seeking to diminish India in the eyes of the world as being a mere regional power obsessed with a smaller neighbour; fourth, to exhibit to the world that India is unable to manage cordial relations with its immediate neighbours in South Asia and is therefore unworthy of being a global power; and, finally to develop linkages and partnerships with major powers and otherwise influential countries to prevent any possibilities of strong Indian countermeasures. Pakistan's policies towards India and Pakistan's strategic assets have always been controlled by the Army, which has also ruled Pakistan directly or indirectly for more than two thirds of the time since Pakistan's inception. The Army has become the single most powerful institution in the country by far, even in the economic domain. In fact, the Army now personifies Pakistan - Pakistan is less a country with an army, more an army that has a country; the interests of Pakistan as a country and of its people had already become secondary to those of the Army some decades ago as evidenced by the country's break up in

1971 which was a direct consequence of actions and policies of Pakistan's Army. The raison d'être of such a large and powerful military would disappear if there is peace, cooperation and harmony between India and Pakistan and therefore the Pakistan Army simply will not permit this to happen. This has been and will remain a reality until there is a dramatic change in the mindset of the Pakistan Army. Grandstanding rhetoric, primarily for Western ears, cannot conceal or override the fact that there is absolutely nothing on the ground to show that the Pakistan Army has any intentions whatsoever of changing its terrorism related actions and its time tested policies towards India or allowing civilian governments to move in that direction. Pakistan has been and will remain the hub of existential national security threats for India.

To fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Pakistan had created a nursery of Islamic jihadist militant organizations in addition to patronizing Osama Bin Laden and his Arab Islamic warriors and incubating the Taliban, with the proactive partnership of Saudi Arabia and the US. With the Soviet Union defeated and disintegrating, Pakistan decided to use these strategic instruments against India in Kashmir and to acquire and establish control over Afghanistan, while the US and Saudi Arabia remained quiescent, if not collaborative. The overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and subsequent US actions against Islamic militants in the Afghanistan - Pakistan region since 9/11, transformed the US, a former partner and patron, into an enemy in the eyes of the jihadis. Since Pakistan is ostensibly collaborating with the US in the war against terror in this region, Pakistan has also become a target. Therefore, except for the groups that Pakistan continues to patronise for use against India and Afghanistan, all other groups are increasingly involved in a widening array of several interlinked conflicts within Pakistan including several directly challenging the Pakistani State and the Pakistani Army as never before. All this has spawned rising radicalization all over Pakistan, accentuating the long existing ethnic, linguistic, regional and sectarian divides. This

scenario darkens further when viewed in tandem with the evolving situation in Afghanistan where the only certainty about the future is that increasing instability will be the order of the day. Indeed, in my personal assessment, the emergence of a Yemen like if not Somalia like situation in that country cannot be ruled out. The Pakistan - Afghanistan border, created arbitrarily in 1893, is becoming ever more irrelevant and that compounds problems for whatever regime may exist in either country. Notwithstanding all this, the Pakistani Army remains wedded to the idea of controlling Afghanistan and treating it as a subaltern state to provide strategic depth in the context of a supposedly hostile India. Meanwhile, it remains India focused in deployment, doctrines and planning, seriously hobbling its efforts to effectively tackle the serious challenges that it itself is facing within Pakistan. All these ingredients are contributing to Pakistan's rapid descent into chaos encouraging speculation that Pakistan may be headed towards disintegration. A failing, flailing Pakistan is far more dangerous for India than when some government is in reasonably effective control, however anti-Indian it may be.

The China Pakistan relationship forged in the late 1950s on the basis of mutual antipathy to India is the PRC's oldest, strongest and most consistent bilateral relationship. Over the decades it has evolved into a multi-sectoral, multi disciplinary strategic and military alliance with two sides extending total support to each other on all issues related to India. Both sides at the levels of the top leadership characterize this 'lips and teeth' and 'all weather' relationship publicly as being higher than the highest mountains and deeper than the deepest oceans. This alliance has been and will continue to remain the bedrock of India's national security challenges. China has been responsible for making Pakistan into a nuclear weapons power as well as giving it potent missile warfare capabilities. Cooperation in these fields continues unabated. This assistance has enabled Pakistan to have arsenals larger than India's in both cases and growing incrementally. China has also provided

Pakistan vast quantities of conventional weaponry and helped create indigenous manufacturing capability including for fighter aircraft, missiles, naval vessels, tanks etc. In addition China has provided Pakistan generous economic and financial assistance over the decades. All this has not only more than neutralised any advantages that India may have had vis-à-vis Pakistan due to its larger size, larger economy and resources, but has given Pakistan a strategic edge over India.

The China Factor

Throughout history China's rulers have been farsighted and conscious of the future. China does not hide its ambitions to reclaim its traditional Middle Kingdom domination of Asia. Due to its size, population, economic and military potential, soft power advantages, etc., India is the only Asian country that could stand in the way of China achieving this objective. Therefore, China's approach to India has been very different from the tactics it has used in shaping its relations with its other neighbours from the very beginning. China is India's largest neighbour. The two countries share a 3500 km long disputed boundary, China's third longest land boundary. It is the only unresolved border amongst the land borders that it has with 14 countries. In addition, China occupies 38000 square kms of Indian territory in Kashmir, controls 5000 sq kms of territory of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir which Pakistan occupied in 1948 and handed over to China in 1963, and claims 90000 sq. kms in northeastern India including the whole of the State of Arunachal Pradesh. It has positioned a vast array of conventional and strategic military assets in Tibet and maintains an assertive and militarily superior posture all along the Indian border with Tibet backed up by state of the art and inexorably expanding transport, supply and logistics infrastructure. Though Tibetans continue to be restive despite 60 years of China's absolute rule over them, surely such a massive build up is totally unnecessary to control a few million unarmed,

deeply religious people. Therefore, a legitimate question arises – what is the purpose of this build up in difficult terrain and harsh climatic conditions? China has conspicuously courted India’s neighbours in South Asia, consciously exploiting internal domestic political equations for strategic advantage vis-à-vis India and provided them with extensive and generous multi dimensional aid and support. In the process, China has spun a web of very strong economic, military, political and strategic relationships with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. China’s relationship with each of these countries impinges directly on India’s territorial integrity, national security and economic prosperity. All countries on China’s periphery in southeast and east Asia have apprehensions about China’s intentions and policies but there are no such concerns in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. China is developing road and rail transport connectivity corridors through Myanmar to Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal and through Pakistan to Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, in addition to gas and oil pipelines, ostensibly for energy security, to have options vis-a-vis the Malacca Straits choke point. However, these connectivities inevitably have very significant security and strategic implications for India. China is stepping beyond its traditional continental land oriented security paradigms with its ‘string of pearls’ strategy, which includes construction/upgrading of ports and naval facilities in all these countries, as well as strongly wooing Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles, indicating its maritime power projection intentions in the Indian Ocean. Thus India is surrounded in the north, east, west and south by the increasing creation of Chinese capabilities. To summarize, China has acquired more clout and influence in southern Asia, in India’s backyard and immediate neighbourhood, than India has. Barring quibbling about technicalities of how a superpower is defined, the fact is that China is already a superpower in the region constituting its trans-Himalayan periphery.

Though China's policy of boxing in India in South Asia and containing India internationally has continued unabated since the 1960s and, in fact, in recent years has even acquired accelerated momentum, at least the atmospherics and even substance of strictly bilateral interaction had been improving steadily and indeed fairly satisfactorily from 1988 onwards, even hurdling the obstacle that arose in the shape of India's nuclear tests and India's linking them to the China threat in the Indian Prime Minister's letter to the US President. Since then in particular India has very deliberately and consciously used every conceivable opportunity to make official statements including public comments from the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, other Ministers and the senior most foreign and national security policy mandarins saying that dialogue, emphasis on positive elements and enlarging areas of cooperation represent the only way forward in bilateral relations and that there is enough space for both India and China to grow, prosper and coexist harmoniously. One testament of this approach is the fact that despite Chinese testiness, the current Indian Prime Minister has met the top Chinese leaders more frequently than the leader of any other country and the same goes for India's Foreign Minister. Another issue that India's leaders and officials dealing with China constantly play up is that economic relationship between India and China is growing by leaps and bounds and China became India's largest trading partner in 2008. Therefore, rising Chinese assertiveness vis-a-vis India, particularly in the last 3-4 years, has increasingly puzzled and worried the Indian strategic community and finally seems to have alerted the Indian security establishment also judging by the recent public comments of the mild mannered, soft spoken Manmohan Singh who has spoken of China acquiring a foothold in South Asia, keeping India in a low equilibrium with its South Asian neighbours, its pinpricks, new assertiveness, etc.

This belligerent assertiveness started three years ago, when, in complete disregard of conventional diplomatic norms, the Chinese

Ambassador in New Delhi told the Indian news channel CNN-IBN that “the whole of what you call the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory, and Tawang (district) is only one place in it. We are claiming all of that—that's our position” on the very eve of President Hu Jintao’s visit to India in November 2006; despite the furor in the Indian media, he and other Chinese diplomats repeated these strong statements which were backed up by the Foreign Ministry official spokesman in Beijing. Seeking to calm waters and in keeping with the normal Indian attitude, there was no strong public riposte from India’s Ministry of External Affairs. Despite India’s measured approach, the tone and tenor of Chinese rhetoric has steadily hardened. China’s imperious statements and behaviour in the context of its harsh suppression of widespread unrest in Tibet in March 2008 and the Olympic torch being paraded through Delhi were remarkably crude and offensive. India’s governmental leaders were amongst the few not invited to the Olympics opening ceremony. Despite it being enshrined in the 2005 Joint Statement between the two Prime Ministers, the Chinese Foreign Minister publicly questioned the principle that settled populations would be one of the major factors determining the contours of a border settlement, a principle of cardinal importance for India.

Further escalation in Chinese rhetorical assertiveness since the summer of 2009 coincided with increasing intrusions and other incidents on the border, particularly in the Ladakh and Sikkim regions; China has been protesting Indian leaders’ visits to Arunachal; denying visas to officials of Arunachal; issuing visas on plain paper stapled to passports of Indian citizens from Arunachal and publicly asserting that the practice will continue; making it clear that there is no question of concessions on the border and in fact even hinting at forcibly recovering “occupied southern Tibet”, a phrase used increasingly to refer to Arunachal; increasing references to having taught India a lesson in 1962, building dams on the Brahmaputra after repeatedly denying any such activity or intentions publicly and in official bilateral

interaction, etc. The flow of strongly negatively worded articles in China's state controlled media became a flood and merely listing them would take many pages. I will give but one example: on October 13, 2009, the Global Times, an English language adjunct of the Chinese Government's mouthpiece The Peoples' Daily, quoted the Foreign Ministry's Spokesman Ma Zhaoxu by name as having stated that "Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made another provocative and dangerous move by visiting the East Section of the China-India Boundary, which India calls Arunachal Pradesh, on October 3, ahead of a local legislative election...China is strongly dissatisfied with the visit by the Indian leader to 'Southern Tibet' disregarding serious Chinese concerns" to "stir up trouble at the disputed area" and "we demand the Indian side address China's serious concerns". By using such harsh language when referring to a person who has been meeting China's leaders quite frequently, and who is known to be well disposed towards China, China is clearly sending a strong message. While India received overwhelming international sympathy and support during the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai in 2009, the Chinese reaction stood out like a sore thumb.

Recent developments and information that has come to light, summarized below, has imparted a new and more serious dimension to Chinese assertiveness. China seems to be preparing the ground to recognise Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), which were earlier referred to as the Northern Territories, and which Pakistan has detached from POK, as integral parts of Pakistan's territory. Both were a part of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir which had acceded to India in 1947 and thus in purely legal terms should be a part of India. If it does so, China would directly challenge India's position on Kashmir in a manner it had never done earlier and become, for all practical purposes, a stakeholder in the highly sensitive Kashmir dispute, converting it into a trilateral issue. Choosing to do so at a time when the directly abutting Pakistan Afghanistan border region

is mired in internecine conflict underlines the dangers of this potential development.

- Selig Harrison's recent allegations of large scale presence of PLA troops in POK and GB, were denied by China's Foreign Ministry spokesman. In two press briefings, in a Freudian slip perhaps, the spokesman had said that China had no troops in "these areas of Northern Pakistan". Though subsequent to Indian protests, this particular statement was not put on the website, it is in line with other developments taking place concurrently and clearly reflects the evolving Chinese viewpoint and indicates its intentions.

- The international community, including China, has been treating the present province of Jammu & Kashmir as a de facto part of India and POK and GB as de facto parts of Pakistan. In pursuance of this policy, all countries issue normal visas on Indian passports to residents of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and normal visas on Pakistani passports to residents of POK and GB. China used to follow the same policy till last year. However, since last year it stopped issuing visas on Indian passports, giving visas on a plain paper which is stapled to the Indian passports and entry and exit stamps of Chinese Immigration are affixed on the plain paper visa and not on their Indian passports. However, Beijing has not changed its visa policy in respect of Pakistani residents of POK and GB.

- Last month China refused a visa to Lt. General B.S. Jaswal who is the GOC India's Northern Army Command. The security of the State of Jammu and Kashmir falls under his jurisdiction. He was slated to pay an official visit to China. Despite the uproar in India, China has not revisited its decision. It is pertinent to note that he had visited China in 2008 even though he was then commanding a Corps in the Eastern Sector which had jurisdiction over the disputed Sino-Indian border in that region. Also, China had no problems in the past in giving a visa to Lt. Gen. S.K Singh Commander of the 14th Corps based in the Ladakh region of Kashmir, which borders Tibet and POK, who even visited Lhasa.

Clearly there appears to be a conscious and potentially serious change of Chinese policy regarding Kashmir.

- Last year China had blocked foreign funding of projects in Arunachal Pradesh specifically on the grounds that it is disputed territory; by the same logic, no foreign funded projects should be executed in POK and GB. China itself had all along accepted that these are disputed territories including in writing: in the 3 March 1963 Agreement, signed three months after the conclusion of 1962 War with India, under which Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley in POK to China, it is clearly stated that China would renegotiate the border with the relevant sovereign authority after the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, a fact which also reflects China's acceptance of the temporary nature of Sino-Pak and Indo-Pak borders in the Kashmir sector. Notwithstanding all this, China is itself implementing 17 projects in PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan which include construction of roads, railways, hydro power projects, oil and gas pipelines, mineral exploration, etc at a huge investment of many billions of dollars. The construction of these projects and subsequent security of these assets will inevitably involve the semi permanent or even permanent presence of Chinese personnel both civilian and military in fairly large numbers. Given that Pakistan is de facto losing control of its northern border regions, China could well be readying to establish its own de facto control over this region raising China's encirclement of India from the north to potentially strangulating levels, given the assets China has created in Tibet and the transport linkages it is planning in Nepal. All this seems a clear manifestation of a consciously thought out purpose oriented hardening of China's attitude to India.

The US Factor

In the specific context of India's national security threats from China and Pakistan, the US has been a distinctly negative factor in the past and remains, at best, an ambivalent factor even today. Pakistan had played a significant role in brokering the Sino-US

rapprochement in 1970-71 and this led directly to the forging of a strong de facto strategic alliance between China, Pakistan and the US till the end of the Cold War, specifically targeted at India and the Soviet Union.

This prompted the US to consciously turn a blind eye to Chinese assistance to Pakistan in the nuclear field though it was in contravention of all international norms and even of US's own concerns about proliferation. Fast forwarding to today, despite the shady background of Sino Pak nuclear cooperation and despite China completely ignoring and bypassing the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the US has chosen a low key approach in opposing the China's recent nuclear pacts with Pakistan rather than assertively preventing the deal. The Clinton Jiang Zemin joint statement issued in Beijing in June 1988, the Obama – Hu Joint Statement issued in Beijing as recently as November 2009 arrogating to themselves the responsibility of maintaining stability in South Asia and the most recent statement of the US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre on 20th September that “China has an important role – it's a neighbour of South Asia – and its unimaginable that China would not be involved in South Asia” represents a continuation of an American policy approach that cannot but be disturbing for India.

The story vis-a-vis Pakistan is similar. Over and above the aid and assistance that Pakistan has received from China, it has received considerably larger doses of military, economic and financial assistance from the US totaling many tens of billions of dollars ever since Pakistan became a military ally since the mid 1950s in the context of the Cold War. Though the US dismantled the Pakistan sponsored Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the US did nothing to prevent Pakistan from evacuating the entire Al Qaida and Taliban leadership from Afghanistan to Pakistan, where they continue to enjoy safe haven till today. With the US transferring its attention to Iraq, Pakistan

rebuilt its jihadi assets in Afghanistan without being hindered at all. Despite being increasingly and annoyingly aware of Pakistani duplicity in cooperating with the US in tackling the terror machines in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the US seems unable or unwilling to take strong measures to force Pakistan to come clean about its continuing links with many if not all of these terror groups, so dependent is it on Pakistan to prosecute its war in Afghanistan. The US also seems to have succumbed to a Pakistani veto on any meaningful Indian involvement in the resolution of the Afghanistan imbroglio. Whenever there appeared any possibility of Indian action against Pakistan's nefarious and brazen terrorist activities, the US brought immense pressure to bear on India to desist. The US continues to pressure India to pursue uninterrupted substantive dialogue with Pakistan despite Pakistan's hostile actions.

Pakistan's aid acquired military arsenal has always been used against India and yet both China and the US continue to supply highly lethal hi tech weaponry to Pakistan even as we speak. But for massive aid over the decades, Pakistan would have collapsed long ago. Despite the dramatically transformed post 9/11 global scenario, despite Pakistan being recognized by everyone as being the hub and nursery of global terrorism, despite every major terrorist attack almost anywhere in the world being in one way or another linked to Pakistan has never been sanctioned for its long standing policy of State sponsored terrorism against India. All this has emboldened Pakistan to continue to pursue its hostile actions and policies against India, absolutely confident that there will be no retribution from any quarter least of all India.

Conclusion

The heady brew of burgeoning Chinese assertiveness, unabated Pakistani hostility, growing instability in the neighbouring Afghanistan Pakistan region and US inability and/or unwillingness

to translate its rhetoric regarding its new strategic partnership with India for the 21st century into substantive policy to assist India in meeting or even mitigating its security challenges in its immediate neighbourhood suggest that India could be in for a torrid time. The only gainers will be China patronizing a growing phalanx of failing states and authoritarian regimes and the losers will be all states that consider themselves law abiding members of the international community and liberal democracies in particular.

I will conclude by noting a strange paradox. The international community seems comfortable with and even welcoming of India's rise in strong contrast to the apprehensions that China's rise has unleashed. In the past decade, India's standing globally has risen dramatically. However, simultaneously, its national security challenges and neighbourhood security environment have been deteriorating steadily. China and Pakistan have been central players in this process. How the world interacts with India in the context of the Pakistan and China factors will almost certainly be, in the longer term, the single most significant element in shaping not only India's place and role in Asian geopolitics but Asian geopolitics itself. India's national security challenges therefore should not be considered as something that India alone must tackle by itself.

Thank you for your attention.

Ranjit Gupta is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer. Currently he is a Member of the National Security Advisory Board; a Distinguished Fellow of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies; and, a visiting Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies. Earlier he has been Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, Visiting Professor at the Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Ambassador-in-Residence at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has been delivering lectures at think tanks and other academic institutions in India and abroad and participating in conferences, seminars and workshops primarily relating to India's relations with the Gulf region, Southeast Asia and East Asia including in particular China, Myanmar, Taiwan and Tibet.

One of his postings at Headquarters was as Head of the West Asia and North Africa Division in the Ministry of External Affairs dealing with Arab countries. He is currently leading an Indian team in a joint research project sponsored by India's Ministry of External Affairs with the Gulf Research Centre, Dubai, on India GCC Relations; he has also recently been granted a 2 year research project by the Indian Council of World Affairs on India GCC Relations.

During his 39 year career with the Ministry of External Affairs he had served successively in Cairo, New York (at the Permanent Mission of India to the UN), Gangtok, Jeddah (Deputy Chief of Mission), Frankfurt (Consul-General) and Kathmandu (Deputy Chief of Mission). Later he was successively India's Ambassador to Yemen (North), Venezuela, Oman, Thailand and Spain and finally was Head of India's non-official Office in Taiwan.

